

FAITH AND RIGHTS

- a participatory global learning evaluation with Digni members and partner organizations

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FOREWORD

Digni invited two staff members from Diakonhjemmet University College and an independent RBA consultant from South Africa to undertake a “Global Strategic Thematic Learning Evaluation of Rights Based Approach” in 2013. The work has been financed by Digni.

The evaluation team met in Oslo in October 2013 to plan for the learning evaluation. Tasks and methodology were discussed and divided between the team members. As a *Learning* Evaluation, the emphasis has been on learning from practice. The idea has been to assess how much of rights practice could be seen in current practice and what could be learnt from these insights for how best to strengthen rights work. Our participation in interviews, engagements at the Participatory Learning Workshops and field visits has been framed by our understanding that key elements of a rights approach comprise empowerment of rights-holders on the one hand, and mechanisms to hold power to account on the other.

We would like to thank Digni secretariat for a challenging assignment. Senior Adviser Elie Storesletten has given substantial inputs and support both to the work and the report. Member organizations, partners and project staff has openly shared their thoughts and experiences, and given us valuable insight in their work and the challenges in RBA. A special thank goes to all local people we met during our field visits.

We are responsible for the findings, recommendations and the report.

Oslo, January 2015

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CONTENTS

Foreword.....	2
Contents.....	3
Executive summary.....	5
Background and Approach of the Learning Evaluation	5
Key findings.....	6
Key Recommendations:	7
1. Introduction	9
The purpose of and understanding of a learning evaluation	9
Terms of reference and approach taken in information gathering.....	9
2. Right-based and faith-based approaches in promoting socio-economic development.....	11
2.1 The emergence of the Rights-based approach (RBA)	11
2.2. The content of the RBA as per the UN.....	11
2.3 The mutual strengthening of the rights-based and faith-based approaches	11
2.4 Rights-based approaches within a diaconal approach	12
2.5 Rights based approaches and development practice	13
3. The organisational and regional context of the evaluation.....	15
3.1 Digni and Digni’s Members	15
Digni’s 19 Norwegian member organizations are:	15
3.2 The regional context	15
Partners in East Africa.....	15
Partners in East Asia.....	16
3.3. Political context for RBA in Ethiopia	16
3.4. Political context for RBA in Myanmar.....	17
4. Key Findings	18
4.1. The Norwegian context: Digni members and rights-based approaches.....	18
4.2 Partners and rights-based approaches	20
4.3. How faith-based identity and values influence strategies and work with rights	22
When human rights issues can be controversial	23
Challenges of inter-faith understanding.....	24
4.4 Opportunities and Challenges for Rights work: Observations from the Participatory Learning Workshops	25
4.5. Examples of good practice based on field visits in Ethiopia and Myanmar.....	27

4.5.1 Key observations from Ethiopia	27
4.5.2 Field experiences from Myanmar	31
4.6 Digni’s added value to member organisations and partners.....	35
5. Summary of Key Findings.....	37
5.1. How and to what degree are Digni members and partners working with rights based approaches	37
Questionnaire responses and interviews with Digni members and their partners.....	37
Participatory Learning Workshops and field visits.....	37
5.2. How faith identity and values influence strategies and work with rights	38
5.3. Significant strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges.....	38
Internal organisational strengths and weaknesses.....	38
External Challenges and Opportunities	39
5.4. Significant results and examples of good practice	39
Good Practice in Development Programmes of the Faith Based Organisations	40
Challenges in the practice of Development projects of faith based organisations	41
Good Practice and challenges from the experiences of two secular rights organisations.....	42
5.5. On being rights based at an organisational level.....	42
5.6. Digni’s contribution and added value to the member organisations and partners	42
6. Recommendations	44
6.1 Digni should provide RBA Capacity Building and Support to Members and Partners.....	44
6.2 Digni members and partners should incorporate RBA within programme planning and implementation	44
6.3 Work on gender equality and women’s rights should be strengthened	45
6.4 Increasing understandings and practice relating to faith and rights	45

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND AND APPROACH OF THE LEARNING EVALUATION

Digni's members constitute a wide range of Norwegian churches and missionary organisations, with partners in almost 40 countries. Their familiarity with and application of a rights-based approach differs. A participatory learning evaluation with the aim of sharing, learning and building competence among the Digni members and partners was undertaken by an Evaluation Team consisting of three members: Two Associate Professors from Diakonhjemmet University College in Oslo, Elsa Døhlie (Chair) and Hans Morten Haugen, and a development consultant from Johannesburg, Shamim Meer. The purpose of the evaluation was to look at current practice - to learn how best to strengthen rights work.

The terms of reference were to:

- Map, assess and document together with Digni, members and partners how and to what degree the organisations are working with **human rights and rights-based approaches**
- Map, assess and document with the organisations how their **faith based identity and/or values influence** their strategies and work with rights
- Identify the most significant **strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges/threats** facing the organisations work with rights
- Identify and document **the most significant results** and give examples of best practice
- Create awareness and deeper understanding in Digni, members and partners of what it means **at the organisational level to become more right-based**
- Assess Digni's **contribution and added value** to members and partners in promoting right-based approaches and how Digni can support members and partners in the future

The evaluation approach was participatory and a variety of methods were applied:

- Questionnaires filled in by Digni members (in November 2013) and Digni partners (during Digni's regional seminars, in East Africa, Nairobi in February 2014 and East Asia in Bangkok in November 2014).
- Interviews with selected Digni members (November 2013) and Digni partners (during the regional seminars 2014)
- Training sessions at Digni's member days (February 2014)
- Two participatory learning workshops at the two regional seminars, where the evaluators engaged with Digni members and partners from 15 different countries.
- Field visits in Ethiopia, following the Nairobi workshop, and in Myanmar, following the Bangkok workshop, to projects funded through five different Digni members. In Ethiopia, the Evaluation Team visited two different areas, in the West and in the South. In Myanmar the team went to areas around Yangon.
- Presentation of the report and feedback from Digni members, during the Digni member days in February 2015.

The Participatory learning workshops served for information gathering and space for focus group discussions. Participants reflected on RBA as a sustainable, people centred development approach, and interrogated the extent to which their programmes and projects were in line with rights principles. They focused in particular on the extent to which projects were empowering rights holders and holding responsible duty-bearers to account.

Discussions in field visits with project staff and beneficiaries in Ethiopia and Myanmar explored programme practice in building the capacity of project beneficiaries as agents of change; and in working with the authorities to hold them to account. Discussions at project level explored also the extent to which rights principles of ***Dignity, Participation, Empowerment, and Accountability*** could be seen in action.

The focus was on empowerment as an outcome not as a process - since participation at every point of the project cycle in itself might not necessarily lead to empowerment; on whether and how experience in projects had changed the self-perception and levels of confidence of the participating beneficiaries; and whether this had changed the way other community members and those in authority saw them.

KEY FINDINGS

Digni members and regional partner organizations saw RBA as very relevant and in harmony with faith values. They saw convergence between faith and rights - noting that authority in the case of faith based organisations came from God and the Bible. They saw faith-based identity as influencing their perception of rights in positive ways. Members and partners emphasized the equality of all human beings, as created in the image of God, and that dignity was God-given to all human beings. Digni members and faith based partners raised concerns about clashes between human rights and faith values. In particular these clashes concerned abortion, condom use and gay rights.

For the few secular partner organisations authority for rights work came from the UN Convention on Human Rights. These organisations addressed faith issues to do with freedom of religion, and were concerned about religious persecution and the need for understanding across faiths.

All partners reported on the need for more training to strengthen RBA within their organization and daily work. Almost all participants recognised that their projects were in line with rights principles of dignity, accountability, participation and empowerment. However, many had not consciously considered rights principles and rights strategies and recognised the need to intensify learning about RBA, and in particular about how RBA relates to projects.

Participants affirmed the importance of working to empower rights holders and to hold responsible duty-bearers to account and the importance of understanding the institutional context in order to know which doors to knock on. Many participants realised that they were working more on the side of empowerment and less on the side of holding responsible duty-bearers to account.

The importance of socio-economic cultural and political context was underlined, noting that this could limit space for rights approaches. At community level, participation was at times hindered by low levels of education, lack of understanding of rights, fear of the consequences of raising voices, poverty and a preoccupation with eking out livelihoods. In many country contexts there were laws in place to affirm rights, however these laws were not always accessible to the majority of the population who were poor

and marginalised. In some country contexts the space for openly taking up rights was restricted and this needed to be considered in developing strategies.

Participants noted that within communities and the broader society attitudes and mind-sets shaped by cultural and religious beliefs tended in particular to inhibit women's rights to equality, non-discrimination and participation. These attitudes might also influence participants' organisations and the need was recognised to interrogate the extent to which their organisations were trapped in traditional beliefs, which went against rights principles particularly when it came to women's rights. Overall participants realised the need to be sensitive to socio-economic, cultural and political contexts in devising strategies, and the need to be sensitive to the use of appropriate language.

GOOD PRACTICE IN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES OF THE FAITH BASED ORGANISATIONS

Ingredients that seemed to help achieve good results included:

- strong commitment to principles of dignity, participation, empowerment and equality with faith based biblical understandings of these principles serving as the basis for such commitment among project staff in faith based organisations
- good planning and the development of appropriate strategies based on careful understanding of the context for working on rights
- good understanding of local socio economic and cultural dynamics in project areas
- clear guidelines for implementation, good implementation strategies, committed staff with the requisite skills (eg in agriculture, water and sanitation, environmental rehabilitation)

DIGNI ROLE AND ADDED VALUE

Digni is looked upon as a resource, an advisor on challenging topics, and as providing opportunities for learning. Digni support helped develop professional organisations and provided fellowship. Digni members and their partners all want more training on RBA, on advocacy and lobbying, and awareness raising. Some want to learn more on how to create bridges from grassroots level to governmental duty-bearers. Some want to strengthen RBA at leadership level, while others wanted tools and materials to evaluate impact. Some want exchange visits and networks for sharing experiences and to enable learning across organisations. Digni was seen as having an important role as connector, supervisor, capacity builder and not least a voice for faith-based organisations to advance their strengths in development work in general and in rights work in particular.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Digni should provide RBA capacity building and support to members and partners, particularly on how to apply rights thinking; how to analyse contexts from a rights perspective; how to devise strategies to advance the empowerment of rights holders and the accountability of duty-bearers; how to incorporate rights principles (participation, dignity, non-discrimination, empowerment, accountability) at programme level; and how to ensure that Digni members and partners themselves work from the basis of rights principles and consciously consider ways of ensuring downward accountability to right-holders. The Evaluation Team acknowledges that many Digni partners are already applying rights principles, but these Digni partners are perhaps not consciously considering their work as explicitly human rights based. Particular attention in training sessions should be devoted to enhancing capacities for developing strategies and for

improving monitoring and evaluation. Those Digni members and partners that have an explicit human rights mandate for their work could be drawn on to assist in such training.

- Digni members and partners should incorporate RBA within programme planning and implementation. In planning programmes members and partners should aim to increase the capability of beneficiaries to hold authorities to account, building on the levels of participation and empowerment already achieved at project level within some projects. Programme planning should more consciously devise strategies to hold accountable other responsible duty-bearers.
- Work on gender equality and women's rights should be strengthened, and a more consistent gender perspective should inform project work. Understandings of gender relations need to consider that inequalities between women and men result in women's marginalization within excluded groups (such as among indigenous people or disabled groups) and that if not addressed women within these groups will continue to be in subordinate positions as compared with men of these groups. Project plans and implementation processes should encompass a better understanding of women's work burden, access to resources and decision making power in relation to men, as well as awareness and understanding of potential resistance from men to increases in women's power and access.
- Project plans and implementation process need also to be more consistently informed by understandings of faith and rights, and address both the mutually enforcing links between faith and rights (such as dignity, empowerment and accountability), and the more challenging areas where faith and rights seem not to be mutually reinforcing – for example around such controversial issues as the rights of so-called LGBT persons (lesbians, gay, bisexuals and transsexuals) and abortion. Moreover, there is need for interfaith dialogue. Inter-religious competence should be promoted among Digni staff, Digni members and partners. There are good supports for this within Digni, as some Digni members own university colleges which provide inter-cultural studies, and two provide courses on Islam: Fjellhaug International University College (NLM) and the School of Mission and Theology (NMS).

