



2020:7

Sida Decentralised Evaluation

FCG Swedish Development AB

Evaluation of FORUM-ASIA's Performance and Achievements 2015–2019

Final Report

Evaluation of FORUM-ASIA's Performance and Achievements 2015–2019

Final Report
February 2020

Henrik Alffram
Ruth Hugo

Authors: Henrik Alffram and Ruth Hugo

The views and interpretations expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida.

Sida Decentralised Evaluation 2020:7

Commissioned by Sida, Embassy of Sweden, Bangkok

Copyright: Sida and the authors

Date of final report: 2020-02-13

Published by Nordic Morning 2020

Art. no. Sida62301en

urn:nbn:se:sida-62301en

This publication can be downloaded from: <http://www.sida.se/publications>

SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY

Address: SE-105 25 Stockholm, Sweden. Office: Valhallavägen 199, Stockholm

Telephone: +46 (0)8-698 50 00. Telefax: +46 (0)8-20 88 64

E-mail: info@sida.se. Homepage: <http://www.sida.se>

Table of contents

Contents

Abbreviations and Acronyms	i
Preface	iii
Executive Summary	iv
1 Introduction	1
2 Methodology	3
2.1 Overall approach	3
2.2 Instruments for data collection	3
3 Forum-Asia	6
4 Findings	10
4.1 Relevance	10
4.2 Effectiveness	13
4.3 Efficiency	30
4.4 Sweden's development cooperation perspectives	35
4.5 Organizational abilities	46
5 Conclusions	58
5.1 Relevance	58
5.2 Effectiveness	58
5.3 Efficiency	59
5.4 Swedish development cooperation perspectives	60
5.5 Organizational abilities	61
6 Recommendations	63
Annex 1 – Documentation	65
Annex 2 – List of persons consulted	72
Annex 3 – Terms of Reference	75

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACMC	ASEAN Committee on the Implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers
ACSC/APF	ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People's Forum
ACWC	ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children
ADA	Asia Development Alliance
ADHR	ASEAN Human Rights Declaration
ADN	Asia Democracy Network
AHRDF	Asian Human Rights Defenders Forum
ANNI	Asian NGOs Network on National Human Rights Institutions
APF	Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AICHR	ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights
CSO	Civil society organization
EA-ASEAN	East Asia and ASEAN Advocacy Programme
EC	Executive Committee (board)
ED	Executive Director
EIDHR	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
ET	Evaluation Team
EU	European Union
Forum-Asia	Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development
GA	General Assembly (of Forum-Asia)
GALAA	Global Advocacy Leadership in Asia Academy
GALP	Global Advocacy Learning Programme on Human Rights and Development
GANHRI	Global Alliance for National Human Rights Institutions
HRAOP	Human Rights Online Platform
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
HRD	Human Rights Defender
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
LMT	Leadership Management Team
NHRI	National Human Rights Institution
RADAR	Review of Asian Diplomacy and Rights
RPA	Regional Plan of Action
RISAHRM	Regional initiative for a South Asian Human Rights Mechanism
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SAHRM	South Asian human rights mechanism
SAPA TFAHR	Solidarity for Asian People's Advocacy Task Force on ASEAN and Human Rights
SA-PCHR	South Asia People's Commission for Human Rights

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

SAJB	South Asia Judicial Barometer
SDGs	Strategic Development Goals
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SMT	Senior Management Team
SO	Specific Objective
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNA	UN Advocacy Programme
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
WHRD	Women Human Rights Defender

Preface

This evaluation was contracted by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) through the Framework Agreement for Evaluation Services and conducted by FCG Sweden.

The Evaluation Team consisted of Henrik Alffram and Ruth Hugo, as well as Hai Fernandez and Rukamanee Maharjan as data collectors in the Philippines and Nepal. The Draft Final Report was quality assured by Florence Etta whose work was independent of the team.

Executive Summary

FCG Sweden has been engaged by the Swedish Embassy in Bangkok to evaluate the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Democracy (Forum-Asia) and its performance and achievements during the period 1 January 2015 – 31 December 2019. The evaluation is undertaken as the current agreement between Forum-Asia and the Swedish Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) came to an end on 31 December 2019 and Forum-Asia has requested continued support. The evaluation can be divided into two interrelated parts: (i) an evaluation of the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria relevance, effectiveness and efficiency, as well as questions relating to three of the perspectives guiding Swedish development cooperation, namely human rights, gender and environment/climate change; and (ii) an assessment of progress in relation to recommendations made in recent evaluations, and in particular those made since the beginning of 2015. The evaluation should ultimately: (i) help Sida and Forum-Asia to assess progress in the implementation of Forum-Asia's strategic plan; (ii) advise Forum-Asia on how it can further strengthen its work; and (iii) serve as an input to Sida's decision on future support to Forum-Asia.

The evaluation has been guided by a utilisation-focused, participatory and politically informed approach. Triangulation has been key to ensuring reliability and validity of findings and to mitigate any biases. The evaluation has applied a mixed-method approach in order to assemble the data necessary to answer the evaluation questions. Data have been collected through: (i) a desk review of available documentation; (ii) key informant interviews; (iii) a survey of participants in selected capacity development initiatives; (iv) spot-checks of administrative and financial management systems; and (v) a verification session.

Forum-Asia is a network organization established in 1991. It has a membership of 81 human rights organizations in 21 countries across Asia. The Secretariat currently has 29 staff members, of which a majority work from the headquarter in Bangkok. The organization also has smaller offices in Geneva, Jakarta and Kathmandu. Forum-Asia's current overall objective is to "Strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights and democracy in Asia and beyond by consolidating Asian human rights movements through effective collaboration with members and partners on international solidarity action as well as strategic engagement with states and other stakeholders at national, regional and international levels." In order to attain its objectives and expected results, Forum-Asia implements geographic and thematical programmes, including: (i) South Asia Programme; (ii) East Asia and ASEAN Advocacy Programme; (iii) UN Advocacy Programme (UNA); (iv) Human Rights Defenders (HRD) Programme; (v) National Human Rights Institutions Advocacy Programme; (vi) Development and Knowledge

Management Programme (vii) Communication and Media Programme; (viii) Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Programme.

In relation to the goals of Sweden's regional strategy for development cooperation in Asia and the Pacific region, as well as in relation to EU's broad main objective in Asia, Forum-Asia clearly has strong relevance. Forum-Asia is also a highly relevant network for many key actors in the Asian human rights community. It gives them voice, connects them to the international arena, assists them in situations of crisis and offers opportunities for capacity building. As Forum-Asia increases its membership and strives to diversify its funding base there is a risk that it stretches its limited resources too thin and thereby loses both relevance and effectiveness.

In general, all of Forum-Asia's programmes have made steady contributions towards the objectives the organization has set out to achieve. Fostering an environment conducive for better human rights protection in Asia is seemingly the area where the most significant results have been achieved. This is not surprising as the objective closely aligns with the idea of solidarity with Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) that drives the network. There is little doubt that without Forum-Asia HRDs in the region would be less protected. Another objective where there is considerable progress towards results is an enhanced impact of HRD advocacy, at least at UN level. Members and diplomats alike view Forum-Asia as a critical network that – informed by its members – effectively brings first-hand experiences of Asian HRDs and voices of rights-holders in Asian communities to the international arena. Impact at the ASEAN and SAARC level has been far less successful, due to political and other factors. Nevertheless, Forum-Asia's persistence in continued engagements in particular with AICHR are appreciated insofar that civil society recognises that some level of engagement needs to be sustained.

To attain the objective of achieving an enhanced advocacy capacity of Asian civil society organizations and HRDs Forum-Asia has facilitated many training initiatives, but some questions are raised about their quality and relevance. To the Evaluation Team it is clear that Forum-Asia adds most value when it focuses its efforts on issues that are best addressed at a regional level and are of direct relevance from a human rights perspective. Forum-Asia at present does not make significant use of online training and webinars, a cost-effective and environmentally friendly alternative option that could complement face-to-face training. While Forum-Asia has been fairly successful in maintaining a focus on what it considers as key human rights issues, it has rarely developed this focus into broad and sustained campaigns. Many interviewees have noted that the systematic data collection and documentation work carried out by Forum-Asia will be of limited value unless accompanied by much more well-developed advocacy campaigns involving both Forum-Asia and its member organizations.

Forum-Asia are in financial terms prioritizing programmes that have the greatest capacity to show results and that are most appreciated by members. The costs of individual capacity building activities appear reasonable. The Geneva office is relevant

and effective, but the costs have been high in relation to the organization's overall budget. To maintain the current level of staffing seems sensible. The added value of the offices in Kathmandu and Jakarta is more limited, but the added costs of maintaining these offices are low.

Forum-Asia generally have sound systems for ensuring target group influence over the organization's strategic direction and programme implementation, even though effectiveness and fairness of these systems appear from time to time to have been somewhat undermined by informal power structures. Similarly, the organization has in place reasonable routines for ensuring transparency, but there are amongst some a lingering perception of arbitrariness in programme implementation and administration. The Evaluation Team is not aware of any allegations of discrimination as a result of Forum-Asia's activities.

Gender equality has been integrated in many Forum-Asia publications, in advocacy learning programmes and in the organization's policy framework, but to a far lesser extent in programme design. Knowledgeable and passionate staff at the Secretariat are currently driving gender mainstreaming by improving gender policies, developing operational tools and facilitating regular knowledge sharing sessions for programme staff. An operational accountability mechanism has further progressed for sexual and gender-based harassment in the workplace than for other grievances. Environmental mainstreaming in Forum-Asia's policy framework has far less progressed compared to gender mainstreaming. Forum-Asia has openly acknowledged that its Environmental Policy needs an overhaul. Environment is not integrated in other programme policies such as procurement and in programme design. Nevertheless, the plight of environmental HRDs and corporate accountability for environmental protection is visible in recent publications and advocacy learning programmes. Forum-Asia operates with a high degree of conflict sensitivity and the Evaluation Team is not aware of any instances in which the organization has contributed to conflict or caused harm.

Overall the governance and management of Forum-Asia appears to be in a better shape than it has been in a long time. The organization has during the past year or so made considerable efforts to address shortcoming in its administrative and financial management processes and systems. The recommendations of past evaluations and reviews have to a high extent been addressed. While there undoubtedly was a need for the organization to strengthen its administrative structures and capacities, it is essential that Forum-Asia and its donors now reach a point at which the organization can primarily focus on developing its human rights strategies and strengthening its programmes, while adjusting and improving its financial and management structures as necessary.

The evaluation makes several recommendations regarding Forum-Asia's strategic focus, programme relevance and effectiveness, and administrative and financial management capacity. Amongst these are the following:

- Forum Asia should ensure that it does not stretch its limited capacity to the extent that its effectiveness is impaired.
- Forum-Asia should strive to more effectively and consistently draw on its added value as a regional membership-based human rights organization.
- Forum-Asia and its donors should ensure that the organization can primarily focus on developing its human rights strategies and strengthening its programmes, while adjusting and improving its financial and management structures as necessary.
- In coordination with relevant partners Forum-Asia should develop a coherent capacity building strategy informed by an assessment of Forum-Asia members' advocacy capacity needs.
- Forum-Asia should discuss with its members what level of resources should be allocated to ASEAN and SAARC related advocacy, in view of the political nature and ineffectiveness of these mechanisms.
- Forum-Asia with its member organizations should develop sustained campaigns capacity on key human rights issues.
- Forum-Asia should continue to strengthen the member organizations' opportunities to reflect on and influence the organization's overall strategic direction in light of changing human rights contexts and challenges.
- Forum-Asia should continue to develop its gender mainstreaming approach and in particular give attention to gender in programme design, implementation and follow-up.
- Forum Asia should update and operationalize its Environmental Impact Policy and integrate environment in other policies such as procurement and in programme design.

1 Introduction

FCG Sweden, represented by Henrik Alffram and Ruth Hugo, has been engaged by the Swedish Embassy in Bangkok to evaluate the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Democracy (Forum-Asia¹) and its performance and achievements during the period 1 January 2015 – 31 December 2019. The findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation are presented in the present report. Hai Fernandez and Rukamanee Maharjan contributed to the evaluation through data collection in the Philippines and Nepal respectively. Florence Etta provided quality assurance.

The evaluation is undertaken as the current agreement between Forum-Asia and the Swedish Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) came to an end on 31 December 2019 and Forum-Asia has requested continued support. The evaluation should ultimately:

- Help Sida and Forum-Asia to assess progress in the implementation of Forum-Asia's strategic plan;
- Advise Forum-Asia on how it can further strengthen its work; and
- Serve as an input to Sida's decision on future support to Forum-Asia.