1. INTRODUCTION

THE PURPOSE OF AND UNDERSTANDING OF A LEARNING EVALUATION

Digni commissioned this “Global Strategic Thematic Learning Evaluation of Rights Based Approach” in 2013. The purpose of the evaluation was to look at current practice of Digni members and their partners in order to learn how best to strengthen rights work among members and partners. The purpose was to therefore learn, document, and understand how partners and members were working with rights and justice issues in their projects and contexts, and the ways in which rights based and faith based approaches may be mutually enriching.

As a *Learning* Evaluation, the emphasis was thus on learning from practice. Significantly, this was not the kind of monitoring evaluation to assess results against planned outputs and outcomes in programme proposals and logical frameworks. The idea was rather to assess how much of rights practice could be seen in current practice and what could be learnt from these insights for how best to strengthen rights work.

This report begins by setting out the key areas of investigation as set out in the Terms of Reference, and the approach taken. Chapter 2 presents an overview of RBA and the Faith values. Chapter 3 presents a discussion of the context. Chapter 4 presents key findings and Chapter 5 presents a summary of findings and chapter 6 presents recommendations.

TERMS OF REFERENCE AND APPROACH TAKEN IN INFORMATION GATHERING

The objectives of the evaluation as set out in the Terms of Reference (annex 1) were organised into the following six areas (annex 2):

1. Map, assess and document together with Digni, members and partners how and to what degree the organisations are working with human rights and right- based approaches.
2. Map, assess and document with the organisations how their faith based identity and/or values influence their strategies and work with rights
3. Identify the most significant strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges/threats facing the organisations work with rights
4. Identify and document the most significant results and give examples of best practice
5. Create awareness and deeper understanding in Digni, members and partners of what it means to be at the organisational level to become more right-based
6. Assess Digni’s contribution and added value to members and partners in promoting right-based approaches and how Digni can support members and partners in the future

The *methodology* for this evaluation was participatory and sought to create a “sharing, learning, and competence building” environment for partners, members and Digni.

Data collection included

- reading relevant documents

- a questionnaire filled in by all Digni members and by all the partners attending the east Africa and south Asia Network Meetings (annex 3)
- interviews with seven Norwegian Member organisations, regional partners and project staff from field visits (annex 4)
- engagement with Digni, members and partners at two Regional Network meetings – one in east Africa and one in south Asia
- field visits and focus group discussions with staff and project beneficiaries from nine programmes in Ethiopia and Myanmar (annexes 5 and 6)

The interviews, engagements at the Participatory Learning Workshops and field visits were framed by our understanding that key elements of a rights approach comprise empowerment of rights-holders (beneficiaries) on the one hand, and mechanisms to hold responsible authorities to account on the other.

The questionnaires to Digni members and partners were intended to provide an overview of their understanding of RBA and of the interaction between rights and faith values. This was followed by interviews with organizational representatives to get a deeper understanding of strategies to empower beneficiaries and hold authorities to account; to assess Digni's role; and to explore how best to strengthen RBA within members and partners current work.

Discussions in field visits in Ethiopia and Myanmar with project staff and beneficiaries explored programme practice in building the capacity of project beneficiaries to be their own agents of change; in building the capacity of beneficiaries to challenge power; and how to work with the authorities in order to hold them to account. Discussions at project level also explored the extent to which rights principles of **Dignity, Participation, Empowerment, and Accountability** could be seen in action.

In attempting to assess the extent of empowerment, beneficiaries were engaged in conversation on whether and how their experience in projects had changed their self-perception and levels of confidence, whether this had changed the way other community members and those in authority saw them. In asking these questions, the focus was on empowerment as an outcome, rather than on participation as a process - since participation at every point of the project cycle in itself might not necessarily lead to empowerment. In attempting to understand changes as a result of project participation the approach taken was that change is incremental, and dependent on the starting point and length of engagement with a community: that years could be spent on awareness and participation before one saw evidence of empowerment or the ability to hold power to account.

2. RIGHT-BASED AND FAITH-BASED APPROACHES IN PROMOTING SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

A brief introduction will be given here on the content of RBA and how rights-based and faith-based approaches can be mutually enriching (for more see annex 11).

2.1 THE EMERGENCE OF THE RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH (RBA)

Human rights was brought into the UN's development agenda in 1997. The 2000 Human Development Report elaborated on a Rights Based Approach and specified a 'Common Understanding' between UN agencies. This was adopted in 2003 and human rights have been emphasized in subsequent UN reforms.

2.2. THE CONTENT OF THE RBA AS PER THE UN

While the term 'human rights-based approach' (HRBA) is applied in the UN's Common Understanding, most development actors refer to rights-based approach (RBA) encompassing a wider set of rights, including customary rights of indigenous peoples and religiously embedded rights.

The TOR for this learning evaluation specify the following human rights principles: accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment and participation. Other human rights principles could be added such as dignity.

Certain actions constitute a threat to human dignity, including interventions that destroy the livelihood which people depend on for survival and the maintenance of their unique cultural heritage. All persons, being members of the same human family, are born with the same dignity. Adequate participation generally results in empowerment, of human beings and local communities. Inclusive participation is facilitated if community members are not systematically excluded from decision-making processes, showing the relevance of the principle of non-discrimination. Accountability is essentially about holding duty-bearers to account for their conduct, based on certain objective standards, with the possibility of sanctions for wrongdoing and reparations for victims through their access to affordable legal or administrative remedies.

Many international development organisations can be fully compatible with both a RBA and a HRBA, and with the first 7 of the 12 additional elements in the UN's Common Understanding:

1. People are recognized as key actors in their own development, rather than passive recipients of commodities and services.
2. Participation is both a means and a goal.
3. Strategies are empowering, not disempowering.
4. Both outcomes and processes are monitored and evaluated.
5. Analysis includes all stakeholders.
6. Programs focus on marginalized, disadvantaged, and excluded groups.
7. The development process is locally owned.

2.3 THE MUTUAL STRENGTHENING OF THE RIGHTS-BASED AND FAITH-BASED APPROACHES

All religions have developed ethical thinking about the relationship between the state and individuals. This thinking encompasses dignity, participation, empowerment and accountability. Hence, even if these

principles are emphasized differently by different religious or societal contexts, soundly interpreted religious teaching provide bases for a faith based approach to human rights.

However some religious teachings should be questioned and countered. Passages from all religious books can be used for oppression and to question the equal value of every human being. Hence, religious authorities should develop their own anthropology and sociology, influenced by religious doctrines and global ethics, in order to respond adequately to societal challenges.

Human rights provides one of the most important sources of global ethics, and many specific human rights resonate with ethical teaching in different religions. The outcome of attempts to 'reconcile' traditional values and human rights depends on the approach of both religious actors and human rights actors. Broad support of human rights can be achieved among religious actors through nurturing common values while allowing room for disagreement.

Promoting justice is central to all religions. Justice can be achieved by holding the powerful to account. Effective enjoyment of human rights depends on the willingness of the state to ensure that everyone can effectively enjoy their human rights. Violations of human rights occur if the state is unwilling – not unable – to ensure the enjoyment of human rights. Human rights can be better understood by referring to corresponding state obligations, specified as to respect (not to interfere), protect (prevent others' interference) and fulfil (facilitating and providing). There are a plethora of religious texts that can be referred to in support of these state obligations.

The document 'Faith Partnership Principles - working effectively with faith groups to fight global poverty' (FPP) was developed by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). The FPP assesses the recognition of religious actors in a relatively secularized context and is the outcome of encounters with faith leaders. Similar processes have engaged other international development actors in Netherlands and Norway, as well as the World Bank. The FPP says faith communities are '*more committed to [the local community] than ... other groups*', '*often the first group to which the poor turn...*' and have a '*unique contribution ... in ... connecting with communities ... that are marginalised or who can't be reached by other means.*' When identifying what is '*required*', the FPP points to the need for better understanding of '*the basic tenets of religions and an appreciation of the different interpretations within any given religion... [and] specific and targeted information on the role of faith in different contexts.*'

Thus international development actors are desirous of stronger engagement with faith communities – also on the premises set by these religious communities. All faith organisations can support a human rights-based approach irrespective of whether they are embedded in Christianity or other faith traditions. All faiths can find common basis between their own ethical values and the values underpinning human rights. Religious ethics encompass dignity, justice and accountability, which are central to human rights realization. It is important to counter attempts to present human rights as only belonging to the Western, Christian realm.

2.4 RIGHTS-BASED APPROACHES WITHIN A DIACONAL APPROACH

There are no contradictions between human rights and diaconal principles. The concept of diakonia has primarily been applied in bodies such as the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation. As a result of the general approximation between the ecumenical movement and the evangelical movement, a space has been created within which diakonia, being the Greek word for

service, can serve as defining the essential element of what it is to be a church. Other elements are for instance proclamation (kerygma) and community (koinonia). Hence, even those organizations that do not explicitly refer to diakonia would presently not have problem with agreeing that they are a diaconal organization.

2.5 RIGHTS BASED APPROACHES AND DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE

When applied in the context of development, rights are broader than laws and frameworks. They are legitimate claims by *rights holders* against *duty-bearers* around *specific needs and interests*.

Rights are universal. By virtue of being human all people are entitled to civil, political, economic and cultural rights. However, the rights of the poor to social and economic resources are often not realised. This is because unequal relations of power and privilege in most societies across the world prevent the majority from enjoying their rights. People are accorded different social worth based on their class, race, gender and other social attributes. Poor people, ethnic, religious and other minorities tend to be marginalised and unable to realise their rights. They often lack the resources to make rights claims. In addition because of society's understanding of their social worth they are not seen as entitled to basic rights. So for example the poor are blamed for being poor, and welfare mothers are often seen as leaches on the system. Conversely those who are of the dominant class, race, gender and ethnicity have the resources to ensure their rights and entitlements, and are seen as being entitled to their wealth and privilege.

Within each race, class, or ethnic group an additional form of marginalisation takes place on the basis of gender. This results in women and of a particular social group being disadvantaged in relation to men of that group. So, for example poor women, women of a specific ethnic group, disabled women, tend to experience more extreme marginalization as compared with poor men, men of their ethnic group or disabled men.

While all human beings have rights and while the same standard of equality applies to all, in order for rights to be realised in practice the starting point needs to be a recognition of difference, marginalisation and unequal power.

Rights based strategies need to explore ways of resourcing rights claiming by those whose rights are not realised. Civil society organizations and NGOs can promote rights claiming through

- creating recognition for rights
- developing agency and voice as a means to claim entitlements and pressure duty-bearers
- building strategies among groups whose rights are violated
- building organization of the groups whose rights are violated

Rights based approaches

- work on both sides –resourcing *groups claiming rights* and holding to account those *on whom the claim is made*
- recognize the interconnectedness of rights, accountability and substantive participation
- see people as agents and subjects of their own development
- see the need for people to participate in decisions affecting their lives
- require ongoing analysis of power relations that shape claims and outcomes

3. THE ORGANISATIONAL AND REGIONAL CONTEXT OF THE EVALUATION

The participatory learning evaluation covered two different continents and regions with geographical, religious, cultural, economic and political differences. Within these regions the country contexts also differed. We elaborate in this section on contextual differences following a brief introduction on Digni and its members.

3.1 DIGNI AND DIGNI'S MEMBERS

Digni is an umbrella organization coordinating and undertaking quality assurance of the development work of 19 Norwegian Christian Evangelical Faith Based organizations, which receive support from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD). Digni also works with competence building, advocacy and communication. Digni administered 181 million NOK from NORAD in 2013.

- **Faith Based:** All Digni's member organizations share and build on Christian values. Digni believes that all human beings are created in the image of God; that it is a Christian obligation to care for creation, uphold the rights and dignity of all human beings and mobilize to challenge injustice use of power' (Overordnet Strategi for Digni § 1).
- **Locally rooted.** Digni's member organizations engage several thousand volunteers in Norway and cater to a vast network of partnership organizations and engaged individuals in the South. This ensures cultural awareness, local ownership and grassroots involvement.
- **Digni 's added value** As the management hub for 19 diverse member organizations working
- **A presence in nearly 40 countries,** Digni is ideally positioned to facilitate mutual learning, cooperation and innovation on development work and organization.
- **Network organization:** Digni draws on large national and international networks, exchanging information and ideas and cooperating on issues of mutual interest.
- **Faith-based and professional:** The combination of a high professionalism and a deep understanding of religious mechanisms is a major asset, which enables Digni to understand, access, mobilize and challenge religious resources, and to translate and broker between secular bodies (states and governments, for example) and religious bodies (Churches and church members, religious leaders etc.) www.digni.no

DIGNI'S 19 NORWEGIAN MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS ARE:

Areopagos, Norwegian Bible Society, The Free Evangelical Assemblies, Pentecostal Foreign Mission of Norway, Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Norway, Baptist Union of Norway, The Mission Covenant Church of Norway, The Norwegian Mission Society, The Salvation Army, Himalpartner, Christian Sports Contact, Norwegian Christian Mission, The United Methodist church, the Mission Alliance, Normision, The Norwegian Lutheran Mission, The Stefanus Alliance, International, Youth With a Mission Norway, Wycliffe. (For more information: www.digni.no)

3.2 THE REGIONAL CONTEXT

PARTNERS IN EAST AFRICA

Partners in East Africa include churches and their development offices: Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and its development office DASSC (Development and Social Services Commission); Free

Pentecostal Fellowship in Kenya; Harvest Church of God in Ethiopia; Pentecostal Churches of Uganda (project: WAA); Igreja Evangelical Assembleia Livre (Project MDI); Free Evangelical Christian Fellowship (FECF)/NATICC; Bible Societies: Bible Societies of Kenya, Ethiopia and Palestine; International NGOs (Norwegian Member organization's local branches:); CHRISC Tanzania and Kenya; PYM Aid Somaliland, Scripture Mission (NLM-Kenya); Salvation Army of Tanzania: A church, a diaconal social service organization, a movement.

The main religion in these countries is Christianity. All partners are Christian Faith Based Organizations – no secular organizations. Some represent large churches (like ECCMY in Ethiopia with 7 million members, FPFK with 250 Thousand members).

Partners at the Digni Regional Network Meeting in 2014 came from the following countries: Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Somaliland, Uganda, Mozambique, Swaziland and Palestine.

PARTNERS IN EAST ASIA

Partners in East Asia may be divided into two main groups. The one group includes Faith Based NGOs: Amity Foundation (China- Social development organization related to the official protestant Christian Church in China (Three Self Church); Salvation Army of Burma: A church, a diaconal social service organization, a movement; International NGO- (Norwegian Member organization's local branch:) Scincon (NLM- China); NLM-Mongolia; YNLM – Indonesia; Buer Consult (NMA in China); NMA Vietnam.

All of these organizations involve local government and government owned NGOs as implementing partners to a lesser or greater extent. Independent civil society engagement in the projects of these organizations is limited mainly due to government regulations restricting the establishment and operation of independent civil society organizations.

A second group of partners in east Asia includes: Christian Faith Based International NGO: International Cooperation Cambodia (ICC); World Renew Cambodia; A Secular International NGO: Plateau Perspectives China; Secular National NGOs: Chin Human Rights Organization; Equality Myanmar; Disabled Persons Association of Bhutan; Kunpen Vocational Training Centre, China;

Overall only a few of the partners in East Asia are Christian faith based; many Norwegian Member organizations have their own local branch offices. Christianity is a minority religion in the region. Main religions are either Buddhists or in one case Muslim, unaffiliated or folk religionists.

Organizations at the regional meeting in East Asia came from the following countries: China, Mongolia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Cambodia, Bhutan, Vietnam.

3.3. POLITICAL CONTEXT FOR RBA IN ETHIOPIA

The 2012 report from the Norad Civil Society Panel, titled 'Tracking Impact. An exploratory study of the wider effects of Norwegian civil society support to countries in the South' has as one of its hypotheses (p 46): "*interaction between governments and CSOs is increasingly tense due to controversial advocacy work*", a hypothesis that is largely confirmed.

Ethiopian Proclamation 621 of 2009 on Charities and Societies says that only Ethiopian societies and charities can take part in activities relating to human rights. Moreover, the Proclamation specifies that

to be considered an Ethiopian charity or society, allowed to work for the advancement of human rights and other purposes less than 10 per cent of its income can come from foreign sources. An interesting observation on Ethiopia is that the EECMY – as a “religious organization”, hence not covered by the Proclamation - can engage in both human rights and peace efforts, unlike its development branch, the Development and Social Service Commission (DASSC), which is covered by the Proclamation.

3.4. POLITICAL CONTEXT FOR RBA IN MYANMAR

Myanmar has had four years of democratic reforms. While the 2014 law indicates less restrictions, the general climate for promoting human rights is still very difficult. Years of military dictatorship have taken their toll and people generally feel helpless. They experienced the worst human rights violations in the past. To large extent human rights abuses continue.

Myanmar has ratified only three UN human rights treaties: The Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. There have traditionally been several restrictions on work by civil society organizations or non-governmental organizations (NGOs)., The Association Registration Law No. 31/2014 was passed by the Myanmar Parliament 25 June 2014, subsequently signed by President Thein Sein and ‘gazetted’ 20 July 2014. The 2014 law does represent an important improvement. The new law provides *voluntary* registration procedures for local and international NGOs and contains no *explicit* restrictions or criminal punishments.

4. KEY FINDINGS

This section presents our key finding from the questionnaires (annex 3), interviews (annex 4), participants' contribution in the network meeting (annexes 7,8, 9 and 10) and from the field visits in Ethiopia and Myanmar (annexes 5,6 and annex 12,13,14)

4.1. THE NORWEGIAN CONTEXT: DIGNI MEMBERS AND RIGHTS-BASED APPROACHES

As part of the mapping of Digni members' rights-based thinking and activities, a questionnaire was sent out to all Digni members primo November 2013, and all 19 Digni members responded. This summary gives a brief account of the responses to the questionnaire (see Annex 2).

To the **first question, on the relevance of RBA for the organization** there was a 1-5 scale, with 5 as "very relevant" and 1 as "not relevant". 16 of 19 indicated a 4 or 5, implying that a rights-based approach is relevant (7) or very relevant (9). One Digni member indicated a 2, while two Digni members indicated a 3. There was an overall strong endorsement of human rights. One Digni member with a score of 4 said 'all our projects address human rights issues...', emphasising that human rights is 'the intention of more or less all our projects.' This member acknowledged, however, that the score might have been 'a bit lower...' if the question had been about specific rights-based approaches (RBAs) '*understood as a method or a constant awareness in our every-day-work...*'

To the **second question, which required a listing of elements of a RBA**, some quoted from internal documents, while other singled out work with specific vulnerable groups of persons, such as indigenous peoples or minorities. Core words of dignity, equality, empowerment (of rights-holders) and accountability (of duty-bearers) were applied by some, as were terms like voice, lobbying and networking for others.

One Digni member, who indicated a 5 to the first question, said the RBA '*obliged [the organisation] to take into account and make explicit reference to ... relevant international and legal standards and conventions applicable to the situation.*' Another Digni member, who also indicated a 5 to the first question, identified how RBA was applicable to challenge traditional practices, as it '*gives us the "documentation" needed to intervene in abuse situations in homes/families which are otherwise protected by traditional-law.*' The same Digni member said that the RBA '*brings "peace to the home" where all family members can live in peace with each other.*'

Some responses were not too specific. To give one example, even if the problems (unequal access to services; freedom of belief) were identified, it was not clear what the Digni member and its partners actually do practically, as the relatively general verb '*address*' was applied. Also the verb '*advocacy*' was applied by this Digni member in the context of governments' observance of human rights, but how such advocacy is actually carried out was not explained. The wording under this question was too general to give an indication of the actual work carried out by this Digni member.

The Evaluation Team believes that it is very useful to bring attention to the dilemmas mentioned by another Digni member that 1) '*the effects of how we as outsiders ... try to change the society...*'; 2) '*working within nations ... where we have to be careful with the term human rights*'; 3) '*if the focus on the word "rights" makes some of these groups more vulnerable than needed...*'; 4) '*Could the "dignity- or equality- or empowerment-approach" be just as valuable...[?]*'; 5) '*tragic effects both within the area of*

children's rights and women right that has the opposite effect of what was intended. We should dare to talk more about those to increase equality...' This seems to suggest that the identification of certain population groups as particularly vulnerable and therefore in need of special consideration (and human rights protection as specified by respective treaties) can in effect make them more vulnerable.

To the **third question, on faith-rights links (how the Digni member's faith basis or values influence its work with rights and justice)**, there was an overall positive assessment that the faith basis of the Digni members had a positive influence on their perception of rights. Not surprisingly, the equality of every human being, as created in the image of God, was emphasised by many. One Digni member, which indicated a four to the first question, emphasised the duty towards others, more than the right to claim for oneself, as central in its approach, underlining that these two were not seen as contrasting. Another Digni member, also indicating a four to the first question, said: *'Priority is given to marginalized groups, based on the Bible/God's concern for poor, orphans and for justice.'* Other Digni members also identified justice.

Another Digni member admitted that in its *'specific Church family...'* human rights *'does not necessarily imply a high authority. However, very few, if any, would question the intentions of the human rights...'*

The issue of partnership was mentioned, understood as a response to the needs expressed by partners. In addition, peace and reconciliation work was referred to under this question.

To the **fourth question, on specifying certain groups of persons they were working with**, the following were prioritized:

- Women: 16
- Minorities: 11 (specified by some to be indigenous peoples)
- Children/youth: 16
- Persons with disabilities: 6 (specified by one Digni member as persons with mental disabilities)
- Others: 6 (3 referred to local communities/villages (integrated programmes); there were also references to leaders, street & slum children, and dalits (by three different Digni members).

Hence four categories were indicated as relevant. Even if children/youth were not particularly emphasized in the interviews, it is no big surprise that such a high number of Digni member report that they are working with children/youth.

To the fifth question, on whom Digni members and their one's partners seek to influence, the following responses were given:

- Local authorities: 19
- National authorities: 9 (one wrote 'some'; one wrote to a lesser degree; 0,5 each)
- Traditional leaders: 14
- Household leaders (parents, male elders): 13
- Religious leaders: 9
- Companies/corporations: 4,5 (one Digni member wrote 'some')
- International organizations: 2
- Norwegian authorities: 3 (one Digni member wrote 'for the org. work in Norway'; not counted here)

- Other: 5 (Norwegian congregations, national churches, school teachers, the general public, youth leaders)

All Digni members were conscious of the need for a good relationship with local authorities where projects are located, and to influence these authorities. The more limited work in influencing national authorities and international organizations and Norwegian authorities was somewhat surprising. In addition, the fact that less than half seek to influence religious leaders is surprising, since many come from religious organizations themselves.

To the sixth question, on Digni members and partners' main approaches, the following responses were given:

- Providing services to them: 10
- Awareness raising through training: 19
- Develop advocacy campaigns with them: 6
- Organizing and mobilizing community groups: 17
- Other: 2 (local churches, awareness raising through media; one Digni member that specified work for its Norwegian operations not counted)

From responses to the **seventh question, on the involvement of communities**, the general impression is that community involvement was present at all stages of the project.