The evaluation can be divided into two interrelated parts:

- An evaluation of the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria relevance, effectiveness and efficiency, as well as questions relating to three of the perspectives guiding Swedish development cooperation, namely human rights, gender and environment/climate change; and
- An assessment of progress in relation to recommendations made in recent evaluations, and in particular those made since the beginning of 2015.

The evaluation questions, categorized under the broader evaluation criteria and perspectives guiding the evaluation, are:

¹ Forum-Asia itself writes the abbreviated form of its name as FORUM-ASIA. For reasons of readability brand names are in this report not written in capital letters.

Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation Questions
Relevance	To which extent is the work of Forum-Asia relevant to the priorities of its members and the needs of the human rights movement in Asia?
	To which extent is the work of Forum-Asia relevant in relation the development cooperation policies of Sweden and the EU?
Effectiveness	To which extent have the programmes contributed to intended outcomes? If so, why? If not, why not?
Efficiency	Can the costs for Forum-Asia's programmes be justified by their results?
Swedish development cooperation perspectives	To what extent has Forum-Asia implemented its programmes in accordance with a Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA)?
	How has Forum-Asia worked with gender equality? Could gender mainstreaming and integration in programme design have been improved in planning, implementation or follow-up?
	How has Forum-Asia worked with environment/climate change issues? Could environment/climate change mainstreaming and integration in programme design have been improved in planning, implementation or follow-up?
Organizational abilities	To what extent have the recommendations of past evaluations been implemented?
	To what extent have lessons learned from what works well and less well been used to improve and adjust project/programme implementation? Is Forum-Asia's system for learning and monitoring adequate for their type of work?

2 Methodology

2.1 OVERALL APPROACH

To meet the requirements of the Terms of Reference (ToR)², the Evaluation Team has approached the evaluation both as a summative assessment of Forum-Asia's performance and achievements and as an organizational review focusing primarily on issues of governance and the functioning of the organization's administrative and financial systems.

The Evaluation Team has applied an evaluation approach that is utilisation-focused and participatory, whereby there has been close interaction with key evaluation stakeholders, in order to capture their perspectives and experiences. Sida and Forum-Asia have been engaged during all stages of the evaluation process, from evaluation design to a review of the draft evaluation report.

The evaluation has also strived to apply a politically informed approach through which the relevance and effectiveness of Forum-Asia's overall strategies and projects are assessed given prevailing political economy constraints. The Evaluation Team's experience of human rights issues in the Asia-Pacific region, the involvement of two local human rights specialists in the team and the selection of interviewees facilitates this approach. We have further aimed to embed a gender responsive approach throughout the evaluation process.

Triangulation has been key to ensuring reliability and validity of findings and to mitigate any biases or problems that may arise from one single method or a single observer. We have triangulated among different methods of gathering data, sources and stakeholder perspectives, and across the Team members.

2.2 INSTRUMENTS FOR DATA COLLECTION

The evaluation has applied a mixed-method approach in order to assemble the data necessary to answer the evaluation questions. Data has been collected through:

² The Terms of Reference are set out in Annex 3.

- A desk review of available documentation³;
- Key informant interviews⁴;
- A survey of participants in selected capacity development initiatives;
- Spot-checks of administrative and financial management systems; and
- A verification session.

2.2.1 Desk review

The desk review has primarily been based on documents obtained from Forum-Asia and Sida. They included strategic plans, project documents, progress reports, minutes, past evaluation and review reports and management responses, and Forum-Asia's communication outputs. A broad range of policies, manuals, guidelines and similar documents have also been assessed.

2.2.2 Interviews

A total of 66 key informants were consulted, including Forum-Asia staff and board members, representatives of member organizations, and external observers. Face-to-face interviews were carried out in Thailand, Indonesia, Switzerland, Nepal and the Philippines. Informants were also consulted by Skype and similar means, and by email. A mix of purposeful and random sampling was applied. All informants were interviewed on the basis of voluntary participation and anonymity. All interviews were semi-structured and adapted to the respondent's expected area of experience and knowledge.⁵

2.2.3 Survey

Using an online survey tool, the Evaluation Team initially planned to ask female and male participants in all trainings carried out during 2018 to share their views on the relevance and effectiveness of these events. We also hoped to gauge to what extent the trainings contributed to enhanced cooperation between organizations and individuals. Forum-Asia informed, however, that it for reasons of security and confidentiality could only provide the Team names of participants in three of these trainings, and in two trainings carried out in 2016 and 2017. In the end, 70 former participants were requested over email to take the survey. Those who did not respond in time for the initial deadline were contacted again and given another five days to respond. In total

³ See Annex 1 for a list of documents reviewed.

⁴ See Annex 2 for a list of persons consulted.

⁵ See list of persons consulted in Annex 2. In Forum-Asia's Indonesia, Nepal and Switzerland offices, all staff members were interviewed. In the Bangkok office a purposeful selection of interviewees was made based on staff members' formal positions in the organization. Priority was given to directors, finance and administration staff and long-term staff holding institutional memory of the organization. Program staff were approached based on their specific portfolio. A sound level of gender balance was attained. Current and former board members, including both men and women, were also interviewed. Interviews with representatives of Forum-Asia member organizations were selected on the basis of a mix of random and purposeful approaches, taking into account geographic concentration and which countries Forum-Asia has particularly focused on. External observers and other interviewees were selected solely on the basis of a purposeful sampling. Sida and Forum-Asia provided suggestions for external key informants to interview and these suggestions were considered by the Evaluation Team. Referral sampling was also used, which meant that interviews were carried out with informants proposed by interviewees during the course of the evaluation.

only eight persons responded. The Team had, however, access to Forum-Asia's own pre and post-training surveys.

2.2.4 Spot checks

Spot checks were carried out to assess to what extent recommendations set out in past evaluations and reviews are implemented in practice. The spot checks aimed in particular to verify application of administrative and financial management rules and guidelines.

2.2.5 Verification session

A verification session was organized with Forum-Asia and the Swedish Embassy, to discuss preliminary conclusions and potential recommendations.

3 Forum-Asia

The object of the evaluation is Forum-Asia; a network organization established in 1991 with a current membership of 81 human rights organizations⁶ in 21 countries across Asia. The organization is committed to “building a peaceful, just, equitable and ecologically sustainable community of peoples and societies in Asia, where all human rights of all individuals, groups and peoples – in particular, the poor, marginalised and discriminated – are fully respected and realised in accordance with internationally accepted human rights norms and standards. It does so by:

- “Bringing together activists and stakeholders to tackle human rights issues;
- Protecting human rights defenders in Asia that find themselves in emergency situations;
- Advocating for human rights at the national, regional and international level; and
- Building the capacity of its members and partners.”⁷

Forum-Asia is registered in Geneva as an international non-governmental organization. Its highest policy-making and supervisory body is the Executive Committee (EC), which comprises seven to nine member organizations elected by a General Assembly (GA) which convenes every three years and comprises the organization’s full members.

Forum-Asia’s main office is in Bangkok. It has smaller offices in Jakarta, Geneva, and Kathmandu. While the Jakarta office focuses on standard setting and institution building of the ASEAN human rights systems, the Geneva office links Asian human rights groups and issues to the global debates and human rights systems. The Kathmandu office works on strengthening the human rights movement in South Asia.

⁶ Sixty-seven full members and 14 associate members.

⁷ About Forum-Asia, https://www.forum-asia.org/?page_id=21481. The wording of Forum-Asia’s overall objective has evolved and even today is not phrased consistently in all programme documents: In 2011, the network aimed to provide a strengthened leading and coordinating role in building a regional human rights movement through effective international solidarity action and engagement with states and other stakeholders in Asia (overall objective stated in the 2011 contractual agreement with Sida). Updated Statutes mandate Forum-Asia to strive towards the promotion and protection of human rights in the Asian region through collaboration and cooperation among human rights organisation in the region. The current consolidated (organization-wide) logical or results framework articulates a more detailed overall objective “Strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights and democracy in Asia and beyond by consolidating Asian human rights movements through effective collaboration with members and partners on international solidarity action as well as strategic engagement with states and other stakeholders at national, regional and international levels.”

Specific objectives	Expected Results
1. Increased capacity of Asian civil society organisations and human rights defenders to undertake advocacy for inclusive and participatory policy-making processes in relation to human rights, democratic governance and sustainable development at national, regional, and international levels.	1.1. Civil society capacities and institutional practices strengthened to effectively participate in different policy-making forums and processes at different levels
	1.2. Increased interaction between civil society and governments towards democratic decision-making and strengthening of accountable and transparent governance in Asia
	1.3. Integration of international human rights standards and perspectives into electoral processes in Asia
	1.4. Civil society concerns and recommendations in the promotion and protection of human rights adopted and implemented by Asian governments and National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs).
2. Foster an environment conducive for better human rights protection and democratic development in Asia.	2.1. Increased protection and security for Asian human rights defenders in terms of their physical security and secure working environment
	2.2. Increased capacity of Asian human rights defenders and organisations to conduct effective campaign and advocacy actions at national, regional, and international levels
	2.3. Increased public awareness on situations faced by human rights defenders, particularly on the situation of women human rights defenders in Asia
3. Enhanced impact of Asian human rights defenders' advocacy actions in relation to SAARC, ASEAN, and United Nations (UN) human rights mechanisms.	3.1. Increased and institutionalised civil society space available in intergovernmental platforms relating to human rights and democracy in Asia (in particular, ASEAN, and UN)
	3.2. Reaffirmation of SAARC and ASEAN commitment to regional endeavours for the promotion and protection of human rights
4. Strengthened Forum-Asia's institutional and operational capacity as a regional umbrella organisation so that it can better serve and effectively represent its constituencies at national, regional and global levels.	4.1. Capacity for knowledge management, financial sustainability and result-based management of Forum-Asia further strengthened so that it is able to serve its members more efficiently and effectively
	4.2. Enhanced recognition of Forum-Asia in the media, including social media, with enhanced outreach to member organisations, key officials and stakeholders in the region
	4.3. Capacity of Forum-Asia further enhanced in terms of effective, and secure communication and information sharing among its members and partners

Forum-Asia currently has a total of 29 staff member, of which the vast majority work from the Bangkok office.

During 2018, Forum-Asia's total expenditures amounted to roughly USD 2.7 million. The European Union is currently its main donor. Other significant donors in recent years include Ford Foundation and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). Sida has supported Forum-Asia since the mid-1990s. The current phase of Sida's support started on 1 June 2011 and concluded on 31 December 2019, following cost and no-cost extensions.⁸ Sida's support was provided in the form of a core institutional grant.

Forum-Asia's current overall objective is to "Strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights and democracy in Asia and beyond by consolidating Asian human rights movements through effective collaboration with members and partners on international solidarity action as well as strategic engagement with states and other stakeholders at national, regional and international levels."

Following the adoption of a new Strategic Plan covering the period 2016-2022, Forum-Asia structured its work around four specific objectives. In its most recent organization-wide logical framework these objectives and corresponding expected results are presented as follows:

In order to attain its objectives and expected results, Forum-Asia implements the following programmes⁹:

- South Asia Programme¹⁰
- East Asia and ASEAN Advocacy Programme
- UN Advocacy Programme (UNA)

⁸ Including a no-cost extension 1 January – 30 September 2017), a cost-extension 1 October 2017 – 31 December 2018, and another no-cost extension 1 January – 31 December 2019.

⁹ Forum-Asia has also articulated four thematic priorities: 1) Protection of HRDs; 2) Protection of civic space; 3) Promoting a HRBA to sustainable development and 4) Strengthening human rights mechanisms, systems and policies at national, regional and international levels. Furthermore, the organization endeavours to increase effectiveness of its advocacy and protection efforts by determining priority countries. Forum-Asia leadership and programmes agreed during the 2017 annual planning on a set of key selection criteria for identifying priority countries: crisis condition and urgency of the human rights situation, active members and partner networks on the ground, internal resource capacity in the Secretariat, and the potential to be "effective" and impactful. Given the increasingly dire human rights situation in Myanmar and Bangladesh since 2015-16, the two countries were chosen as top tier priority countries to focus on. Forum-Asia also picked five more countries: Cambodia, Philippines, Maldives, Pakistan and Mongolia, for tier two assistance. However, Forum-Asia staff indicated these priorities are flexible given a rapidly changing human rights environment in Asia. In-country presence of the Secretariat also makes the network sensitive to requests from its members in the country where the Forum-Asia office is located.

¹⁰ Forum-Asia in 2019 expressed its intent to realign the South Asia Programme as the Central and South Asia Programme. Since then there has been further discussions as to how best to manage Central Asia. At the time of writing, a final decision has not been made.

- Human Rights Defenders (HRD) Programme
- National Human Rights Institutions Advocacy Programme
- Development and Knowledge Management Programme
- Communication and Media Programme
- Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Programme¹¹

A more comprehensive theory of change making explicit the broad range of assumptions surrounding the programmes and their contributions to attainment of results, specific objectives and the overall objective has not been presented for the period under review.¹²

¹¹ In an effort to make its programme delivery more effective, Forum-Asia's programmes' structure changed over the evaluation period (2015-2019). In 2017 Country Programme (ANNI, East Asia and South Asia) was separated into ANNI (renamed NHRI Advocacy) and South Asia becoming self-standing programmes while East Asia merged with the ASEAN Advocacy Programme striving for a more streamlined coordination in the work done out of the Bangkok and Jakarta offices. The Information, Communication and Publication programme in 2017 became the Communication and Media Programme. A New Initiatives and Partnership Development Programme was established in October 2017 to support development of new projects and initiatives in different areas of work identified by Forum-Asia's General Assembly in 2016 such as business and human rights, civic space, development and youth. The programme in 2019 was renamed Development and Knowledge Management Programme.

¹² In a Forum-Asia proposal submitted to Sida on 15 November 2019, a theory of change is, however, presented. Forum-Asia's PME programme has spearheaded the process and two sessions on theory of change were held during the organization's annual planning in January 2020.

4 Findings

4.1 RELEVANCE

Relevance can be defined as a measure of the extent to which an intervention or an organization is suited to the priorities of the intended beneficiaries, target groups, implementing organization and donors. The evaluation has assessed the extent to which Forum-Asia and its programmes are relevant in relation to its members, the human rights community in Asia and the relevant Swedish development cooperation strategy.

4.1.1 Relevance in relation to members and the human rights movement

There is broad agreement that the human rights situation in the Asia-Pacific region in many ways has deteriorated in recent years. Forum-Asia describes itself a situation in which civic and democratic space is shrinking and violations of human rights increasing. The situation is according to the organization challenged by neo-liberal economic developments; illiberal democracies; corrupt state institutions; weak judiciaries; reduced space for civil society organizations; laws restricting the freedoms of expression, association and assembly; extrajudicial killings; persecution of human rights defenders; threats and legacies of armed conflict; human trafficking; religious extremism and a lack of corporate accountability. Several other challenges could be added to this list, including negative developments from a gender equality perspective.

In this context, in which the human rights community by necessity is made up of a broad range of organizations with different focus and priorities and often a strong focus on local or national human rights issues, it is not easy for a regional human rights organization like Forum-Asia to be perceived as relevant by all actors. A challenge for Forum-Asia is, as pointed out by many interviewees, to ensure that it does not spread too thin, and to make sure that it uses the added value that comes with being a regional organization. The difficulty of maintaining a sufficiently strong focus can be expected to increase with a growing membership and diversified funding base with new donors expecting the organization to take on new issues. Some member organizations have stressed the importance of Forum-Asia not growing in ways that undermine its member organizations.

At the same time, as pointed out by some interviewees, Forum-Asia's strength as an advocacy organization increases with a larger and more diverse membership. It has also been stressed that the organization's relevance for the broader human rights community in Asia could be strengthened if Forum-Asia developed closer ties with a larger group of local human rights groups and thus strengthened its presence on the ground in different countries. This is, however, a tall order for a regional human rights group with limited resources and a coverage of more than 20 countries. It should be noted that even though Forum-Asia, despite a recently increased membership, may not serve as the big

tent for all human rights organizations in the region, most of the larger and more well-known organizations are members.

While there are different views on how Forum-Asia can strengthen its overall relevance and the relevance of its different programmes, there is agreement amongst those interviewed in connection with this evaluation that Forum-Asia is a much needed actor in the current human right context. There is broad consensus that there is need for an Asian human rights voice and that Forum-Asia plays a highly relevant role in strengthening solidarity amongst different organizations and in connecting local and national human rights groups with the international level, and in particular the international human rights machinery. Forum-Asia also provides these organizations with information about what takes place internationally and facilitates for them to use the outputs of the international human rights mechanisms. Furthermore, as a regional actor Forum-Asia can advocate on issues that domestic human rights groups find too sensitive to raise or work on. At the same time, many are of the view that more sustained and better coordinated and resourced campaigns would enhance Forum-Asia's relevance and effectiveness.

A few interviewees have expressed that Forum-Asia's focus on monitoring or striving to engage and advocate in relation to institutions (including National Human Rights Institutions) and mechanisms (including ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, AICHR) – which in most countries have had little positive impact on the human rights situation – is of limited value. Some also believe that it makes little sense for the organization to focus on the creation of a South Asian human rights mechanism considering the poor functioning of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and that it is highly unlikely that such a mechanism will be created in the foreseeable future.

Several interviewees have underlined the relevance of Forum-Asia as a regional capacity building actor. Relevance requires, however, a focus on trainings that are: best carried out at regional level; do not duplicate what others are doing; focuses on issues on which information is not readily available. For a regional human rights organization, it appears that capacity development on human rights issues with a strong cross-border element would be particularly relevant. Some of Forum-Asia's trainings meet most of these criteria, but others do not. As further noted below, the applied approach to capacity development is also associated with significant costs and carbon footprints.

Several interviewees argue that there is a need for the human rights groups in Asia to develop and apply new strategies to address new and old human rights problems, and that Forum-Asia could have a key role in both identifying new strategies and tools and in building capacity on how to implement and use them. Interviewees have noted that Forum-Asia has traditionally played a limited role when it comes to connecting human rights and development. The creation of a new Development and Knowledge Management Programme is intended to help address this issue, but questions remain as to whether the programme will effectively handle this concern or rather dilute Forum-

Asia's efforts further. Some members have noted that Forum-Asia should not be regarded as an expert organization. More experienced and specialized human rights defenders can sometimes be found amongst the staff of its member organizations and it is therefore important that Forum-Asia continues to draw on the experience of its members in its knowledge management work and capacity development initiatives.

In a region with few democratically structured human rights organizations, Forum-Asia's participatory structure as a membership-based organization in which the members ultimately control the governance of the organization should be recognized. Even though Forum-Asia over the years has been affected by internal governance challenges, the membership structure has despite shortcomings helped ensure that Forum-Asia has maintained a level of relevance for its members. As the members make up a significant share of the human rights movement in Asia, its membership structure has arguably also contributed to a level of relevance in relation to the human rights movement as a whole. Overall it can be noted, however, that the member organizations appear to see as most relevant those programmes which directly serve to enhance their capacity or effectiveness, including the HRD and UN Advocacy programmes.

4.1.2 Relevance in relation to Sweden's regional strategy

The Strategy for Sweden's regional development cooperation in Asia and the Pacific region 2016-2021 states that Sweden's support should contribute to "mutual interaction between human rights, democracy, gender equality, environment and climate change."¹³ With a focus on these issues the cooperation should lead to "Strengthened capacity of regional actors to promote greater accountability and increased democratic space" and to "Strengthened capacity of regional actors to promote human rights and gender equality."¹⁴

In relation to these goals, the support to Forum-Asia is clearly relevant. The organization is a regional actor striving to promote human rights. It regards gender equality an essential aspect of human rights and of its own work. Amongst the member organizations are organizations with a strong focus on democratic development, natural resource and environment related human rights issues, and women's rights and gender equality.

The Swedish Strategy also states that "the purpose of supported activities is to contribute to strengthening the ability of regional actors to deal with transboundary challenges and opportunities in the areas of human rights, democracy and gender equality, and environment and climate change in a mutually reinforcing way." Parts of Forum-Asia's work concern transborder issues – including its work on ASEAN and

¹³ Government Offices of Sweden, Strategy for Sweden's regional development cooperation in Asia and the Pacific region 2016-2021

¹⁴ Ibid

SAARC, some of its research and the work on safety and security of human rights defenders – but other aspects of its work more concern national level human rights issues and capacity development of organizations working on such issues.

As with all Swedish development cooperation, the support provided under the regional Asia strategy should furthermore “be based on and characterized by a rights perspective and the perspective of poor people on development.”¹⁵ It should also be “economically, socially and environmentally sustainable, and also gender-equal.” Forum-Asia is, according to its Strategic Plan (2016-2022), committed to a human rights based approach in all its work and “recognises the right to a healthy and sustainable environment, and support climate justice.”¹⁶ The implementation of these ambitions are discussed under section 4.4.

4.1.3 Relevance in relation to EU’s Asia Objective

EU’s main objective in Asia is to “help engender the political and social stability of the region, promoting policies to assist in maintaining as much as possible its high rates of economic growth, also for the benefit of Europe’s own economy and citizens.” EU also notes that “sustainable political and social stability in the region will continue to require the advocacy of the EU’s values and the spread of more resilient forms of democracy - alongside an improved rules-based multilateral order - aimed at serving the people of the region.”¹⁷

Forum-Asia’s commitment to “building a peaceful, just, equitable and ecologically sustainable community of peoples and societies” and to respect and realization of human rights is clearly in line with EU’s broad objective for Asia.

4.2 EFFECTIVENESS

This section presents the evaluation team’s findings of the extent to which Forum-Asia attains, or is likely to attain, its four specific objectives; what factors influence the achievement or non-achievement of results.

4.2.1 “Increased capacity of Asian civil society organizations and human rights defenders to undertake advocacy for inclusive and participatory policy-making processes in relation to human rights, democratic governance and sustainable development at national, regional, and international levels”

Under this Specific Objective (SO1) Forum-Asia in recent years reported activities such as training on human rights in the context of election, holistic security for HRDs, Global Advocacy Learning Programme on Human Rights and Development (GALP)

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Forum-Asia, Strategic Plan 2016-2020

¹⁷ European External Action Service, Asia, 15 June 2016

and NHRI related advocacy missions. The effectiveness of some of these activities, and their contribution to the Specific Objective, is examined below.

The need for advocacy capacity building facilitated by Forum-Asia was one of the key drivers for some of the newer members to join the network. Forum-Asia has been very active in trying to meet demands of its members. Maintaining a balance between the national level needs of members while at the same time ensuring capacity building efforts have a regional human rights perspective can be a challenge for the network. Some observers have noted that regional advocacy learning opportunities have generally decreased in the Asia region. This is perhaps evidenced by the high interest in the GALP program, with 1200 applications received in 2019 for a 2020 session (though half came from outside Asia).

Some Forum-Asia staff, members and partners commented that collectively more efforts could be made to have an agreed understanding or definitions of “advocacy” and “capacity development”, and that advocacy learning programmes should be better framed by a more coherent approach on building capacity of the human rights movement in the region. It was also suggested that a capacity building strategy of Forum-Asia or jointly with partners who are active in that space, should be informed by a scoping exercise with Forum-Asia members to assess their advocacy capacity needs. Forum-Asia at present does not make significant use of online training and webinars.

The Global Advocacy Learning Programme on Human Rights and Development (GALP) is pitched by Forum-Asia as its flagship learning programme and implemented through the Development and Knowledge Management Programme. In previous years Forum-Asia through its HRD programme jointly with the Asia Democracy Network (ADN) and the Asia Development Alliance (ADA) organized the Global Advocacy Leadership in Asia Academy (GALAA). This type of advocacy capacity development over the evaluation period has produced 104 alumni.¹⁸

The new approach by Forum-Asia to facilitate a learning programme on its own (GALP) is attributed by some staff and members to a growing discontent of some members over GALAA’s intense focus on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and development issues, at the (perceived) expense of human rights. At the same time, everyone agrees that GALAA and GALP both intend to bridge the gap between the development and human rights movement and thus the difference between the two training programmes is not entirely clear. Forum-Asia emphasized GALP has an increased focus on creating space for collective learning and reflection and less

¹⁸ GALP alumni so far include 22 participants in 2017 (14 men and 8 women) and 24 participants in 2018 (10 men and 14 women). Due to cash flow issues GALP could not take place in 2019 but will resume in 2020. GALAA trained 30 participants (21 women) in 2016 and 27 participants in 2015 (no gender-disaggregated data could be traced).

academic teaching methods, and that is specifically targeting youth activists. A review of GALP reports points towards a significant environmental rights and sustainable development focus.