To the **ninth question, on support**, overall feedback to the Digni secretariat was the need for more training on RBA, and awareness of how the 'secular' human rights could be better applied in religious contexts, as well as theological training. (For a general overview on how the Digni secretariat can contribute to the work of the partners, see section 4.6.)

In **summary**, the survey indicated an overwhelmingly positive support for RBA. The principled positive reception is not, however, matched by application of specific programming 'tools' in order to implement the rights-based approach. As an example, few of the responses specified human rights principles, for instance dignity, non-discrimination, accountability and participation, all being human rights principles that the Evaluation Team found were positively received when these were presented at the Digni member days (see annex 11) and the network meetings in East Africa and East Asia. It was also interesting that Digni members with the lowest score on the relevance question (question 1) explained this by the fact that a human rights approach must have the public authorities as the primary addressee.

4.2 PARTNERS AND RIGHTS-BASED APPROACHES

Partner organisation representatives completed questionnaires similar to the Norwegian members' organizations during the regional workshops in Kenya and Thailand. From the East Asia region 10 of 11 partners filled in the questionnaire and 13 out of 14 partners from Southern Africa completed the questionnaire. There were no significant differences in responses region wise.

To the first question, on relevance of a RBA for your organization (see annex), all partners said RBA is relevant for their organisation. 17 answered very relevant and 6 relevant. These responses corresponded with the responses from Digni member organizations.

To the **second question, on the understanding of and listing some of the elements of a RBA**, about half the partners listed some elements of RBA. Within these answers, dignity and participation were most

referred to. Others listed rights for children, women and marginalised groups as some of the elements for RBA, and again a few listed project activities. One response was to *“help people to know their rights and help the government to fulfil the rights.* Another focused on the participatory methods. Four mentioned non - discrimination and transparency and one was concerned with services as a key element of a RBA approach.

The conclusion is that there is not a clear and full understanding of RBA among the partners. Many of the elements mentioned might need to be operationalised and understood in the context of development work.

To the **third question, on the faith-rights links (how the Digni partners’ faith or values influence their work with rights and justice)**, there was a positive assessment by all partners. The main response was that faith values influenced their work with rights. Many said that their values aligned with rights, or that their acceptance of rights were derived from their faith values. One said that RBA was part of the organisation’s strategy while another answered: *Our organization’s faith values are reflected through every activity and they are aligned with rights and justice.* Another said: *our faith is the foundation for why we want to work with the most vulnerable groups* and one said that they wanted to provide services with compassion. Another responded: *we want a serving attitude, sharing love and forgiveness, cultural sensitivity towards local cultures and faith-based mind-set.* Examples of approaches mentioned include; *show respect, be open build fellowship, be dynamic, team building, love , cultural sensitivity, people oriented activity, improve social justice, all people same value, support people living independent lives, responsible, accountable, equality, justice, and dignity.*

As a general conclusion, it may be said that partners in both regions saw harmony between faith and right values.

To the **fourth question, on specifying certain groups of persons**, the following were prioritized: 20 projects were working with children or youth, 11 with minorities, 13 with disabled, 16 with women and 9 answered others like parents of disabled, poor or church members and persons living with HIV, HIV positives. The categories suggested were relevant, with minorities are high on the agenda with more partners from East Asia working with minorities and disabled. The most interesting finding is that almost all partners are working with children and youth and that 2/3 are working with women.

To the **fifth question, on whom the organization seek to influence**, 21 said local authorities, 19 said household leaders, 17 said national authorities, and 16 said religious leaders, 11 traditional leaders and 6 said international org, 3 answered companies and 2 Norwegian authorities. Others mentioned youth groups, the public and professional leaders. Hence, partners focused on local leaders as well as on national authorities and religious leaders. The focus on national authorities and religious leaders differs significantly from member’s responses.

To the **sixth question, on partners’ main approaches**, 23 said awareness raising and training, 22 said organising and mobilising community-groups, 14 said develop advocacy campaigns and 10 were service providers. Other activities were: liaison meetings with partners, income-generating activities, empowering local people. These approaches are closely linked to RBA activities. On the other hand almost half of the partners engaged in service provision.

To the **seventh question, to what extent the partners involved the communities**, responses give the picture that all involved involve communities in project planning and in implementation, but that when it comes to context analysis and evaluation, participation is not that strong.

To the **ninth question, on what kind of support the organization and persons that they work with need** responses were to strengthen the rights dimension in their work through capacity building and training, practical tools and exposure trips. They want to strengthen networking among Digni partners, and need financial and other resources. Responses also specified support in developing strategies, sharing resources, empowering CBOs and not least support in monitoring and reporting. This gives the impression that capacity building, more training and other ways of strengthening the RBA work is a strong need among partners.

General summary: RBA is seen as very relevant and in harmony with faith values by both Digni members and regional partner organizations. Partners are working with prioritised right's holder groups. Household leaders, local authorities, and national leaders as well as religious leaders were prioritized as duty-bearers. The main RBA approaches are training and awareness raising, and mobilizing local community groups. All partners involve local communities in project implementation.

All partners report on the need for more training to strengthen RBA within their organization and daily work. This can be understood as a clear signal that there is still not a full understanding of the RBA concept and approaches and strategies. The challenge is to find ways of training and awareness rising that facilitate and activate rights principles and empowerment of the poor. This significant change will not only rely on training alone but also on how knowledge from the training will be put into practice action. However, applying RBA in development work and strengthening the capability of working both with the right-holders and the duty-bearers seem to be an important and essential need.

4.3. HOW FAITH-BASED IDENTITY AND VALUES INFLUENCE STRATEGIES AND WORK WITH RIGHTS

As mentioned in section 4.2. Digni members and partners indicated overwhelmingly positive support for RBA, and viewed faith-based identity as having a positive influence on the perception of rights. Both members and partners could easily argue for this influence. Not surprisingly, most emphasized the equality of every human being, as created in the image of God. Many referred to how dignity was God given to all human beings. One member organization prioritised duty towards others, over the right to claim for oneself, underlining that this was central in their approach, and that these two were not in conflict. Another Digni member said: *'Priority is given to marginalized groups, based on the Bible/God's concern for poor, orphans and for justice.'* Other Digni members identified justice, acknowledging that *"Poverty and unjust distribution is central."*

The following quote by implicitly introducing the requirement that rights principles should correspond with the Bible, suggests that right based thinking can in practice be conditional: *The Bible advocates rights of humans so there is no conflict between faith and rights. Human dignity is the basic principle of the UN Declaration of Human Rights and of the Bible. Human rights is a tool we need to use and we need to see how human rights principles correspond with the Bible.*

Another member said: *The basis for all of our work is the equal worth of all human beings, derived from the fact that all are created in the image of God.* In addition, another: *The religious justification has at its*

core the notion of all created in the image of God, while the secular has at its core the human dignity of all members of the human family.

Another member mentioned the perspective: 'specific Church family...' human rights does not necessarily imply a high authority. However, very few, if any, would question the intentions of the human rights. The Bible talks about equality and justice. Or: In order to reach out to the churches, it is, however, important to start with the Bible, as the Bible is the most authoritative norm source for Christians.

Gender equality was specified as being at the core of any positive development process. This was elaborated in interviews with partners: The responsibility of all Christians is emphasized in the Good Samaritan.... The gender and the power dimensions hence become central. While the Bible is the main source, Good Samaritan methodology can also be conducted in areas with a high percentage Muslims, and then there will be more emphasis on common values. Another partner were also referring to using stories from the bible: We use biblical stories but we change some words. We use the practical part of these stories

WHEN HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES CAN BE CONTROVERSIAL

Members and partners were also concerned about clashes between human rights and faith values as mentioned in Chapter 3. This was not only connected to Christian values, but also reported on from a Buddhist perspective.

Firstly, reproductive rights were specified, with abortion and condom use seen as clashing with faith values. This clash led one organisation to de-emphasize condom use in their HIV programme: *With our HIV and AIDS work, we promote abstinence and faithfulness and do not stress condom use. Condoms are seen as promoting promiscuity.* Several stated a clear position on marriage as being between men and women, and were therefore not be prepared to support same sex marriage and equal rights for homosexuals. Some sought to give less attention to issues such as abortion and homosexuality: *There is a clash between the UN Declaration on Human Rights and Christian values. We do not speak out in public on homosexuality or abortion. We keep out of these matters.*

The following quote captures the main approach towards homosexuals among partners: *We are struggling with homosexuality. Biblical teaching is against homosexuality. Homosexuals are a vulnerable group especially when it comes to HIV and AIDS. We should defend their human dignity. At top level, we agree they should not be beaten or killed, that they should be protected. In our country, this is a very sensitive issue and cannot even be raised. We draw on the Bible to say no to stigmatization of HIV positive people*

At least one organisation noted that they had begun to address discrimination against 'sexual minorities': *While fighting discrimination based on freedom of religion or belief is the most important task of our organisation, there is also increased attention to other forms of discrimination, including discrimination of sexual minorities*

In addition, one partner said: *One of the clashes between Christian values and rights is that in our HIV/AIDS prevention work there are risk groups, like men who have sex with men, who contradict Christian values. But Christianity is also changing on gay rights. We work with NGOs that promote gay rights, and we have had LGBTI training. In China, people do not openly say they are gay. Most Chinese are not of any religious belief so they are more open.*

Gay rights emerged as a particular issue of concern at the east Africa Participatory Learning Workshop mainly because of the considerable media coverage on this issue since the workshop was held at the time of the passing of the repressive Uganda law against homosexuality. To address this concern an evening dialogue was conducted by staff from Digni's secretariat. The view taken by participants in this discussion was that while faith organisations could not promote gay rights neither could a faith perspective condemn gay people.

CHALLENGES OF INTER-FAITH UNDERSTANDING

The challenge of Christian faith based organisations working in countries where the majority religion was not Christian came up in interviews and in discussions at the Participatory Learning Workshop in Thailand. These discussions highlighted the need for inter-religious understanding and dialogue, noting that in many East Asian countries Buddhism was the main religion, in Indonesia Islam was the majority religion, and in east Africa Muslims made up a significant proportion in some local community contexts. As one partner noted it is important for faith-based organisations to build trust across different religious groups so as to enable them work effectively in bringing a better life to all members of local communities.

As noted in Chapter three contextual differences between East Africa and East Asia included the predominance of Christianity in Africa and of Buddhism in East Asia. At the Kenya workshop all the partners were Christian faith based organizations, and most participants came from countries where the majority populations were Christian. By contrast, at the East Asia Network Meeting in Thailand while the majority of the partner organisations were Christian faith based organisations, or local branches of member organizations, five were secular organisations. All of the organisations from East Asia were working in countries where the majority populations were not Christian – the majority populations were Buddhists, or non-religious, or in the case of Indonesia, Muslim.

The need for greater inter-religious understanding was highlighted in two encounters at the East Asia Participatory Learning Workshop. Firstly, a Buddhist participant from a secular organisation based in a majority Buddhist country voiced her initial discomfort that the Digni workshop space had little relevance to her or her organisation since all discussion seemed to be framed by Christian ideas and values. However as the meeting progressed it became clear to her that other faiths were also included in the definition of faith-based and she left the meeting feeling included and that the Digni network had relevance for herself and her organisation. In an interview with this organization this concern of what it means to be faith-based was discussed.

A second encounter concerned a Christian participant who shared the ways in which Christians experience persecution in a majority Buddhist country. Discussion on this point resulted in an appreciation of dealing with religious persecution without becoming aggressors in retaliation.

These discussions made clear to the Evaluation Team that there is need for stronger awareness and competence among Digni, its members and partners on how different religions, not only Christianity, can foster human rights thinking and promotion.