GALP facilitators continue to be drawn from Forum-Asia members and partner organizations. While Forum-Asia made an effective use of expertise held by some newer members, some observers also felt the network continues to mostly rely on trusted trainers that have been used over many years. They therefore called for a “change of guard” and encouraged Forum-Asia to a higher extent identify young creative HRDs from the members or broader human rights movement in Asia. To the Evaluation Team it appears, however, that Forum-Asia has been striking a reasonable balance.

Forum-Asia conducted a follow-up survey in February 2018, three months after the first GALP (2017) and participants’ suggestions resulted in changes to the format of GALP 2018 including a field visit and case studies presented by each participant. However, to effectively measure practical application in the workplace and other impact of the learning, surveys may be better carried out at a later stage. Forum-Asia is making some efforts to remain connected with GALP alumni through WhatsApp groups and to leverage alumni in advocacy and research of the network by for example publishing case studies from GALP participants in working paper series and enabling some alumni to represent the organization in UN advocacy at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC).

A broader survey as part of this evaluation with participants of various 2017-2018 Forum-Asia training activities also found that most respondents remained in touch with other participants and/or trainers. However, in most cases this was not facilitated by Forum-Asia. While the GALP programme is not designed as a training-of trainers, it seems to nevertheless have some multiplying effect in building capacity of others, for example three months after the training 25 % of GALP 2017 participants indicated that they had organized similar trainings (or components of training) for other individuals and groups. The evaluation survey with 2017-2018 Forum-Asia training participants also found that most of the respondents share the knowledge and skills learned with other colleagues in their organization or other organizations.

The holistic security training sessions are implemented through the HRD programme and part of a deliberate prevention strategy going beyond solely reactive measures for the protection of HRDs under threat. Capacity of HRD groups at risk is built on digital, physical and psychological security (well-being). Initially the HRD programme relied on external consultants. In the meanwhile, HRD programme staff in interviews

reported to have strengthened their own capacity through staff development¹⁹ and make efforts to source local expertise identified through member organizations.

Review of Forum-Asia materials confirmed the network uses pre-training checklists to assess training needs and conducts post-training evaluations. While member organizations and partners generally consider security trainings for HRDs relevant, they also point towards a variety of international providers in that area. Through post 2018 security training evaluations participants expressed their intent to prepare a risk assessment and contingency plans within their organization.²⁰ In response, Forum-Asia in 2018 assisted several member organizations with much appreciated security assessments.

The NHRI advocacy programme has built advocacy capacity of Forum-Asia members holding NHRIs accountable. Forum-Asia continues to serve as the Secretariat of the Asian NGOs Network on National Human Rights Institutions (ANNI), established in 2006 advocating for strengthened NHRIs in compliance with international standards. While ANNI membership is not identical to the Forum-Asia membership, the majority of ANNI members are also Forum-Asia members.²¹ Currently all funding for ANNI comes from Forum-Asia 's budget and all its activities are coordinated by Forum-Asia. ANNI has regular dialogue with Asia Pacific Forum of NHRIs (APF) and in that sense is unique as other regions do not have a similar CSO platform mirroring the regional platform of NHRIs.

A major advocacy strategy of ANNI is the publication of the annual ANNI report on the performance and establishment of NHRIs in Asia. It is an assessment of Paris Principles compliance of Asian NHRIs both in law and practice, as well as an inquiry into their effectiveness and impact.²² The ANNI reports are well regarded by Forum-Asia partners and appear an effective medium to create space for enhanced advocacy by CSOs with NHRIs. ANNI members in the 2019 review however also frequently report their previous recommendations have only been partially implemented by the NHRI in their country and at times there was no dialogue or response at all.

Some Forum-Asia members have voiced some frustrations over the lack of financial independence of ANNI and argue the Forum-Asia Secretariat should more actively

¹⁹ Including through completion of a three-month online security training course by Protection International in 2017; and on-the-job training by Forum-Asia's own IT specialist.

²⁰ This aligned with a 2015 scoping by Forum-Asia on the status of organizational protection of Forum-Asia members and a plan to develop a model organizational protection system.

²¹ Out of 31 ANNI members, not counting Forum-Asia, 22 are Forum-Asia members and one of the ANNI members is AiNNi a network of several CSOs in India that are also Forum-Asia members

²² A three step process is used to prepare the report: Firstly, during consultations ANNI members plan the focus of the new report and update previous action points; Secondly, an ANNI member of the relevant country prepares a chapter on the relevant NHRI, circulates the draft to the relevant NHRI for comments and integrates the NHRI feedback; and as a conclusive step the published report is presented at an ANNI conference organized in parallel with Annual General Meeting of the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (APF) to maximise NHRI-NGO dialogue.

work towards securing a separate funding stream for ANNI or at least provide funding support for earlier and more consistent engagements with NHRIs. Forum-Asia has expressed the view that at present ANNI is a Forum-Asia programme and as such its financial transactions have to comply with Forum-Asia systems and policies. Forum-Asia however also reported having submitted proposals developed with its members to prospective donors to secure independent ANNI funding.

Forum-Asia and ANNI members who have drafted chapters of the annual report say it is hard work and more time for reflection and implementation of previous recommendations is needed. Interviewees recommend moving toward a biennial publication. Minutes of ANNI consultations confirm that the frequency of ANNI reports is an ongoing discussion among ANNI members.

Overall Forum-Asia members who have been involved with ANNI since the start say the network is crucial for their NHRI advocacy but needs to be refreshed and adopt more creative advocacy strategies. ANNI advocacy has reportedly contributed to ensuring that “undeserving” NHRIs are not upgraded by the Sub-Committee on Accreditation of the Global Alliance for NHRIS (GANHRI) to the coveted A status. Interviews with Forum-Asia members and staff lauded a joint high-level mission by Forum-Asia, ANNI and APF in 2017 and ANNI advocacy by Forum-Asia/ANNI members in Taiwan – as reflected in a chapter in the 2019 ANNI report - was instrumental in the adoption in December 2019 of an organic law providing a legal basis to establish an NHRI under the Ombudsman system in Taiwan. ANNI and Forum-Asia advocacy in Mongolia according to Forum-Asia members led to an improved NHRC law in Mongolia. Nevertheless, the overall value of ANNI is inevitably affected by the limited relevance and effectiveness of many NHRI’s.

A key example of Forum-Asia’s research intervention strategy is Forum-Asia’s series of seven working papers offering ‘Asian Perspectives on International Human Rights Landscapes’. The working papers are deliberately aligned with Forum-Asia’s thematic priorities. Six working papers published within the evaluation period focus on a decade of Asian foreign policy at the UNHRC; business and human rights, SDGs, civic space, human rights systems and mechanisms and women human rights defenders. Forum-Asia staff and some members are key contributors to the papers. While the papers explore current and relevant human rights topics they often read as a series of collated articles rather than an integrated research product. Awareness or use of the working papers was not highlighted by any of the Forum-Asia members or partners interviewed.²³ It also appears that these papers have only been used to a limited extent in advocacy campaigns and capacity development by Forum-Asia.

²³ Forum-Asia has pointed out, however, that Sida has expressed appreciation of the working papers.

Overall, evaluation findings show that Forum-Asia is contributing to enhanced human rights related advocacy capacity amongst CSO and HRDs, but the general socio-political climate in which they operate limits what can be achieved with the strategies and activities applied.

4.2.2 “Foster an environment conducive for better human rights protection and democratic development in Asia”

Most activities towards this specific objective (SO 2) are implemented by the Human Rights Defenders’ Programme, though there are many synergies with other programmes for example with UNA when Forum-Asia facilitates access of HRDs to the UN Human Rights Council or UN Special Rapporteurs.

Protecting HRDs is a Thematic Priority in Forum-Asia’s 2016-2022 Strategic Plan and aligned with that priority the organization provides urgent support to HRDs at risk, strengthens national protection networks, maintains regular communication with the UN Special Rapporteur on HRDs and popularised the UN Declaration on HRDs.

Forum-Asia has been involved in protection of HRDs for many years but in 2015 joined a consortium – Protect Defenders - funded by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). Through the consortium Forum-Asia protects HRDs at risk, provides training and builds organizational capacity of HRD organizations on security management (latter aspect covered under holistic security trainings and organizational capacity under SO1). Forum-Asia developed a comprehensive guideline on a protection plan for HRDs that includes temporary relocation assistance for HRDs facing immediate and extreme threats to their lives as a result of their work as HRDs, and with a need for temporary relocation to a safer place within Asia region where Forum-Asia has its members or close partners.²⁴

Interviewees reported Forum-Asia has very good working relations with other consortium partners, some of whom are led by former Forum-Asia staff. Forum-Asia members and partners participate in the protection plan, but there may be a need for further orientation discussions with them on their role in this process.²⁵ Several Forum-Asia members observed that beyond physical threats and judicial harassment, staff of

²⁴ Other types of urgent assistance cover immediate medical support fees for HRDs who have been attacked or who have suffered an acute medical condition as a direct result of their peaceful human rights activities. To ensure that the HRD receives a fair trial, trial observation may also be provided to HRDs who have been charged with a legal case by state or non-state actors as a form of threat or harassment resulting from their human rights activities.

²⁵ During interviews for this evaluation some representatives of member organizations seem to lack empathy for the relocated HRD under threat, voicing accusations against relocated HRDs “exploiting the opportunity” while it appears the HRD had simply exercised their right to asylum.

many member organizations are under threat in the sense that they are barely able to survive after the CSO bank accounts have been frozen by various governments. The volume of protection requests received by Forum-Asia has increased significantly in recent years. It is uncertain whether this is caused by an increase in threats against HRDs in Asia or an increased visibility of the protection plan and related availability of funds.

Forum-Asia's HRD Programme documents cases of human rights violations against HRDs and communicates some of them to relevant UN Special Procedures Mandate holders, many of which are picked up by the Special Rapporteur on HRDs and referred to relevant Governments with varying results.²⁶ Forum-Asia accompanies this with lobbying through relevant embassies. It should be noted that at least three of the current Forum-Asia Board members are HRDs under threat.

Forum-Asia also documents HRD threats through biennial reports and on a dedicated portal. Biennial reports "Defending in numbers" review the situation of HRD across Asia. Three of these reviews were published within the evaluation period.²⁷ In 2015 Forum-Asia re-launched a revamped Asian Human Rights Defenders' (AHRD) Portal which led to an increase of 164% in unique visitors, however by 2018 that effect appears to have tapered off (22 % decrease from 2017). The AHRD Portal aims to increase public awareness on the situation faced by HRDs in Asia by illustrating through encoded cases the reality of threats HRDs face in their daily lives because of the work they do. The Portal also provides online campaign tools, case database, and resource materials for the general public as well as for HRDs themselves.²⁸

Forum-Asia has been organizing the biennial Asian Human Rights Defenders Forum (AHRDF) since 2001 to provide a safe platform to share challenges HRDs face in carrying out their legitimate work and discuss advocacy efforts. At AHRDF7 in Sri Lanka in 2016 and AHRDF8 in Indonesia in 2018 HRDs had space to directly interact with the UN Special Rapporteur on HRDs and to discuss good practices on effective national and regional protection mechanisms. Forum-Asia members appreciate this role

²⁶ In 2015, 356 cases were documented of which 11 cases communicated to the UN Special Rapporteur on HRDs and a less than 25 % response rate from Asian governments to referred cases; In 2016, 4 cases communicated to Special Rap and no response from governments was received; In 2017, out of 13 cases 7 were picked up by Special Rapporteur and sent to respective governments with 3 of them responding.; In 2018, out of 17 'urgent appeals' two were sent to respective governments and no data on response rate were reported.

²⁷ 2013-2014 Mounting Echoes of Muffled Dissent; 2015-2016 Silencing the Voices of Asia and 2017-2018 Resistance in the Face of Repression.

²⁸ It appears there are currently some technical difficulties with the portal: "cases of HRDs" tap is inaccessible and monthly statistics tap appear not updated when tested by the Evaluation Team in January 2020. Forum-Asia has clarified that the technical difficulty arose after the portal was migrated to a new platform at the end of December 2019. Forum-Asia reports that its IT staff is working closely with the developer to address the issue.

of the network and for some HRDs this is the only opportunity they have to connect with a UN human mechanism (e.g. Taiwan given that their country is not a UN member). Diplomatic sources confirm that Forum-Asia very effectively uses this platform, to bring the first-hand stories of HRDs to the attention of the UN.