In the interview with Equality Myanmar (EQMM), conflicts between religion and human rights were raised, through the lens of culture and social stigma. It was noted that Buddhism is often used to condemn LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) and persons living with HIV/AIDS; and that religious texts are used as a basis to limit the role and social/religious space for women. Religious

conflicts were ongoing between Buddhists and Muslims in Myanmar with Muslim communities severely ostracized for allegedly being not loyal to the state. There are attempts to forbid inter-faith marriage through a proposed law prohibiting inter-faith marriage. Some NGOs, including EQMM, spoke out strongly against this on a human rights basis. Radical Buddhist groups have said that human rights are not in line with Buddhism and place human rights organizations on the list of ‘enemies of Buddhism’.

Even though some partners work in countries or local communities in East Africa where Muslims are in significant numbers little attention seemed to have been given to conflicts between religion and rights. In interviews while Digni members emphasized equality, non-discrimination and cultural sensitivity when approaching rights-holders (beneficiaries), they did not address how to work with religious leaders and communities from other faiths. However, it is important to note that this question was not posed in the evaluation questionnaires.

There is some learning that can take place among Digni members on inter-religious dialogue, Digni member Areopagos, has been – and is – a leading actor regarding inter-religious dialogue. NLM has two important documents that can be drawn on to address inter-religious dialogue: Strategi for Utviklingsamarbeid, and Misjonsstrategi mot 2020. The first document addresses peace and reconciliation, in the context of ethnic groups, and might implicitly relate to communities with different religions. The second document explicitly prioritizes the non-reached peoples. The term ‘Muslims’ is applied, but primarily for statistical purposes (p. 4 and p. 7). When recruiting (Norwegian) personnel, emphasis is on Bible knowledge and knowledge of local cultures, and education from Fjellhaug (see above) is said to be ‘*desirable*’ (ønskelig). There is no requirement to have competence in other religions or interreligious dialogues.

4.4 OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR RIGHTS WORK: OBSERVATIONS FROM THE PARTICIPATORY LEARNING WORKSHOPS

Discussions at the two Participatory Learning Workshops on Rights Based Approaches held as part of this learning evaluation at the Digni Network Meetings in Kenya and Thailand, served as information gathering focus group discussions, enabling the evaluators to engage with Digni members and partners from 15 different countries.

These discussions created space for participants to reflect on RBA as a sustainable, people centred development approach, and to interrogate the extent to which their programmes and projects were in line with rights principles, in particular the extent to which their projects were empowering rights holders and holding to account the responsible duty-bearers.

Participants at both workshops affirmed the relevance of RBA and rights principles to their work and were of the view that their organisations had the opportunity to use RBA for greater impact. Almost all participants recognised that their projects were in line with rights principles of dignity, accountability, participation and empowerment. However many had not consciously considered rights principles and rights strategies and recognised the need to intensify learning about RBA, and in particular about how RBA relates to projects.

Participants affirmed the importance of working to empower rights holders and to hold responsible duty-bearers to account and the importance of understanding the institutional context in order to know which doors to knock on – that if the roles and responsibilities of different authorities (for example state authorities or traditional authorities) was not clearly understood it would be difficult to know which

institution to hold to account. Many participants realised that they were working more on the side of empowerment and less on the side of holding responsible duty-bearers to account. As follow up to the workshops some set themselves the task of looking more closely at the institutions they needed to interact with in order to advance the rights of specific target groups.

Many participants had not considered the accountability of their organisations to the communities and individuals they worked with – that is the target groups of their programmes and projects. In discussion they realised that their organisations were conscious of upward accountability to donors or to state laws in terms of which NGOs should operate. They recognised the need to extend their notion of accountability to include accountability to their target groups. They recognised also the need to understand their own power as better resourced agents in relation to the poor and marginalised communities they worked with.

The importance of socio-economic cultural and political context was underlined with participants in both east Africa and East Asia noting that this could limit space for rights approaches. Participants noted that at community level participation was at times hindered by low levels of education, lack understanding of rights, fear of the consequences of raising voices, poverty and a preoccupation with eking out livelihoods. They noted that while in many country contexts there were laws in place to affirm rights these laws were not accessible to the majority of the population who were poor and marginalised. The space for openly taking up rights was restricted in some country contexts and this needed to be considered in developing strategies.

Participants noted that within communities and the broader society attitudes and mind-sets shaped by cultural and religious beliefs tended in particular to inhibit women's rights to equality, non-discrimination and participation. These attitudes might also influence participants' organisations and participants recognised the need to interrogate the extent to which their organisations were trapped in traditional beliefs which went against rights principles particularly when it came to women's rights.

Overall participants realised the need to be sensitive to socio-economic, cultural and political contexts in devising strategies, and the need for appropriate language.

In interviews conducted during the Participatory Learning Workshops, partners working in contexts where human rights and RBA had limited space also raised the importance of appropriate language noting: *We do not say that we are working on rights. We do lobbying with government and other stakeholders to promote participation of people and education.*

Among the opportunities that could be built on to advance rights, participants noted a demand from the international community for rights work; governments' desire for good reputations in the international arena; and some governments genuine concern about people. In most countries there were laws and regulations to promote rights. Generally, the media was supportive of rights work. At community level, some local chiefs were supportive of rights work, and there were opportunities for local initiative, local ownership and participation.

Participants were of the view that there was space for rights work, and that even when space was limited, it was possible to build trust and bridges and to expand space through careful strategizing.

In summary deliberations with participants at the Participatory Learning Workshops in east Africa and East Asia increased their awareness:

- That they need to more consciously see the people they work with as agents of change
- That RBA places more value on people and participation
- That they need tools to bridge the gap between rights and faith
- That they need tools to deal with specific rights issues
- Of their own role and power as development practitioners coming into communities
- Of the importance of culture and political context
- Of the need for accountability to the people we work with - recognising that currently most organisations are concerned solely with upward accountability to donors
- Of the interaction across faiths, particularly in east Asia

4.5. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE BASED ON FIELD VISITS IN ETHIOPIA AND MYANMAR

Immediately following the East Africa network meeting, two team members conducted field visits in Ethiopia. One team member visited two EECMY projects funded by NMS in Western Ethiopia: the Western Ethiopia Women's Empowerment Project (WEWEP) and the Western Ethiopia Integrated Environment and Food Security Development Programme. A second team member visited three EECMY projects funded by NLM in Southern Ethiopia, and one project funded by Youth With A Mission (YWAM) in West Arsi.

Similarly, following the East Asia network meeting two evaluation team members conducted field visits in Myanmar. These included visits to The Salvation Army of Myanmar's Myanmar Integrated Community Livelihood Development Program; the Chin Human Rights Organisation's (CHRO) Project Kaladan Movement and Equality Myanmar.

The purpose of the field visits was to learn the extent to which the projects had incorporated rights principles, and in particular the extent to which project activities were empowering project beneficiaries and holding responsible duty-bearers to account. These learnings were intended to feed into understanding how best to strengthen rights work within Digni, its members and members' partners. Programmes visited were selected on the basis that they constituted good practice and would offer significant learnings.

4.5.1 KEY OBSERVATIONS FROM ETHIOPIA

WESTERN ETHIOPIA WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PROJECT (WEWEP)

BACKGROUND TO PROGRAMME

The WEWEP programme goal was to empower women in Church synods and the local society, to increase their awareness of harmful traditional practices and increase their knowledge on women's rights. The church had decided in 2010 that all synods should have a women's department reporting directly to the Executive Secretary. However many synods had not implemented this decision by 2013, and the programme aimed to provide impetus for synods to implement this. The programme focused on building leadership skills; setting up women's departments in all synods; and setting up self-help groups at community level.

Project design took into account that women's rights was a sensitive area because empowering women affected the supremacy of men. To mitigate this the strategy devised was to include men in

communities and the synods in discussions so that they would understand the advantages of empowering women. Importantly the strategy of engaging men did not confuse or shift attention away from the goal of empowering women.

An important step in designing the project was to analyse women's situation in the six synods where the project was to be implemented. Significant findings were that women's low self-esteem was an obstacle to their empowerment, influencing their role in the synod and in society, their willingness to participate, and to take high positions; that traditional beliefs assumed women were sub-humans; that women were victims of economic and sexual subordination and violence; and that women's basic human rights were violated.

The project prioritises gender equality based on Biblical understandings that all are equal in the eyes of God. WEWEP draws on the Bible in their empowerment work with women – for example drawing on the story of Tamar to engage women in discussion on violence.

OBSERVATIONS FROM FIELD VISITS

The WEWEP programme was launched in August 2012, only eighteen months before the February 2014 evaluation field visit and had already in that short space of time, made strides in advancing women's participation within church structures, and in empowering women within local communities through self- help groups and community conversations.

Self-help group members attending focus group discussions noted that their involvement in the self-help groups had led to changes in their extreme sense of isolation and their extreme poverty. They now experienced greater social cohesion and had made economic gains. This had led to increased self-confidence and increased self-esteem.

In focus group discussions WEWEP leadership at community and congregation level noted that they had been empowered to challenge norms around male and female roles and responsibilities in their homes and in the community. Community conversations had surfaced problems around FGM, fistula and HIV/AIDS, had raised awareness on these issues and engaged the community in making a start to look for solutions.

At the same time, all focus group participants noted that there was more to be done in order to achieve gender equality given cultural norms which dictated women's subordinate status. They noted that while WEWEP had opened up space within church structures to enable women's entry into these former male spaces, once women were in these structures they were expected to occupy subordinate roles such as making and serving tea. This was so even for women who were elected Elders. Focus group participants noted the need for ongoing empowerment and support activities with women in church structures.

WEWEP staff members noted that more work was needed to strengthen their work on accountability. They were of the view that work to hold authorities accountable could be strengthened through providing information, building skills and confidence that people can be actors and do things for themselves.

THE WESTERN ETHIOPIA INTEGRATED ENVIRONMENT & FOOD SECURITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

BACKGROUND

This programme started in September 2009 and had come to a close by the time of the field visit. The programme goal was to reduce vulnerability to food and nutritional insecurity of rural households in six targeted woredas of Oromia State. Specific objectives were: Promoting agriculture production; Environmental rehabilitation; improved health services; improved access to water, sanitation and hygiene; Diversified income; Women's empowerment.

OBSERVATIONS FROM FIELD VISITS

Success in meeting project objectives had led to empowerment of the programme beneficiaries. Discussions with beneficiaries made clear that material changes in food security and income levels had led to increased confidence and improved self-esteem. In focus group discussions both women and men noted that they felt more capable, their self-perceptions had shifted so that they experienced themselves as more capable community members, and the community in turn perceived them as capable leaders. One man noted that since participation in the project he had changed, the community saw him differently and he had been elected a kabele (village level) leader. Women said 'we could not sit like this and talk with you before the project.'

Gender equality was seen as a priority area and a crosscutting issue within this programme. Women's equal participation was seen as important for community development, and as in line with faith values. Project staff noted that their basis for gender equality is the Bible: *'The Bible tells us that there is no difference between women and men and all are equal in the eyes of God. The Bible is the basis for our work. In Genesis God told, Adam live in the Garden of Eden and protect the garden. This is about the environment'*.

The project had included gender training for husbands and wives together. The outcome was increased awareness of women's subordination, of the need for greater equality between women and men as partners in the home and in the community, and men taking on more household work than previously. Lessons from the Integrated Programme being taken into the planning of a new development programme (Green LIP) included the importance of assessing women's needs in the new project area, and assessing women's work burden, their control over resources and participation in decision making as compared with men's.

One challenge recognised by project staff was the need for more attention to accountability of duty-bearers.

A second challenge raised by the evaluation team member related to principles of non-discrimination and equality. The target group for this programme deliberately included the very poor together with an economically better off class of community members. This social mix was seen as important in order to ensure project goals. However, it was not clear how these socioeconomic differences played out in interpersonal relationships within the project and how this affected non-discrimination and equality. The principle of non-discrimination is a challenging one relating to socio economic difference at project level, particularly since development practice often assumes lack of such difference at the village level and often ignores such difference between project staff and beneficiaries.