Forum-Asia has also facilitated several national HRD consultations in locations that largely align with Forum-Asia's priority countries.²⁹ National consultations have inter alia resulted in a loose national HRD protection network, a national advocacy action plan, feedback on a draft HRD protection law and some steps towards a temporary (sub-)regional relocation mechanism. Forum-Asia has reported that progress towards (sub-)regional temporary relocation mechanism(s) is slow due to a combination of factors including the complex nature of such mechanisms. Nevertheless, Forum-Asia organized its first regional level consultation on temporary relocation mechanisms in 2017 and several follow-up national level consultations took place in Nepal, Indonesia and Thailand between 2018-2019. In December 2019, as a pilot project, a temporary relocation mechanism was launched in Thailand.

Protection of Civic Space is another Thematic Priority in Forum-Asia's Strategic Plan. Aligned with this priority and working towards the second Specific Objective, Forum-Asia for example in December 2018 conducted a regional consultation with three UN Special Procedure Mandate Holders on the freedoms of expression, assembly and association and HRDs, which provided a platform for HRDs to share their experiences, explore commonalities and provide Special Rapporteurs with insights in country contexts that may enable them to more effectively engage with governments. Forum-Asia also published several pieces of research to support evidence-based policy advocacy.³⁰ A quick review of these publications confirms that most of them depend on data from Forum-Asia members, and some of them have chapters written by the members. Forum-Asia thus appears to make an effective use of the first-hand knowledge present among the members of the network. However, they could be more effectively leveraged in campaigns and capacity development.

The Evaluation Team's overall finding is that Forum-Asia has successfully implemented a range of activities to foster an environment for better human rights

²⁹ E.g. in 2015 in Thailand, Myanmar and Mongolia; in 2016 in Myanmar, Mongolia and the Philippines; in 2017 in Pakistan, Mongolia and Philippines; and in 2018 again in Philippines, Myanmar and Mongolia, as well as Nepal and Thailand.

³⁰ These include a 2018 fifth Working Paper entitled "Civic Space" exploring challenges and way forward through data analysis engendered by the CIVICUS monitoring tool and reviews of cyberlaws in some sub-region and country contexts; "Instruments of Repression, a 2018 Regional Report on the Status of Freedoms of Expression, Peaceful Assembly and Association in Asia"; "Freedom of Expression Under Threat" a 2019 collation of perspectives from media and HRDs in Asia. In 2016 Forum-Asia also released 'Desecrating Expression – An Account of Freedom of Expression and Religion in Asia' building on the global discussion around the intersection between the right to freedom of expression and the right to freedom of religion. The study focuses on nine countries in Asia – Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Vietnam – which each have seen a significant number of violations on freedom of expression on account of religion or religious sensitivities in the context of religion.

protection and democratic development, but the specific objective is such that its attainment is difficult to assess and Forum-Asia's contribution to it by necessity very limited. However, the highly problematic situation that currently exists in many countries in the region would in all likelihood have been worse without the work of Forum-Asia and its members.

4.2.3 “Enhanced impact of Asian human rights defenders’ advocacy actions in relation to SAARC, ASEAN and UN human rights mechanisms”

Under this specific objective (SO 3), Forum-Asia has reported regional consultations on freedoms of assembly and association, freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief, academic visits of UN Special rapporteurs, advocacy at the UNHRC, at ASEAN level and towards the establishment of a South Asia Human Rights Mechanism (SAHRM). These activities are mainly implemented by the UN Advocacy Programme, East Asia and ASEAN Advocacy and South Asia Programmes. Aspects implemented by the HRD programme have been covered under 4.2.2 (SO2) above.

In order to enhance impact of Asian HRD advocacy with UN human rights mechanisms, Forum-Asia's UNA Programme has facilitated on average 20 HRDs every year to travel to Geneva and participate in official meetings and side-events of the UNHRC. Facilitation of Asian HRDs' participation in the meetings of the UN bodies and informal meetings with diplomatic missions in Geneva has provided an opportunity for the Asian HRDs to more effectively engage with the UN system and their own governments for the purpose of addressing human rights issues and concerns in their countries. While other organizations also provide this type of financial and logistical support, Asian HRDs often prefer that Forum-Asia facilitates access because the network represents their region, is perceived as more knowledgeable of human rights issues in Asia and allows them to raise their concerns on their own terms.

Forum-Asia reports that many concerns raised by the organization in side-events, written public statements and letters to the UNHRC have been reflected in Council debates in interventions by states, as well as in resolutions adopted by the UNHRC, e.g. on Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Malaysia, Cambodia, Philippines and Maldives.³¹

Since Forum-Asia often conducts joint advocacy with other organizations (e.g. International Commission of Jurists, International Federation for Human Rights

³¹ For example, in 2016 during the 31st session of the HRC, Forum-Asia together with civil society called on the government of Myanmar to take active measures to consolidate the progress made to end all remaining human rights violations in the country. Additionally, Forum-Asia, Myanmar civil society and HRDs called for the Council to request the Special Rapporteur to establish clear benchmarks that will act as a road map for the future human rights issues. The final text of the resolution on Myanmar requested the Special Rapporteur to “identify benchmarks for progress” as an added function.

(FIDH), adhoc coalitions of INGOs on specific country contexts) it is not always possible to distinguish to what extent Forum-Asia has directly enhanced impact of HRDs' advocacy at the UNHRC. However, Forum-Asia has definitely been instrumental in HRD advocacy at UN level and its contributions are very well regarded by all stakeholders interviewed for this evaluation. With regard to public statements at UN forums, Forum-Asia members acknowledge that some INGOs that have fact-finding at the core of their mandate (e.g. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International) may have more impact but at the same time Forum-Asia members feel it is necessary to also have statements issued by Forum-Asia as a sign of solidarity with its members and to emphasise the Asian voice.

Forum-Asia has worked to develop the capacity of members in Mongolia, Timor-Leste, India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka to prepare alternative Universal Periodic Review (UPR) submissions or follow-up of UPR recommendations and in 2015 brought together members and partners active in UPR processes from South Asia and Southeast Asia to share good practices. At the request of some of its members, Forum-Asia also participated in pre-sessions of the 27th UPR cycle. Some Forum-Asia members indicated in interviews that they would like for Forum-Asia to continue and even increase support in this area.

With the support of HURIDOCs, Forum-Asia built an online platform - Review of Asian Diplomacy and Rights (RADAR) – launched after a pilot period in September 2017. RADAR monitors the voting patterns and performance of Asian states at the UNHRC. In 2018 Forum-Asia reported that a lack of human resources and technical difficulties prevented posting regular updates and analysis in this tool. SMT at the end of 2019 extended the contract of an IT consultant till the end of 2020, so it is hoped that these difficulties will be resolved.

Among its series of working papers, two may contribute to enhancing advocacy impact of HRDs at UN human rights mechanisms provided that they are effectively leveraged in learning activities, consultations and outreach: In September 2017 Forum-Asia published the second Working Paper on 'Perspectives On A Decade Of Asian Foreign Policy at the UN Human Rights Council'. In August 2019 Forum-Asia published a sixth working paper on 'Human Rights Systems and Mechanisms' that includes a chapter on 'Participation of Non-Governmental Organisations in the United Nations'. The UN Advocacy Programme is prioritizing the UNHRC. In comparison, Forum-Asia's engagement with UN treaty bodies has been minimal.³² Several Forum-Asia members, including some working on women's rights and LGBTI rights, are looking

³² The limited examples that exist include facilitating advocacy by Thai NGOs at the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 2015 that resulted in civil society concerns being reflected in ESCR Committee concluding observations. Also, a FORUM-ASIA Fellow from Myanmar had the opportunity to observe the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women review of Thailand and the Human Rights Committee review of Mongolia in 2016.

towards Forum-Asia to play a greater role in supporting advocacy by members with UN treaty bodies.

To enhance impact of HRD advocacy at the SAARC, the South Asia programme has been the key delivery vehicle. In August 2015 a South Asia Office of FORUM-ASIA was set up in Kathmandu to make the South Asian human rights advocacy more efficient and effective. The South Asia Office is tasked to work at SAARC level to advocate for the establishment of a regional human rights mechanism. Once established, the South Asia Office was meant to work with the mechanism for the promotion and protection of human rights in the region, including regional standard setting. The Office also retain the responsibility to address the needs of the day in the sub-region vis-à-vis Forum-Asia's priorities. In November 2015 the first-ever South Asia members' meeting was held in Nepal reflecting and setting priorities for the work in the sub-region. The South Asia Programme, previously joined with East Asia and ANNI, became a self-standing programme in 2017. Between 2015 and 2019 the Kathmandu office and South Asia Program was staffed by only one Programme Officer and some interns.

There is a unanimous view among Forum-Asia management, staff and members that the programme has not been effective so far. Understaffing and unrealistic expectations deriving from co-housing with a Forum-Asia founding member organization are raised as contributing factors. Forum-Asia itself has acknowledged communication barriers between some South Asian members and the Programme Officer based in Kathmandu. However, far more significant obstacles lie in the political developments and related absence of SAARC meetings since 2016 due to mounting tensions between India and Pakistan as well as a lack of coherent vision and participation among South Asia Forum-Asia members on how civil society can do effective advocacy on the establishment of a South Asia Human Rights Mechanism.

A Regional Initiative for a South Asia Human Rights Mechanism (RISAHRM) was established in 2012 as a loose network of HRDs and experts in South Asia and platform for mobilising action towards a regional human rights mechanism in South Asia. A Task Force of RISAHRM set up in 2014 was meant to lead the campaign at (sub-)regional level while national committees would steer process at national level. The Task Force members were drawn from both Forum-Asia members and other organizations, but they acted in an individual capacity rather than as the organization they represented. Forum-Asia documentation reviewed for this evaluation concluded the RISAHRM and its Task Force became untenable because of this complex operational set-up wherein RISAHRM was dependent on Forum-Asia for financial and human resources but would act independently, at times clashing with Forum-Asia priorities and without ownership of Forum-Asia members. Forum-Asia support to RISAHRM was therefore placed "on-hold" in April 2017. A Forum-Asia RISAHRM booklet published barely a month earlier thus became an ineffective resource.

Forum-Asia concluded in its January 2019 draft Strategy for Human Rights Advocacy in South Asia for the establishment of a regional human rights mechanism that to influence an archaic institution like SAARC, “it should be approached and influenced by multiple actors from multiple avenues. A synergistic collaboration should be forged among CSOs, media, NHRIs, knowledge think tank and universities and their regional alliances, where they exist”. The strategy was developed with Forum-Asia members. It includes a South Asia People’s Commission for Human Rights (SA-PCHR). An increased ownership by South Asian civil society on addressing human rights violations in the sub-region and a collective voice on advocacy for a SAHRM are the expected outcomes of the SA-PCHR. While an advocacy plan on the SA-PCHR is still being fleshed out and it is too early to conclusively assess its chance of success, some interviewees raised doubts, given that it to some extent involves the same persons as RISAHRM³³, its work would be largely symbolic and the political environment (i.e. inoperative status of SAARC) has not changed.

The South Asia Judicial Barometer (SAJB), planned as a biennial publication, could become an integral part of the above strategy on SAHRM. The SAJB is a regional assessment of access to justice and the judiciary in South Asia conceptualised in 2015 as a collaborative research project between Forum-Asia and its Sri Lanka member, Law & Society Trust (LST). The first SAJB was published in 2017 and the second is currently in progress. In its first issue, the publication contained chapters from five South Asian countries (India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan), and a brief note on Pakistan. Four main issues were highlighted in the publication: labour rights; rights of minority groups; freedom of speech and association; and national security and terrorism. Involvement of Forum-Asia members beyond the LST appears limited. A 2018 survey by Forum-Asia’s Communications and Media team found that 61% of Forum-Asia members had not received the SAJB. Interviews by the Evaluation Team also found a lack of awareness of the SAJB among some South-Asian Forum-Asia members, including those that are involved in court monitoring, and other interviewees acknowledged that the report has been followed by insufficient advocacy efforts.

To enhance impact of HRC advocacy at ASEAN, Forum-Asia implements many activities through its East Asia and ASEAN Advocacy Programme. Forum-Asia has been involved in the Solidarity for Asian People’s Advocacy (SAPA) since its inception in 2004, as a CSO coalition advocating human rights and poverty issues in South East Asia. The establishment of a regional human rights mechanism was one of the key recommendations. In 2017-18, Forum-Asia assisted SAPA with their advocacy

³³ The SA-PCHR would be composed of a Panel of eminent persons from the region – assisted by in-country working groups - with mandates to develop an alternative jurisprudence on the basis of human rights monitoring, receipt and analysis of complaints from the region and investigation into emblematic cases. The alternative jurisprudence, it is hoped, would create pressure on the governments to form a regional human rights commission. The Panel would also be tasked with lobbying governments in South Asia on the establishment of a SAHRM and the drafting of a South Asian Charter on Human Rights. Selected Forum-Asia members and prominent RISAHRM TF members, retired judges, HRDs, NHRI officials, journalists and so on are envisaged as potential members of the Panel.

strategy and work plan and consolidating SAPA involvement in another CSO platform, the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People's Forum (ACSC/APF).

The ACSC/APF was created in 2005 and serves as a platform for enhancing solidarity, and a “convergence platform” of civil society and grassroots voices to engage with ASEAN. The conference is meant to align with the ASEAN Summit and Chair to enable interface with ASEAN's Foreign Ministers. However, no interface took place between 2015 and 2018. In November 2019, at the first interface in five years in Bangkok, Forum-Asia as part of ACSC/APF highlighted the need to address the Rohingya crisis; proposals to establish an environmental pillar; and the impact of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership on the ASEAN people. It seemed there was some willingness to listen to Forum-Asia's suggestions on partnership building, but when the organization raised concerns about human rights and environmental issues this interest seemed to evaporate.³⁴ External stakeholders have indicated that Forum-Asia's presence in the People's Forum is essential.

While Forum-Asia has consistently advocated for a regularised annual interface between CSOs and the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), it took until 2017 for this to be realised. Forum-Asia reports that since 2017, three interface meetings were organized between civil society organizations (CSOs) that hold consultative status and AICHR.³⁵ It should be noted that the parameters for granting consultative status for CSOs at AICHR are vague and once granted in practice engagement relies on proactivity of individual AICHR representatives. After its application was initially rejected in 2015, Forum-Asia in March 2017 gained AICHR consultative status. While this accreditation is viewed as an important tool enabling better access to AICHR, it does not guarantee that Forum-Asia will be meaningfully consulted.³⁶ Forum-Asia members and partners in August 2018 called for a more meaningful engagement with AICHR going beyond a merely formulaic presence.³⁷ However, Forum-Asia still feels accreditation adds weight and credibility to their statements.

Since 2009 Forum-Asia together with SAPA has published an annual assessment of the performance of the ASEAN human rights mechanisms, initially only on AICHR, later also on ASEAN Commission on the Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC). To increase ownership and impact of these reports, Forum-Asia staff stated the programme in 2018 adjusted the drafting process. It now starts with a meeting with

³⁴ <https://humanrightsinasean.info/statements/civil-society-groups-convey-concern-about-human-rights-to-asean-leaders/>

³⁵ <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=27551>; <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=25216>

³⁶ Under the 2015 Guidelines on the AICHR's relations with civil society organisations, AICHR may seek to consult with such CSOs and consultations or dialogues between the AICHR and CSOs shall always be substantive and towards a mutually satisfactory result, carried out in an environment of friendliness and respect.

³⁷ <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=26978>

stakeholders, including AICHR and ACWC representatives, CSOs, academics, seeking inputs on format and relevant issues to be covered in the report. The timeframe has also been adjusted to allow for the report to be used for advocacy at several ASEAN summits.

The 2019 report exceptionally focuses solely on AICHR because of its tenth anniversary. The report concludes that “After a decade of its existence the AICHR has yet to mature into an effective regional human rights mechanism. Unfortunately to date it has failed to provide protection and serve as a regional recourse for victims of human rights violations for people whose own states have failed to protect him.” Despite this negative score card, a review of Forum-Asia documentation confirms AICHR has invited Forum-Asia to present the findings to the entire AICHR. Forum-Asia towards the end of 2019 also participated in discussions on modalities for a review of AICHR Terms of Reference and the interpretation of key articles in the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration.³⁸ Media reported in November 2019 that ASEAN Foreign Ministers constituted a ‘panel of experts’ to review AICHR’s Term of Reference.³⁹

Interviewees stated Forum-Asia has also used its participation in an EU-ASEAN human rights dialogue as an alternative means to ensure AICHR is more responsive to CSO suggestions. Several ASEAN government officials and embassy officials use FORUM-ASIA’s AICHR performance report as a baseline or for other advocacy purposes. Senior ASEAN sources interviewed for this evaluation view FORUM-ASIA as one of the most active and professional CSOs among the approximately 30 CSOs that currently have consultative status with AICHR and commend its role in trying to hold AICHR to account. It thus seems that Forum-Asia has been able to manage the delicate – or “antagonistic” in the view of the 2015 Dastgeer evaluation – relationship with AICHR.⁴⁰

ACWC does not require accreditation of CSOs and in general is viewed as more open to CSO engagement. In what appears to be a rare interaction with ACWC in recent years, Forum-Asia in 2018 co-organized an ACWC Strategy Dialogue: Multi-Stakeholders Collaboration to Fast-Track the Promotion of ASEAN Regional Plans of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Women and Children respectively. While this initially resulted in an increased trust of ACWC in Forum-Asia as a partner

³⁸ Forum-Asia in November 2019 publicly called for ASEAN leaders to ensure a robust review aimed at strengthening the AICHR protection mandate to address the current human rights deterioration in ASEAN <https://humanrightsinasean.info/statements/civil-society-groups-convey-concern-about-human-rights-to-asean-leaders/>

³⁹ <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2019/11/01/asean-form-panel-review-mandate-rights-body.html>

⁴⁰ Ali Dastgeer and Camilla Riesenfeld, Evaluation of FORUM-ASIA’s Performance and Achievements (2011-2014), May 2015

to promote women and children rights in the region,⁴¹ it appears to have been a one-off engagement and the strengthened relationship did not last.

By 2019 ACWC representatives appear to have lost some confidence in Forum-Asia support due to several factors: Forum-Asia is not viewed as a network prioritizing women and children's rights, Forum-Asia is viewed as more focusing on AICHR (in part because of tenth anniversary) and ACWC proposals for a CSO mapping exercise have not been accommodated by Forum-Asia. The latter may not be feasible given that the organization focuses on priority countries while ACWC cannot be seen to favour one ASEAN nation over another in its activities. The tenth anniversary of the ACWC in 2020 may represent an opportunity for renewed engagement with ACWC and Forum-Asia intends to dedicate its 2020 performance report to review a decade of ACWC operations.

Though the Forum-Asia strategy also envisaged Forum-Asia monitoring of the ASEAN Committee on the Implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (ACMC), Forum-Asia so far has only engaged on migrant issues through the SAPA Task Force on ASEAN migrant workers. There is no suggestion by stakeholders that Forum-Asia should increase direct engagement with ACMC. A specialized network of CSOs in Asia, Migrant Forum Asia, has a solid reputation and may be better placed to engage with ACMC.

Forum-Asia maintains the ASEAN Human Rights Online Platform (HRAOP), launched in 2013 as a one-stop platform consolidating advocacy materials and information related to human rights in ASEAN. Forum-Asia considers it as the only independent, comprehensive open source search engine on effective human rights campaigning in the ASEAN. Interviewees did not highlight this platform.

Overall there appear to be varying views among Forum-Asia members on how to engage with ASEAN human rights mechanisms. There appears to be a consensus that while the mechanisms have not been effective, Forum-Asia has done its best to effectively engage with them and that this is an ungrateful task that needs to be done by someone. Even if the mechanisms themselves are not effective, some Forum-Asia members found engagement helpful to open space for advocacy on a human rights issue with their national leaders. Other Forum-Asia members felt advocacy at ASEAN level did not advance human rights protection in their country context. Some members wondered whether instead of directing advocacy at ASEAN institutions, public litigation may be more effective strategy to advancing human rights in South-East Asia. A key question for discussion with Forum-Asia members is how much resources (human and financial) ought to be invested in continued engagement with ASEAN human rights mechanisms.

⁴¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BVA7hOHhsdM>

4.2.4 “Strengthened FORUM-ASIA’s institutional and operational capacity as a regional umbrella organization so that it can better serve and effectively represent its constituencies at national, regional and global levels”

The fourth specific objective, Forum-Asia’s institutional and operational capacity, is only analysed here insofar as concerns its media and communications-related results. Other aspects related to the organizational abilities including administrative and financial management and on gender and environment are examined in sections 4.4 and 4.5.

The Communication and Media Programme works on internal and external communication to maximise the organizational outreach to members, partners and outside audiences through traditional and social media strategies, publications and other communication tools. The primary role of the programme is to create a larger constituency for human rights issues in Asia.

A 2015 evaluation of Forum-Asia’s Performance and Achievements (2011-2014) by Ali Dastgeer and Camilla Riesenfeld⁴² (hereinafter the Dastgeer evaluation) concluded that Forum-Asia did not have a communication strategy and that the organization’s engagement of the media had been poor. Its press statements and releases were said to lack the ability to attract attention, with journalists not viewing Forum-Asia as the authoritative commentator on human rights developments. A 2016 review commissioned by Sida and carried out by John Samuel⁴³ (hereinafter the Samuel review) also found that Forum-Asia did not have a coherent policy positioning in terms of responding to particular human rights issues. Forum-Asia in 2017 drafted a Communication and Media Strategy which was meant to align with and complement its country strategies. In 2018 Forum-Asia signalled the strategy did not develop further due to a lack of progress on the related country strategies.

There is a consensus among external human rights partners and Forum-Asia members that – when measured against the above rather low starting point - overall Forum-Asia’s effective use of media has improved significantly in recent years. While between 2017 and 2018 its presence in the more traditional media decreased (53 % decrease in media coverage), its social media presence has grown (Facebook likes grew by 26 %, and Twitter followers by 15 %). An Instagram account was launched on Human Rights Day, 10 December 2019. Live-streaming and live-tweets are said to have increased visibility of programme activities. A 2018 survey of Forum-Asia members by the Communication and Media team found that 83.3 % had not used Forum-Asia’s

⁴² Ali Dastgeer and Camilla Riesenfeld, Evaluation of FORUM-ASIA’s Performance and Achievements (2011-2014), May 2015

⁴³ John Samuel, Review Report on policies, systems and practices of Forum-Asia, Trancivic, 2016

Youtube channel. Forum-Asia however mostly uses it to store videos online without conscious efforts to promote the channel.

A prominent advocacy tool of Forum-Asia is public statements analysing and highlighting a specific human rights issue in Asia. Out of 102 statements released by Forum-Asia in 2018, 41 had media pick-up. In 2019, at the date of writing, Forum-Asia had issued 104 statements, with 25 of those picked up in the media. Many of those statements are released in solidarity with Forum-Asia members whose HRDs are under threat or knowledgeable on the issue. Members may or may not choose to sign on. A review of Forum Asia documentation confirms that Forum-Asia has developed a Statement Policy clarifying steps in that process. Public statements according to interviews with Forum-Asia members are a key and highly appreciated role of Forum-Asia where the network offers a protective voice to its members who may not be able to advocate publicly on the issue.

External stakeholders in interviews also expressed appreciation of Forum-Asia's statements and saw its close contact with rights-holders in Asia – through its members – as an important asset. However, several members and partners have also observed that Forum-Asia is relatively weak on campaigning. It has been suggested that the organization in collaboration with its members should work more on well-planned joint regional campaigns going beyond one-off advocacy efforts.

The 2016 Samuel review recommended an organogram indicating clear reporting lines and lines of accountability within the organization would be integrated in all management documents and induction package, as well as displaying posters on Forum-Asia's notice Board. An updated organizational chart was provided to the Evaluation Team. The chart does not seem to be widely used and is for instance not displayed on noticeboards in the Bangkok, Jakarta and Geneva offices or on Forum-Asia's website. An organizational chart, combined with key messaging on Forum-Asia's vision and key strategic objectives could enable external stakeholders to have better understanding of what Forum-Asia "stands for", i.e. its core identity and added value.

Forum-Asia conducted a 25th anniversary campaign in 2016 and released an informative publication 'Our struggle for years 25 years of Forum-Asia' and a compilation of videos of 2015 interviews with human rights experts and activists reflecting on current and future challenges as well as the role played by Forum-Asia in the last 25 years.⁴⁴ In 2014, Forum-Asia also released a video introduction to the organization through the testimonies of the then Executive Director (ED) and six Forum-Asia members.⁴⁵ However, this video is not readily accessible to the public if

⁴⁴ <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=22489>

⁴⁵ <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=17836>

one wants to have a quick idea of what Forum-Asia stands for. The video importantly interviews some iconic HRDs in Asia but could be improved by reflecting some younger and diverse HRD voices (such as reflected in Forum-Asia's stories of change videos), and adding visuals on fact finding missions, HRD consultations and capacity development efforts.