HARVEST CHURCH OF GOD (HCOG): EDUCATION AND BASIC LIFE SKILLS

The background of this project is the efforts of a dynamic Pentecostal church to serve its local community better. The education project was initially supported by private contributions from Ethiopia, Europe and North America. The area prioritised was a woreda with low school enrolment, high drop-out rates and high food insecurity, in a region of good soil quality and enough rain. The Youth With a Mission (WAM) and Harvest Church of God (HcoG) then partnered, primarily in providing school facilities and services relating to the schools.

The encounter between the church and the local (majority Muslim) community was at certain stages contentious. The problem was that HCOG perceived that the community would be positive to the school building, but as the community was not informed, some thought it was going to be a church. Therefore, some from the community set fire to the construction site. Had the human rights principles of participation and transparency been observed at these initial phases, this sad event could have been avoided.

The evaluator met with some community members who had initially opposed the project, but who were now very happy about the school and the other services provided. The current critical aspect is whether a church should take responsibility for providing education in Kofale town and surrounding villages, relieving the woreda authorities of their duty to provide education for all. This was discussed with the mayor, the head of the education office, and the head of women & children's affairs office. It was evident to the evaluator that in light of limited resources there was need for all positive forces to contribute. The local authorities could, however, challenge the local Muslim organisations to a public discussion on how to face this situation.

It is relevant to note that Al-Shabab sought to recruit in this region and that Kofale in August 2013 was the centre of violence (www.thesfanews.net/ethiopian-regime-gunned-down-25-muslim-protesters). When the national anti-terror police came to end the demonstrations by force, some leaders tried to hide in the homes of Christians and hence these house owners were also arrested together with the protesters, but were subsequently released. Hence, the context of this project is one of inter-religious tensions.

Unique aspects of this project are that it is not limited to the construction of a school and the hiring of teachers. The local pastors of the HCoG spend much of their working time in social services (not pastoral services), for instance visiting families of pupils who fail to attend school – to understand the reasons for the absence, and enable their return to school. In order to facilitate girls' school attendance, there are no school fees for girls, and they get equipment for free. There is now a plan to build secondary schools, as there are too few secondary schools. The evaluator could see no indication of benefits accruing to Christian pupils that do not apply to Muslim pupils also. This inclusive approach implies that not only pupils, but also whole families are empowered. Such empowerment is necessary in order to address the many problems facing the Kofale woreda.

SOUTH WEST SYNOD'S COMMUNITY BASED HEALTH SERVICE PROJECT

The title of the project is somewhat misleading, as there are several elements in the project, leading to community development. Moreover, while the title indicates a 'traditional' health service project, the member of the Evaluation Team observes that the actual objective of the project was to abolish a most harmful social practice in the Ganta community, in the mountains just above Arba Minch.

Arba Mich is the main city of both Zuria woreda and Gamo Gofa zone. According to the 2007 census there are almost 1,6 million persons in the zone, more than half Protestants and little less than a third Ethiopian Orthodox (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gamo_Gofa_Zone). The strong Christian presence has however, not resulted in the abolition of the so-called 'slave system' practiced in several kebeles in the Ganta community, just kilometres away from Arba Minch.

The project started in 2010 and in project documents presented as an 'ordinary' local community development project. It is relevant to clarify *why* the social practice of strong isolation and stigmatization of persons considered to be slaves is a human rights issue, as it is not the state, but the *traditional leaders* and various 'facilitators' who maintain the practice. The brief answer is that state obligations to protect, being essentially obligations to prevent others' interference in persons' human rights (see chapter 2.3). By not taking measures to abolish such a harmful practice as the Ganta slave system, the Ethiopian authorities have not complied with their overall human rights obligations. The Ganta slave system threatens the *core* of human rights, namely the equal dignity of all human beings. The slave system had been a concern for EECMY since 1968, but it was not clear whether EECMY had addressed this before 2010.

The Ganta slave system is a traditional practice. A person who eats with a slave or in other ways socializes with a slave will oneself become a slave. One can come out of the slave status by paying a considerable amount of money (around 50.000 birr, the equivalent of 15,000 NOK; for farmers this is many times an annual salary). We heard the most dreadful stories. One was of a man who decided to eat with a slave – which for his wife was such a shame that she divorced him. Another man paid to be freed of his slave status, but as his brother was still a slave he could not attend the funeral of his nephew, because if he had done so, he would again become a slave. It seems as if the traditional leaders are not necessarily those who benefit the most in financial terms, but the 'brokers' or middle men that receive the money from the slaves seems to benefit.

In 2011, a public renouncement of the slave system was announced. This happened at a conference that was well attended. In the kebele that we visited, Ganta Mayche, it was admitted that the slave system was more harshly practiced in other kebeles, and that it was not possible to say that the slave practice had totally vanished in all the five kebeles in the Ganta community – or in adjacent kebeles.

The project is an interesting example of presenting an effort as an ordinary 'development project', when the overall purpose was to abolish a most harmful and human rights-threatening practice.

4.5.2 FIELD EXPERIENCES FROM MYANMAR

Organisations visited in Myanmar included the faith based Salvation Army of Myanmar (TSAM); and two secular organisations – Chin Human Rights Organisation (CHRO) and Equality Myanmar (EQMM).

Significant differences were evident in the inspirational base and implementation strategies of the faith based TSAM on the one hand, and the secular CHRO and EQMM on the other. TSAM as a faith based entity works from the basis of Biblical faith values, while CHRO and EQMM as secular organisations work from the basis of human rights as enshrined in the UN Declaration of Human Rights. TSAM programmes are conventional development programmes which attempt to incorporate rights principles of empowerment; while CHRO programmes are concerned more directly with advancing rights of marginalised peoples, and particularly indigenous groups, the majority of whom are Christian. EQMM is

concerned with advancing rights of marginalised and vulnerable groups particularly religious minorities and freedom of belief.

VISIT TO THE SALVATION ARMY OF MYANMAR (TSAM)

BACKGROUND

The overall programme goal of the Salvation Army's Myanmar Integrated Community Livelihood Development Program is to increase the resilience of communities by strengthening livelihoods, management and leadership capacities. Projects within this programme include microcredit, HIV Care and Prevention, and access to drinking water and sanitation.

The 2013-2016 project document includes rights principles of dignity, participation and empowerment; and sets out community empowerment, awareness raising, gender equality and HIV and AIDS as issues to be addressed within all projects. The primary target groups are families and community members, particularly the poorest and families affected by HIV/AIDS. A secondary target group is TSAM officers and staff – in order to increase their effectiveness in conducting programme activities.

The Village Development Committees (VDCs) and Self Help Groups (SHGs) work within the project framework of upgrading existing water-supply systems, or building new ones. The Health Care groups work within the framework of the HIV/AIDS component of the integrated programme, focusing on care and prevention. Health and HIV and AIDS are addressed as key concerns affecting livelihoods. To prevent HIV spread through blood transfusion, TSAM has set up blood donor Self Help Groups who are given information and tested for HIV/AIDS.

OBSERVATIONS IN THE FIELD

Discussions in the field revealed impressive results in empowerment, participation and initiative of beneficiaries. This was particularly impressive given that these are new projects initiated since 2013. On the side of TSAM good planning, clear guidelines and good implementation strategies seem to be ingredients that helped to achieve these results. On the side of the communities, an ethos of tremendous self-sufficiency seems to drive the community to take initiative.

However at the same time there were challenges observed by the evaluation team member and discussed with TSAM staff in the field. The first challenge was that while programme efforts have strengthened community self-sufficiency, projects have up to now not engaged authorities in order to hold them to account. In fact, in some ways project efforts have taken on functions of the authorities - for example road maintenance and the service of a blood bank. The evaluation team member discussed with TSAM staff the need for the programme to look for ways in which to engage communities as active citizens in holding state and other authorities accountable.

A second challenge was to do with addressing gender inequality. It was evident that this was an area where little discussion had taken place and that there were low levels of awareness of existing gender relations. A possible start could be made by engaging community women and men in discussions aimed at getting a clearer picture of the position of women and men in relation to men and boys; and to move on from such understanding to action to rectify specific gender imbalances.

A third challenge was to do with reaching the poor as a primary target group. While reaching the very poor is the goal of this programme, this is always a challenge and often requires specific mechanisms in place. The current programme requirement of an own contribution of twenty percent seemed to make

it difficult to attract poorer community members. Hence, the mechanism of a contribution, which has served well in enabling beneficiary ownership of the project, seemed to be a mechanism that excluded the poorest community members. As discussed with TSAM staff, this dilemma needs to be addressed as the projects move into their next stages.

Finally, at the Participatory Learning Workshop in Thailand, the TSAM representative stated her interest in engaging Equality Myanmar in rights training for TSAM staff and community leaders. It would enhance the work of the programme if such training were conducted, and if it included training on gender equality and women's rights. Developing a more conscious rights approach will strengthen the work of empowerment and accountability in these projects.

VISIT TO PROJECT KALADAN MOVEMENT

Chin Human Rights Organisation (CHRO) works in partnership with the Arakan Rivers Network on the Kaladan Movement Programme. This programme seeks to prevent and mitigate human rights violations and negative social impacts of a large infrastructural project - the joint India-Myanmar Kaladan Multi-Modal Transport Project. CHRO is a secular organisation which starts out from a rights perspective, relating to faith through a rights lens in their endeavour to promote freedom of religious belief for Christians in Myanmar.

Programme objectives of the Project Kaladan Movement emphasise both empowering rights holders and holding duty-bearers to account. The organisation's focus has been to document and disseminate their documentation in order to raise awareness of the local population and to hold the Myanmar national state, the Chin State and the government of India to account.

Holding to account such powerful governmental actors present enormous challenges and require ongoing strategic engagement with various partners, and ongoing engagement of local populations, and CHRO has made impressive strides in taking up the challenge despite difficult contextual conditions.

The advocacy focus of the organisation results in impressive work on accountability. Work on empowerment is ongoing and appears to be an area that could be strengthened. CHRO as an organisation does not work at the local level but has partners through which local level awareness raising and actions take place. CHRO and its partners have been able to make inroads at the local level, taking care to produce documentation in local languages.

Linking local grassroots empowerment strategies with national advocacy is a challenge at the best of times and in this case is made more challenging given the distance of the project area from Yangon (where CHRO is based), poor transport infrastructure and difficult terrain. Added to this is the challenging political context where issues of security are forever present and where CHRO leaders have been blacklisted by the state.

While gender equality and women's rights do not appear as organisational priorities or concerns in early documents of the Kaladan Movement, the 2015 Activity Plan includes specific gender considerations noting that the Movement will look at the gender impacts of construction, women's land rights and labour rights, and will explore women's perspectives. From discussions with project staff it is clear that efforts are being made to intensify a focus on women's empowerment and that this area can be strengthened.

VISIT TO EQUALITY MYANMAR (EQMM)

EQMM was based in Thailand until 2013. They worked on international advocacy while in Thailand because Myanmar was still closed. Regional level advocacy focused on ASEAN and prepared the UPR (Universal Periodic Review). In 2011, they sent a stakeholder report to the UN and in 2012 they took part in a CRC Burma forum that produced a report that was sent to Geneva. While in Thailand EQMM also tried to work with indigenous groups and strongly supported women's groups along the border. They also focused on Child rights, especially on child soldiers

EQMM's entry to Myanmar in 2013 allowed them to direct attention at advocacy on the national level, and to engage at grassroots community level. Human Rights Education remained their focus. National level advocacy is an important part of their work. They are working on building networks around different issues to strengthen the ability to influence national advocacy and local-level education. The network approach is also beneficial for their return to Myanmar. EQMM is unaffiliated with any political or armed groups, allowing them to remain unbiased.

HOW EQMM WORKS AT BOTH LOCAL AND NATIONAL ADVOCACY LEVELS

EQMM developed Training programs based on Popular education methodology. There were two main issues: Training and Advocacy. EQMM was concerned with not just what to teach but also how to teach. They had to consider how to discuss human rights without using the language of human rights at the local level. Their approach was to start with a discussion of the issues raised by grassroots level activists based on their lived experience. They have a structure that reaches vertically from grassroots activism to national advocacy. Work from the community organizing level informs their advocacy work. EQMM also works to advance LGBT rights (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) and they address HIV and AIDS as rights issues.

National level advocacy includes regular lobbying of parliament, and advocating that the national human rights commissions must be independent. During the field visits for this evaluation EQMM held community based events and engaged in national advocacy to advance children's rights.

LINKING TRAINING AND ACTIVISM

Human rights training is conducted with community activists who are active members of local CBOs or NGOs. The initial training is over five days, where one to four EQMM trainers help the CBO members identify their concerns, and to develop ideas for action they may have and want to strengthen. They introduce CBO participants to human rights thinking with the starting point being the concerns expressed by participants based on their own experiences. To make sure that human rights education is put into practice post training, EQMM allocates small grants. This enables CBO participants to put their ideas into action. EQMM staff maintain contact with participants over 6 months - helping them to plan in detail, come up with long-term goals and training them to manage the small grant. After 3 months EQMM visits the participants to get a report on their activities and financial receipts. After 6 months, a group conference brings together the mobilizing groups from the different trainings to plan for the next year.

LINK BETWEEN FAITH AND RIGHTS

EQMM has found that faith groups want to work on human rights issues because of the overlap with their own values; and that rights groups take up freedom of religion as a human rights issue.

Issues where faith and rights tend to conflict are reproductive rights, LGBT rights and gender roles. Through the lens of culture and social stigma, Buddhism is often used to condemn LGBT, and to limit women's roles. There has been ongoing religious conflict between Buddhists and Muslims with Muslim communities severely ostracized. A campaign has been taken up by religious radicals to deport and abolish Muslims in Myanmar; and to forbid inter-faith marriage by the creation of an anti-inter-faith marriage law. NGOs, including EQMM, spoke out strongly against this on a human rights basis. These radical Buddhist groups have said that human rights are not in line with their religion and have put EQMM on the list of "enemies of Buddhism". Action from the government has been very uneven. The Bishop of Burma released statements on child rights issues and inter-faith marriage law but EQMM is unaware of any statements regarding LGBT rights or HIV/AIDS rights.

4.6 DIGNI'S ADDED VALUE TO MEMBER ORGANISATIONS AND PARTNERS

Questionnaire responses and interviews at the Digni network meeting in East Africa and in East Asia confirmed that Digni is a good resource and provides needed support. Members and partners highly appreciate Digni's roles and are satisfied with the support they received from Digni from Digni staff for work on all levels. They noted that Digni helps to develop professional organisations, creates fellowship with members and partners, and creates an open atmosphere of sharing of experiences among the partners.

In interviews, Digni members reported a sense of belonging in relation to Digni. They are "*our organisation*". "*We do not need to fear anything, and we have easy access to the secretariat.*"

In terms of Digni's added value Digni members mentioned capacity building, the framework agreements (for those having that), and networks for organisations to from one another. Digni is looked upon as a resource, an advisor and help with problems or challenging and controversial questions. One organisation stressed Digni's importance in helping to "*grow our identity as Christian organisations*". The importance of Digni's voice towards the Norwegian Government and politicians was also underlined, and Digni's Secretary General was specifically mentioned in this relation: "*They give us a joint voice.*"

Related to RBA members and partners requested more training and capacity building. Some wanted training specifically on advocacy and lobbying, others on awareness raising of beneficiaries. Others wanted to learn more about how to bridge RBA from grassroots level to governmental and political duty-bearers. Some wanted to strengthen RBA on the leadership level while others wanted to get more tools, material and ways of evaluating the impact. All wanted to increase their awareness of how 'secular' human rights could be better applied in religious contexts and some requested theological training.

One partner would like Digni to give more support on how the churches can contribute more in the society.

Some wanted support was on how to work with minorities and with persons with disabilities.

Some mentioned funding, with some noting that Digni funding could support their efforts to become more professional in their own fundraising efforts.

Overall partners requests to Digni mainly related to capacity building through training and learning from each other by listening, networking among projects, documenting, sharing and study tours. Related to

RBA online discussion forums, course material and special web pages were mentioned. Some suggested shorter regional meetings with fewer partners and specific thematic focus as a way to develop Digni's role as supervisor and professional supporter.

In conclusion, Digni has an important role to play both as a connector between the partners, as a supervisor and capacity builder and not at the least as a voice for faith-based organisations and their strengths in development work in general and as right workers in particular. As the Secretary General emphasised in one of the discussions at the network meeting in East Asia: *"the faith leaders always represent a gate to the local communities and the people"*.

5. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

5.1. HOW AND TO WHAT DEGREE ARE DIGNI MEMBERS AND PARTNERS WORKING WITH RIGHTS BASED APPROACHES

In addressing this question the evaluation dissected core elements of rights based approaches as comprising

- empowerment of rights holders
- accountability of duty-bearers
- incorporation of rights principles of participation, non-discrimination and dignity

Information gathering¹ for this evaluation attempted to explore the extent to which Digni members and their partners saw these core elements as relevant and the extent to which RBA and rights principles could be seen at the level of practice within projects and programmes.

QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES AND INTERVIEWS WITH DIGNI MEMBERS AND THEIR PARTNERS

Responses from questionnaires and interviews highlighted that all Digni members and their partners saw rights based approaches and rights principles as relevant for their work. A minority went as far as to comment that all their work focused on advancing human rights.

At the level of implementation, key beneficiaries included women, minorities, youth, and people with disabilities. These beneficiaries participated at various levels in project activities and organisational strategies to empower them included awareness raising, organising and mobilising. Work with duty-bearers included the desire to influence local authorities, traditional leaders, household leaders, religious leaders and to a lesser extent national states.

In terms of understandings of RBA, there was a mix of responses. Some listed human rights principles of dignity, non-discrimination, accountability, participation; some specified empowerment of rights-holders and accountability of duty-bearers; and some mentioned voice, lobbying and networking. A few were not able to elaborate on their understanding, while others understood RBA in relation to international commitments and laws.

In terms of support needed the majority feedback from both members and partners was that they needed more training on RBA to strengthen the rights dimension in their work – more specifically they needed capacity building and training, practical tools, exposure trips, networking and finances and resources. Hence, there is clear indication that there is still not a full understanding of RBA among Digni members and partners.

PARTICIPATORY LEARNING WORKSHOPS AND FIELD VISITS

Discussions at the two Participatory Learning Workshops highlighted that Digni members and partners saw RBA as relevant, that many were implementing core elements of RBA, and that there was need for more learning in order to strengthen RBA work. In particular, they realised the need to understand

¹ Information gathering for this evaluation was through questionnaires completed by Digni members and partners; discussions at the two Participatory Learning Workshops held as part of the Digni Regional Network meetings in east Africa and east Asia; and interviews with seven Digni members in Oslo, with partners at the two Regional Network Meetings and with project staff and beneficiaries during the Ethiopia and Myanmar field visits.

better the roles of specific institutions and organisations in order to know which door to knock on in relation to specific rights claims.

Field Visits revealed impressive achievements in empowering beneficiaries within development programmes, but that more could be done to hold authorities to account.

5.2. HOW FAITH IDENTITY AND VALUES INFLUENCE STRATEGIES AND WORK WITH RIGHTS

Digni members and faith based organisational partners saw convergence between faith and rights - noting that authority in the case of faith based organisations came from God and the Bible. They saw faith-based identity as influencing their perception of rights in positive ways. Members and partners emphasized the equality of all human beings, as created in the image of God, and that dignity was God-given to all human beings. Two organisations noted that their reason for prioritising women's rights was Biblical understandings of equality between women and men. Digni members and faith-based partners raised concerns about clashes between human rights and faith values. In particular these clashes concerned abortion, condom use and gay rights.

For the secular partner organisations authority for rights work came from the UN Convention on Human Rights. These organisations addressed faith issues to do with freedom of religion, and were concerned about religious persecution and the need for understanding across faiths.

Discussions at the Participatory Learning Workshop in Thailand highlighted two issues in relation to the need for interfaith dialogue and understanding: firstly the need for caution in addressing religious persecution and avoiding the pitfall of reverse persecution against current persecutors; and secondly the need to ensure that the Digni Network was a space where non-Christian staff and secular organisations felt included.

In interviews and in discussions at the two Participatory Learning Workshops Digni members and faith based partners saw the need to increase their awareness of how secular human rights could be better applied in the context of faith-based organisations.

5.3. SIGNIFICANT STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

INTERNAL ORGANISATIONAL STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

An organisational strength across all organisations is agreement on the relevance of RBA while an organisational weakness is insufficient understanding and experience of RBA concepts and on how to implement RBA at programme and project levels.

Field visits highlighted that while the organisations visited were strong on empowerment of beneficiaries, there was areas of weakness around accountability of duty-bearers. Often there was insufficient contact with duty-bearers and in some cases, programmes had tended to take on the responsibilities of local authorities. Discussions at the Participatory Learning Workshops highlighted that often organisations were not clear who to hold accountable. More work needed to be done in order to understand the institutional context and which organisations or levels of government were responsible for which issues. This understanding would enable organisations to be clear about which doors to knock on for specific rights claims.

An organisational weakness identified at the Participatory Learning Workshops was that members and partners often did not see their organisations as duty-bearers, and that they needed to do be more conscious of their roles as duty-bearers. This would entail looking more closely at their accountability to beneficiaries.

Similarly, members and partners at the Participatory Learning Workshops identified the need to be even more conscious of the power of organisational staff in relation to the project beneficiaries.

It was also noted that traditional beliefs which limited women's rights might also shape organisational cultures and be carried by staff within the very organisations that were ostensibly promoting rights.

EXTERNAL CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

External context was identified as very significant in shaping space for advancing rights which in turn shaped strategies, including the language used.

A key challenge identified in the external environment was political contexts where governments sought to curtail a more active citizenry, and were hostile to civil society advancement of rights even though in some cases these very governments may have signed international rights conventions. Digni members and partners noted the need to be careful about using the term rights. In interviews and in the Participatory Learning Workshops partners noted the need to explore language such as dignity, equality or empowerment so as not make the intended beneficiaries more vulnerable than they already were, resulting in effects opposite to that intended.

A second key challenge was traditional beliefs and practices which limited women's rights in particular. These beliefs were to be found in households, communities, but also within the organisations themselves.

A third challenge was around gay rights, contraception and abortion as these are widely accepted secular rights which conflict with faith values and beliefs. More discussion was clearly needed on these issues.

Fourthly, the challenge of Christian faith based organisations working in contexts where the majority religion was Buddhist or Muslim was raised in interviews and at the Participatory Learning Evaluation. These discussions highlighted the need for inter-religious dialogue.

5.4. SIGNIFICANT RESULTS AND EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

Field visits conducted in Ethiopia and Myanmar immediately following the two Digni Regional Network meetings, involved interviews and focus group discussions with beneficiaries and staff of nine programmes and projects. Programme selection was based on those that offered learning opportunities as examples of good practice.

Seven of the projects visited were conventional development programmes implemented by Church development departments or Christian faith based organisations. The implementing church based entities included EECMY DASCC, NLM, and Harvest Church of God in Ethiopia, and the Myanmar based Salvation Army of Myanmar. One of the seven programmes focused on women's empowerment, three on integrated rural development, one on education, one on the traditional practice of slavery (in Ethiopia), one on living conditions of a minority community.

Two of the programmes visited – both of these in Myanmar - were programmes run by secular organisations focused on advancing rights. One of these programmes focused on advancing the rights on an indigenous group and the other focused on advancing the rights of poor and marginalised communities nationally.

Discussions with beneficiaries and staff of these programmes explored significant results and examples of good practice, and provided insights into good practice as well as ongoing challenges.