Overall, the data collected by the Evaluation Team indicate that progress towards the communication and media aspect of Forum-Asia's operational capacity objective has been satisfactory. If the organization enhances its focus on sustained campaigns implemented jointly by its partners, the media and communications role of the office may need to be further enhanced.

4.3 EFFICIENCY

Efficiency concerns whether the results of an intervention are obtained at reasonable costs. This section more specifically looks at the costs and cost effectiveness of Forum-Asia's programmes and activities, the costs and added value of the organization's permanent presences outside of Bangkok, the degree to which the programmes are on budget and activities delivered on time.

4.3.1 Cost effectiveness of programmes

Forum-Asia's budget and financial reporting is not structured to correspond to its four strategic objectives, which makes it difficult, or impossible, to assess costs in relation to these objectives and the organization-wide logical framework. The financial reports do, however, show the costs for the organization's main programmes. Table 1 below shows the costs per programme for 2017 and 2018, as well as each programme's share of the organization's total programme costs.

Table 1: Programme costs 2017-2018

Programme	2018		2017	
	USD	Share of total programme costs	USD	Share of total programme costs
Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation	140,000	7.1%	134,000	7.9%
Information, Communication & Publication	140,000	7.1%	120,000	7.0%
South Asia	100,000	5.0%	85,000	5.0%
East Asia	182,000	9.2%	182,000	10.7%
UN Advocacy	348,000	17.5%	339,000	19.9%
Human Rights Defenders	538,000	27.1%	310,000	18.2%
ASEAN Advocacy	249,000	12.5	204,000	12.0%
ANNI	121,000	6.1%	96,000	5.7%

Programme	2018		2017	
	USD	Share of total programme costs	USD	Share of total programme costs
SMT ⁴⁶	162,000	8.2%	74,000	4.3%
ANNI India	5,000	0.3%	161,000	9.4%
Total programme costs	1,985,000	100%	1,705,000	100%

The UN Advocacy Programme and the Human Rights Defenders Programme are the two programmes that use the largest shares of the Forum-Asia's programme budget. In 2018, they amounted to 17.5% and 27.1% respectively.⁴⁷ They are arguably also the two programmes that can most clearly report tangible results and appear to be the most appreciated initiatives amongst members. The actual costs for the UNA Programme was during 2017 and 2018 in practice somewhat higher than reported here, as some staff related costs pertaining to the programme are reported as Office Administrative Expenses and not as programme costs. The Evaluation Team has not seen the financial report for 2019, but UNA costs were significantly reduced as the Geneva office was downsized.

To assess the costs of individual activities based on the reporting Forum-Asia provides to Sida is not always possible. The costs of individual trainings and workshops are not always specified in the financial reports and the length of trainings and the number of participants in each training are never listed in these reports. This information is occasionally, but not consistently, mentioned in Forum-Asia's narrative reporting. Its under-reporting on budgeted and actual expenses in relation to individual activities contrasts with its more detailed reporting on several other matters, including staff salaries.

The Evaluation Team has reviewed the costs for some of Forum-Asia's training activities. The GALP provides "Forum-Asia's members, partners and other promising youths a space for collective learning and reflection on various aspects related to human rights advocacy." In 2018, the trainings involved 23 participants – including four interns and junior staff from Forum-Asia – from 15 countries. The participants met in Thailand for a total of seven days. The event is fully funded by Forum-Asia and according to the organization's financial report for 2018 the costs for the training, excluding staff costs for organizing the event, amounted to approximately USD 24,000, or just over USD 1,000 per participant or 150 per participant per day.

⁴⁶ Programmes budgeted under SMT are GALP, Strategic partnership, networking and resource mobilization, Young leadership development programme, New Initiatives and Partner Development.

⁴⁷ It should be noted that actual share pertaining of the UNA was higher as health insurance costs and the social charges relating to the Geneva office staff working on the programme are reported as Office Administrative Expenses and not programme costs. While there are similar costs relating also to staff members working for other programmes, these costs are considerably lower.

In May 2018, Forum-Asia organized a workshop in Bangkok for junior staff in its member organizations to “strengthen the civic space through knowledge sharing and providing participants with advanced advocacy and documentation skills to monitor elections and their impacts on civic space.” A total of 15 participants from member organizations in several countries attended the three-day workshop. The cost for the workshop came to a total of USD 9,900. The cost per participant was thus USD 660 which gives a daily cost per participant of USD 220.

In these two examples, the costs per training are obviously high in relation to the costs of many national level trainings but considering the regional nature and the fact that they involve significant travel related expenses the trainings do not appear particularly expensive. From an efficiency perspective it is, however, also relevant to reflect on the fact that the two trainings are not directed at experienced human rights workers and that their content appears to be such that they perhaps could be carried out at national level with national level trainers at a significantly lower cost. At the same time, the added value of providing opportunities for human rights defenders from different countries and contexts to interact and share experiences would obviously be lost with a domestic approach. An overall observation of the Evaluation Team is nevertheless that Forum-Asia could make more use of webinars for capacity building purposes and web conferencing for meetings, including EC meetings, and that this could contribute to reduce costs.

Staff costs constitute a large share of Forum-Asia’s total expenditures. Considering the nature of the organization’s work, this is to be expected. None of Forum-Asia’s programmes currently have more than five staff members and a reduction of staff in any of the programmes would likely impact significantly on its outputs. It should be noted, however, that salaries and other staff benefits offered by Forum-Asia are often more generous than those offered by the member organizations.

In summary, Forum-Asia prioritizes, in terms of expenditures, those programmes that members perceive as particularly essential. While the relevance, and thus efficiency, of some programmes is discussed in this report, there are few opportunities for Forum-Asia to reduce costs within the individual programmes. Increased use of internet technology for capacity development purposes could, however, contribute to increased efficiency. Regular assessments of how salaries and other staff benefits compare to those of similar organizations and the member organizations can also be important for ensuring value for money.

4.3.2 Costs and added value of the Geneva, Jakarta and Kathmandu offices

Over the past decade, the Asian human rights groups have significantly increased their interaction with the UN human rights mechanisms, and it is clear that Forum-Asia and its office in Geneva has contributed significantly to this development. Past evaluations have shown a strong support for UNA generally and for the Geneva office in

particular.⁴⁸ The Evaluation Team's consultations indicate, as mentioned, that the Geneva office continues to bring significant value to Forum-Asia and its members.

It should be noted, however, that while there may be no other Asian human rights organization with a permanent presence in Geneva, many CSOs that are Forum-Asia members tend to rely on multiple organizations for financial or logistical support and HRD access to UN human rights mechanisms. These include Forum-Asia but also the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), Franciscan International and UPR Info. CSOs thus have options and are not solely dependent on Forum-Asia. Nevertheless, Forum-Asia members often prefer liaising with Forum-Asia while in Geneva because of the familiarity and knowledge of the Asia region.

Existing concerns about the Geneva office relate to the ineffectual nature of the UN human rights machinery and to the costs of operating the office. During 2018, the total costs of the Geneva office was USD 379,000, or 14 % of Forum-Asia's total annual expenditures. Of the 379,000, 81 %, was staff costs, including expenses for salaries, social charges and health insurance. Other costs relating to the Geneva office were travel, workshop and meeting costs. The cost for office rent and utilities amounted in 2018 to about USD 10,000, which is low considering the strategic location of the office.

In 2018, the Geneva office was staffed by a programme manager, a programme officer and an administrator. The contract of the programme manager was not renewed when it expired at the end of 2018 and the staff has thus been reduced from three to two person and the total costs pertaining to the office considerably reduced. While the changed staffing situation had some impact on the UNA research and media outreach plans, it has according to interviews not had a dramatic impact on the Geneva office's core activities. It should be noted that not all costs for the UNA relate to the Geneva office and that the reduced Geneva costs may have some impact on the Bangkok-related UNA costs. The costs of one staff member in Geneva is, however, approximately 2.5 times the costs of a Bangkok-based staff member at the equivalent level.

If the relevance and efficiency of the Geneva office is negatively affected by the ineffectual nature of the UN mechanisms and their ability to affect change, this is to an even higher degree the case for the ASEAN human rights machinery and the work carried out by the Jakarta office. Even though the office has ensured effective implementation of a range of activities, the offices fairly limited contribution to results also puts its efficiency in question. The costs of running the Jakarta office are, however, modest. In 2018 the costs for staff salaries, rent, utilities, communication and

⁴⁸ See Ali Dastgeer and Camilla Riesenfeld, *Evaluation of FORUM-ASIA's Performance and Achievements (2011-2014)*, May 2015 and Cecilia Jimenez Damary, *Strategising the Work of the Geneva Office of Forum Asia*, January 2015

supplies pertaining to the Jakarta office was approximately USD 107,000. Of this amount, staff costs made up more than 90 %. As staff costs would be the same in Bangkok as in Jakarta, the cost effectiveness of the work carried out by the Jakarta office has little to do with its physical location. Considering the location of the ASEAN Secretariat, as long as Forum-Asia maintains a significant focus on ASEAN and its human rights machinery it makes sense to maintain a Jakarta presence.

The costs of running the Kathmandu office amounted in 2018 to roughly USD 37,000, which primarily pertained to the salary of the one staff member employed. Forum-Asia and some member organizations consider the office to be understaffed and Forum-Asia expects to have two Kathmandu-based staff members during coming years, raising the annual costs of the office to between USD 75,000 and 80,000. An improved staffing situation can contribute to enhanced outputs, but with the current focus and mandate of the South-Asia programme it may nevertheless be difficult for the office to attain significant results, and thus to achieve a high degree of cost effectiveness.

The Evaluation Team's assessment of the general role, effectiveness and the efficiency of the Jakarta and Kathmandu offices are also affected by the fact the members organizations in practice appear to have closer interaction with the office in Bangkok than with the offices in Nepal and Indonesia.

4.3.3 Budget and workplan deviations

Forum-Asia as a whole has often underspent in relation to its annual budget. In 2015 the variance between budgeted and actual expenses was 27 % and in 2017 the same figure was about 9 %. In 2018, however, actual expenses exceeded budgeted expenses with just under 1 %. Amongst its individual programmes, Forum-Asia's South-Asia programme underspent in 2018 with about 2 %, while its other programmes underspent during the year with between 7 % and 24 %. Previous years have seen considerably higher deviations between planned and actual programmes costs.

Forum-Asia provides detailed reports on activity implementation and workplan deviations. In 2018 Forum-Asia organized 15 Regional workshops/ consultations/ conferences, 14 National workshops/ consultations/ conferences, 10 capacity building initiatives, 18 fact finding or advocacy missions, 16 side events to the UNHRC sessions. It also issued 17 publications or other documentary outputs, 17 case fact sheets, and numerous press releases; and offered emergency assistance to HRDs at risk. Of its planned activities in 2018, only eight were cancelled, postponed or delayed. Previous years have seen a higher number of activities not being implemented. In 2016, 49 activities were "unimplemented or not fully implemented", but some unplanned activities were carried out.

It can also be noted that almost all of Forum-Asia's programme related budget lines were utilized in 2018 and that an overall assessment of Forum-Asia's financial and activity reports during the years reviewed by the Evaluation Team show an improved

coherence between the planning and implementation processes, even though there is room to further strengthening the budgeting process (see section 4.5.1.2).

4.4 SWEDEN'S DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION PERSPECTIVES

This section addresses the three evaluation questions relating directly to perspectives guiding all Swedish development cooperation. In addition, it reflects on a question of conflict sensitivity posed by Sida following the data collection phase and the Evaluation Team's debriefing for embassy and Forum-Asia staff of preliminary findings and conclusions.

4.4.1 Human Rights Based Approach

For Sida, the main purpose of a human rights based approach (HRBA) is “to empower boys, girls, men and women to claim their human rights (as rights holders) and to increase the capacity of those who are obliged to respect, promote, protect and fulfil those rights (as duty bearers).”⁴⁹ It also entails a focus on disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, and is primarily applied through the four principles of non-discrimination, participation, transparency and accountability. In relation to these principles, the ToR for this evaluation raises four specific questions which are discussed in this section:

- Have target groups been participating in project planning, implementations and follow up?
- Has anyone been discriminated by Forum-Asia's activities through its implementation?
- Have projects been implemented in a transparent fashion?
- Are there accountability mechanisms in the project?