GOOD PRACTICE IN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES OF THE FAITH BASED ORGANISATIONS

Rights principles of dignity, empowerment and participation were impressively evident in the seven development projects implemented by the faith based organisations in Ethiopia and Myanmar. In two cases empowerment results were particularly impressive given that the field visits were conducted at an early stage of the life of these projects.

Principles of non-discrimination and equality were addressed in all projects. Two projects focused on redressing the exclusion and stigmatisation of marginalised social groups - people considered slaves in one project, and the living conditions of a marginalised ethnic group in another.

Five projects addressed equality through working on women's empowerment and women's rights. At the level of planning all of these projects included gender equality objectives, with at least two basing their plans on a careful understanding of gender dynamics within the project site. At the level of implementation commitment to the principle of gender equality and a willingness to challenge men and traditional beliefs enabled some headway to be made in raising awareness on women's subordination and in empowering women to speak out.

One project sought to reduce maternal mortality. A second sought to increase the enrolment of girls in schools. In a third programme the isolation of socially excluded widows was addressed through their engagement in self-help groups; community conversations highlighted unequal gender relations, and harmful traditional practices and engaged community members in considering action to redress these; and some headway was made in getting more women on to church structures. A strategy that enabled good results in this programme was that programme staff realised that men would be threatened by advances in women's rights and to mitigate this they engaged men. What made this strategy work in empowering women was that programme staff did not lose sight of their objective of empowering women and of ensuring women's agency and leadership in promoting women's rights, even as they engaged men. In other words, what did not happen (as has happened in other country examples) is that men did not take over the struggle for women's rights making women once more passive victims. This was avoided precisely because of clear objectives and good strategies.

In the two integrated development programmes visited women's empowerment was addressed within health and agriculture projects and was seen as important for community development. The programme document in the one programme specified rights principles of dignity, participation and empowerment; and set out community empowerment, awareness raising, gender equality and HIV and AIDS as issues to be addressed within all projects. Lessons from the second programme were being taken into planning a new programme with staff being mindful of the need to assess women's work burden, their control of productive resources and the extent of their decision making power at the new project site in order to adequately inform programme strategies.

At an interpersonal level, the principle of dignity was evident in the ways in which project staff related to beneficiaries, and the principles of participation and empowerment were evident in the engagement of the beneficiaries with project staff and the evaluators.

As regards the principle of accountability, there was good engagement with authorities in some projects. In one project, a faith based organisation partnered with the department of health in a project to reduced maternal mortality. In a second project a faith based organisation worked with authorities to reduce the tradition of slavery. In a third project a development arm of the church engaged church leaders in order to increase women's participation in church structures.

Ingredients that seemed to help achieve good results on the side of the implementing included:

- strong commitment to principles of dignity, participation, empowerment and equality with faith based biblical understandings of these principles serving as the basis for such commitment among project staff
- good planning and the development of appropriate strategies based on careful understanding of the context for working on rights
- good understanding of local socio economic and cultural dynamics in the project areas
- clear guidelines for implementation, good implementation strategies, committed staff with the requisite skills required (eg in agriculture, water and sanitation, environmental rehabilitation)

On the side of project beneficiaries, an ethos of tremendous self-sufficiency seemed to drive community initiative and community ownership of projects.

CHALLENGES IN THE PRACTICE OF DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS OF FAITH BASED ORGANISATIONS

However, alongside impressive results of good practice, there were also challenges with principles of non-discrimination, equality, participation and accountability in some of the development projects visited.

The principles of non-discrimination, equality and participation were seen as possibly compromised in three projects. In one project while the mechanism of a monetary contribution on the part of beneficiaries enabled their participation and ownership of the project, this requirement tended to exclude the very poor from project participation. In a second project, the tendency to select better off farmers as model farmers as they would be more likely to succeed excluded poorer farmers. In a third project the conscious strategy of including a social mix of better off and poorer farmers could result in processes of exclusion within the project, with better off farmers taking ownership and hindering the effective participation of poorer farmers. These experiences highlight that the principle of non-discrimination is a challenging one relating to socio economic difference at project level, particularly since development practice often assumes lack of such difference at the village level and often ignores such difference between project staff and beneficiaries.

Challenges with women's empowerment and advancing gender equality were also evident. In one project once women got into church structures they found themselves occupying subordinate positions and were expected to perform kitchen duties even when they served as Church Elders. This highlighted the need for ongoing empowerment and support activities with these women. In a second development project although project plans prioritised gender equality little had been done to implement this

intention, and unless project staff prioritise implementation the project could continue without addressing this aspect.

Challenges with accountability were observed in three projects which appeared to take on functions of the local state instead of holding state authorities to account for areas that they were responsible for – one being a road development project, a second a HIV project taking on the function of a blood bank, and a third a school building project. A second accountability challenge was lack of sufficient engagement with government authorities on the part of member and partner organisations in order to influence government action to outlaw the system of traditional slavery on the one hand and improve the plight of the Bena community on the other.

GOOD PRACTICE AND CHALLENGES FROM THE EXPERIENCES OF TWO SECULAR RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS
Rights principles served as the basis for the existence of the two secular rights organisations and their work focused on advancing the rights of the marginalised. In their practice both organisations engaged in high level advocacy to hold powerful national and regional governments to account – in the one case around a large infrastructural project in the second case around various rights including LGBT rights. Both organisations were able to make some advances through careful understanding, good analyses and good strategies.

Both organisations worked to empower local community members and to link grassroots efforts with high level advocacy. The organisation which focused on the large infrastructural project engaged a local partner to work with local communities in awareness raising, and while they had made some headway in creating awareness at the local level, they faced enormous challenges in linking grassroots efforts with national level advocacy.

The second organisation employed popular education methodologies to train grassroots community activists on human rights, and supported them in initiating local level projects to advance human rights post training.

The experience of these two organisations highlight the enormous challenge of holding powerful state actors to account and the need for ongoing analyses and strategy development in order to link grassroots and national level actions.

5.5. ON BEING RIGHTS BASED AT AN ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL

In interviews and discussions it was evident that Digni members and partners had not consciously considered their organisations as duty-bearers, their organisations' accountability to project beneficiaries, and the power differences between themselves and project beneficiaries. As with most development organisations, there was awareness only of upward accountability to donors or to state laws.

Awareness of downward accountability and power differences is important to ensure meaningful processes of participation and empowerment.

5.6. DIGNI'S CONTRIBUTION AND ADDED VALUE TO THE MEMBER ORGANISATIONS AND PARTNERS

In response to questions on their relationship to Digni and the perceived added value of being part of the Digni family, Digni members and partners noted that they appreciate the support received from

Digni. Related to RBA they requested capacity building and awareness of how the 'secular' human rights could be better applied in religious contexts as well as for some theological training.

Digni is looked upon as a resource, an advisor on challenging topics, and as providing opportunities for learning. Digni support helped develop professional organisations and provided fellowship.

All want more training on RBA, on advocacy and lobbying, and awareness raising. Some want to learn more about how to create bridges from grassroots level to governmental duty-bearers. Some want to strengthen RBA at the leadership level while others wanted tools and materials to evaluate impact; and exchange visits and networks to share experiences and learn across organisations.

Digni has an important role to play as connector, supervisor, capacity builder and not least, a voice for faith-based organisations to advance their strengths in development work in general and in rights work in particular.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 DIGNI SHOULD PROVIDE RBA CAPACITY BUILDING AND SUPPORT TO MEMBERS AND PARTNERS

In interviews and discussions Digni members and partners affirmed their need for capacity building and support for RBA. Observations from interviews and field visits further identified areas of support needed. Support is required in relation to:

- how to apply rights thinking to programmes and projects
- how to analyse contexts from a rights perspective
- how do devise strategies to advance the empowerment of rights holders and the accountability of duty-bearers
- how to incorporate rights principles (participation, dignity, non-discrimination, accountability) at programme level
- how to ensure that Digni members and partners themselves work from the basis of rights principles and consciously consider ways of ensuring downward accountability to right-holders.

The approach to capacity building should take note that there are examples of good practice at project level among many Digni members and partners, and should enable learning to take place across organisations.

Capacity building and support should be tailored to meet the needs of specific Digni members and partners, noting the different starting point of each organisation, that all see the relevance of rights work, that many are working to advance the rights of beneficiaries and to engage authorities, and many are already applying rights principles although perhaps not consciously seeing these as rights issues.

Capacity building and support could take the form of training workshops followed by ongoing engagement to increase capacities for contextual analyses, capacities for the development of strategies and capacities for effective monitoring and evaluation.

Developing a more conscious rights approach will strengthen the work of empowerment and accountability in the development projects.

6.2 DIGNI MEMBERS AND PARTNERS SHOULD INCORPORATE RBA WITHIN PROGRAMME PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Programme planning should address more consistently the empowerment of rights holders, the accountability of duty-bearers and the employment of rights principles.

In planning programmes, members and partners should aim to increase the capability of beneficiaries to hold authorities to account, building on the levels of participation and empowerment already achieved at project level within some projects. Programme planning should more consciously devise strategies to hold accountable responsible duty-bearers. This would entail institutional analysis to identify specific duty-bearers responsible for specific issues, and honing strategic skills to more consciously develop mechanisms whereby project beneficiaries (rights holders) could hold duty-bearers to account. It would entail taking greater care to ensure that authorities undertook their responsibilities and that development organisations did not take on their responsibilities by default.

Care should be taken to consciously promote principles of dignity, participation, empowerment, non-discrimination and equality within projects, within partners and member organisations and to ensure that the principles of dignity and non-discrimination are not (unconsciously) affected by socio economic, cultural or religious differences.

6.3 WORK ON GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS SHOULD BE STRENGTHENED

While gender equality and women's empowerment were clearly addressed in many of the programmes and projects visited in the field and in the projects shared at the Participatory Learning Workshops, it was also clear that more work needs to be done in order to include a more consistent gender perspective in project work.

Understandings of gender relations need to consider that inequalities between women and men result in women's marginalisation within excluded groups (such as among indigenous people or disabled groups) and that if not addressed women within these groups will continue to be in subordinate positions as compared with men of those groups. So for example, work with indigenous people should take care to understand and address the different experiences of women and men within indigenous communities. Work on children's rights should take care to understand and address the different experiences of girl and boy children. Work on disability rights should take care to explore and understand different experiences of women and men who are disabled.

Work to advance gender equality needs to be based on clear commitment, good analysis and good strategy formulation. This includes an analysis of women's situation at project level – focusing on understanding women's work burden, access to resources and decision making power in relation to men's. And it includes the development of strategies noting the reality of potential resistance from men to increase in women's power and access.

Increasing capacities for work on redressing gender inequalities could be achieved through training and through ongoing practical honing of skills in analysis and strategy formulation at project level.

6.4 INCREASING UNDERSTANDINGS AND PRACTICE RELATING TO FAITH AND RIGHTS

Digni members and partners saw the need to increase their awareness of how human rights could be better applied in the context of faith based organisations. In addition, discussions at the Participatory Learning Workshops and during field visits raised challenges concerning rights such as gay rights and abortion and the need for interfaith dialogue. These issues could be addressed by Digni's creation of spaces for ongoing discussion and engagement. Such discussions could explore existing norms of faith based organisations in relation to widely accepted secular rights like gay rights, contraception and abortion. In addition, the deliberations could include greater awareness of the need for inter-faith dialogue, and the challenge of Christian faith based organisations working in contexts where the majority religion was Buddhist or Muslim, or in communities which were not homogenous Christian communities.

Digni should also ensure that inter-religious competence is promoted among Digni staff, Digni members and partners, and in the projects. Some Digni members own University colleges which provide teaching in inter-cultural studies, and at least two, Fjellhaug University College, owned by the Norwegian

Lutheran Mission (NLM), and the School of Mission and Theology (MHS), owned by the Norwegian Mission Society (NMS), provide courses on Islam. These could be drawn on in creating greater inter-religious competence and in assessing how RBA can be promoted by inter-religious work.