Forum-Asia's Strategic Plan 2016-2022 presents HRBA as one of the organizations “basic premises and values”, and as one of its thematic priorities. It also says that “Forum-Asia will promote a human rights-based approach to development which stresses on: promoting economic, social and cultural rights; advocacy for accountability; transparency and participation of marginalised people; and youth and women in the policy-making process.”⁵⁰

i. Participation in planning, implementation and follow-up

The General Assembly is the highest decision-making body in Forum-Asia and the ultimate structure through which the member organizations can influence the governance and strategic direction of the organization. The General Assembly meets every three years and comprises all of Forum-Asia's full members, which all have one

⁴⁹ Sida, Human Rights Based Approach at Sida: Compilation of Thematic Area Briefs

⁵⁰ Forum-Asia, Strategic Plan (2016-2022)

vote. The General Assembly adopts the organization's strategic plan and elects the EC, which serve as the highest decision-making body between General Assembly meetings.

Those interviewed in connection with the current evaluation have not questioned the overall governance structure of Forum-Asia. Many members are, however, of the view that Forum-Asia's system for ensuring programme relevance could be strengthened. It has for instance been mentioned that the General Assembly meetings do not provide sufficient time for discussing Forum-Asia's future direction. Some interviewees are also of the view that the General Assembly meetings are dominated by a few vocal organizations and individuals, while others have few opportunities to make their voices heard. The most recent General Assembly meeting in 2018 lasted for 2 ½ days.

Outside of the General Assembly meetings, the member organizations are given opportunities to discuss strategic issues in sub-regional and other meetings, as well to review and comment on Forum-Asia's annual work plans before they are adopted. Even though the number of organizations that use the opportunity to provide written comments is limited, the general feeling expressed amongst interviewed organizations is that they are given increasing and reasonable opportunities to formally influence the strategic direction of the organization, and in particular the content of individual programmes and activities, between General Assembly meetings. In relation to specific activities and initiatives, Forum-Asia often provides opportunities for individual participants and affected members to provide feedback and thereby potentially influence future efforts.

Some interviewees are, however, of the view that there from time to time has been a high degree of informal consultations which have given individual organizations disproportionate advantages and benefits, including opportunities to influence activity focus and participation. It has been mentioned that these type of informal or bilateral consultations were particularly common in the past when Forum-Asia prioritized individuals from the member organizations in staff recruitment. It has also been said that Forum-Asia's thematic and geographic priorities have sometimes been determined and influenced by the personal background of individual directors and EC members.

ii. Discrimination in activities

There are different views amongst interviewees on how large Forum-Asia's membership should be and on which type of organizations that ought to be members. It has been argued that organizations representing certain groups and issues have been poorly represented. The recent intake of youth and women-led groups and an expansion of membership countries has been a way of addressing some of these concerns. Criticism of the fact that Forum-Asia's membership does not include organizations relating to other countries, including North Korea, remain, nevertheless.

When it comes to programme focus and activity implementation it may be argued that Forum-Asia has paid insufficient attention to some vulnerable groups, such as persons living with disabilities. At the same time there is, as mentioned, a need for Forum-Asia

to prioritize and focus its resources if it should be able to effect real change. The Evaluation Team is not aware of any explicit allegations that anyone has been discriminated by Forum-Asia's activities. There are, however, several positive examples of Forum-Asia acting to defend the rights of discriminated groups which for reasons of sensitivity or otherwise have received little attention from Forum-Asia members and other domestic human rights groups.

iii. Transparency in implementation

In relation to its members, Forum-Asia ensures transparency through the democratic and participatory structures and processes described above, including the General Assembly, the EC and programme and activity related consultations. In relation to the general public, Forum-Asia ensures transparency through its annual report, which is readily available on its website, and contains information about the organization's governance and activities as well as basic financial data. Forum-Asia also provides information about its operations to the general public through its monthly newsletter, which presents information about organizational priorities and activities, and various other information materials.

Forum-Asia produces in line with its contractual obligations both financial and narrative progress reports which meets the requirements of its donors. The financial statements are audited on an annual basis and shared with donors, and should according to Forum-Asia's own regulations be available on the organization's webpage. During a spot check the Evaluation Team was not able to identify the audited statements on the webpage.

Amongst those interviewed by the Evaluation Team are some lingering perceptions of arbitrariness in terms of what the organization focuses on, who gets to attend what activities, and who is recruited or promoted. In the recent past, the structure and culture in the Secretariat has allegedly been excessively hierarchical, leading to a division and lack of trust between the leadership and other staff members. As discussed in section 4.5 measures ensuring a more inclusive style of management have recently been taken to address this division and related perceptions of insufficient transparency.

iv. Accountability in the organization

An Ethics and Grievance Redressal Sub-committee was established under the EC in 2019. The Sub-committee shall according to Forum-Asia's Governance Manual hear "any concern raised by an associate or staff relating to misconduct and wrongdoings such as acts of a fraudulent, dangerous or criminal nature, incidences of corruption, *sexual or gender-based harassment*, or any other serious reputational risks for FORUM-ASIA and the suspicion thereof."⁵¹ Concerns can be raised by all individuals working under any form of contract or agreement with FORUM-ASIA. The manual

⁵¹ Section 4.7 Governance Manual

makes no reference to complaints by participants in Forum-Asia activities or other actors concerned with, or affected by, its work.

It appears that there will be some time before the Sub-Committee, which serves in an advisory role to the EC, is fully functioning. Procedures regarding complaints, investigations and sanctions need to be developed and made known amongst staff members. The Governance Manual mentions that the Sub-Committee should assist the EC in protecting whistle blowers⁵², but a general whistle blower mechanism through which staff members and external actors can make anonymous complaints is not in place.

In 2017, Forum-Asia adopted a Sexual and Gender-based Harassment in the Workplace Policy, which is further discussed under Section 4.4.2 of this report. Under the policy a Redressal Committee also handles complaints on sexual and gender-based harassment. The Redressal Committee was set up in 2019, and its ToR endorsed by the EC. Although it is understood that both bodies have a different reach (Redressal Committee also handles grievances from Forum-Asia member or partner organizations) and are located under different governance structures (Ethics Committee under EC; Redressal Committee at Secretariat), from the perspective of effectiveness and efficiency it appears that it would be more relevant for Forum-Asia to have one well-functioning complaints and investigation regime for all ethics violations rather than different regimes for different types of violations.

The ToR for this evaluation only raises the issue of accountability mechanism within Forum-Asia. It is nevertheless worth noting that most of Forum-Asia's activities and programmes have a direct focus on enhancing the accountability of state institutions. This includes initiatives aiming at monitoring and reporting about the performance of NHRIs and judiciaries, as well as fact finding missions, statements and other advocacy initiatives aiming at, or stressing the importance of, holding to account those responsible for violations of human rights and to ensure functioning institutions for this purpose. Many of Forum-Asia's training initiatives have directly aimed at strengthening the capacity of civil society actors to hold duty bearers to account.

4.4.2 Gender equality

i. Institutionalization through structures and in-house competence

A review of Forum-Asia documents by the Evaluation Team confirms that gender is well integrated in Forum-Asia's policy framework. The organization's vision includes gender-equal societies in Asia. Equality and diversity is a stated core value of Forum-Asia in its Staff Handbook. Forum-Asia's 2016-2022 Strategic Plan states the organization shall strictly enforce a zero tolerance against discrimination on grounds of inter alia gender; embrace diversity and promote gender equality and women's rights

⁵² Annexure 7(iii) Governance Manual

as a crosscutting issue and theme in all its work. Forum-Asia's Code of Conduct expected to be signed by all staff requires them to "espouse the dignity and worth of human person as well as the equal rights of men and women at all times" and states that discrimination or harassment of any sort will not be tolerated.

Forum-Asia adopted a Gender Policy in 2012 and in 2015 in response to previous reviews articulated a Gender Action Plan to operationalize the policy. A mid-2018 staff survey found the policy is too focused on women and binary gender definitions and concluded that the policy needs to be made more actionable. The 2015 gender action plan is not mentioned or tested in the survey and it appears lost. The network in 2017 adopted a Policy on Sexual and Gender-based Harassment in the Workplace that has been integrated in full within the 2017 Staff Handbook (while the gender policy is only referenced in a list of additional policies). The Staff Handbook includes maternity and paternity leave entitlements and reasonable time off for nursing children. A draft Well-being Policy includes flexible hours and working from home.

Recruitment rules require staff selection without distinction as to inter alia gender and sexual orientation (articles 4 Terms and Conditions of Service). The Recruitment Policy does not include Temporary Special Measures but notwithstanding Forum-Asia at present has a diversified workforce including staff who openly identify as LGBTI. Women are well represented in core roles of the network. Five out of seven board members are female, though one of them recently resigned after she was removed from her organization. The incoming new ED is female and the other Director is male. Four out of five core programmes are currently managed by women.

Forum-Asia procedures for assessing recipient organizations requires screening of Forum-Asia members before concluding an MoU for co-organizing an event held outside Bangkok, Jakarta, Kathmandu and Geneva. One of the areas for assessment is the recipient organization's demonstrated commitment to gender equality, equity and non-discrimination principle. However, gender does not appear to have been integrated within other financial rules and procurement policies.

The Dastgeer evaluation recommended that SMT should spearhead gender-mainstreaming. While transformative leadership on gender equality is crucial, ownership and participation by staff are equally relevant. In that regard, the Evaluation Team found through interviews and document review that Forum-Asia staff is currently driving gender integration at the Secretariat and beyond. In January 2018 Secretariat staff participated in a Gender and Organizational Analysis Workshop provided through Sida's gender help desk (Regional Gender Equality Support Function currently provided by WOCAN) resulting in a Gender Mainstreaming Action Plan for 2018. Consequently, a Gender Mainstreaming Working Group (GMWG) was created and its role has been formalized in a ToR approved by the board in August 2019. At least one SMT member or delegate is a member of the GMWG. The GMWG operates on a voluntary basis and aims to meet on a monthly basis. It has made a solid effort in establishing a baseline of staff's awareness of gender concepts and relevant Forum-

Asia policies. The GMWG has drafted gender definitions to improve upon the 2012 binary Gender Policy and a list of good gender mainstreaming practices.

All these documents have been shared with Forum-Asia members in October 2019 through an emailed communication of the chair of the board. Interviews with Forum-Asia members however reveal that it did not reach Forum-Asia members or they had no memory of it. Given frequent use of group messages, it is plausible this message was received but not read, and more individualized communications may be needed to clearly communicate Forum-Asia's gender stance to its members. The GMWG regularly organizes gender knowledge sharing sessions (4 in 2018 and 2 in 2019) to which attendance is voluntary. Staff prepare a visual material or invite an external resource person to facilitate a discussion. Some Forum-Asia staff observed that attendance may need to be made mandatory in order to also reach those that are not yet gender aware.

As stated above, Forum-Asia in 2019 formally established the Redressal Committee envisaged in the sexual harassment policy and its ToR was endorsed by the EC. According to the policy one SMT member should be on it but some staff expressed concern that the presence of a male director may be inappropriate in some cases. This should be easily resolved with the incoming female ED, and alleged victims should be given options on whom they feel comfortable discussing with. The committee managed to secure an external gender expert from the International Commission of Jurists, who is also a former Forum-Asia staff.

It should be noted that another accountability mechanism established under the EC in 2019, an Ethics and Grievance Redressal Sub-committee, is per Forum-Asia's Governance Manual also tasked with inter alia sexual or gender-based harassment concern raised by an associate or staff. As observed in section 4.4.1.4 above, from the perspective of effectiveness and efficiency it would have been more relevant for Forum-Asia to have one well-functioning complaints and investigation regime for all ethics violations rather than to have different regimes for different types of the violations. The GMWG also recommended this course of action in their analysis of the 2018 survey on the sexual harassment policy. Furthermore, the GMWG flagged that disability inclusion ought to be integrated in the sexual harassment policy.

The 2018 GMWG survey also found that implications of the Policy on Sexual and Gender-based Harassment in the Workplace for Forum-Asia members are unclear. The policy does explicitly state it applies to employees of the Organization, members of the EC, staff of member or partner organizations, visitors, or third parties who will be reprimanded when they sexually harass another. Forum-Asia in 2019 resolved one case of sexual harassment by encouraging the Forum-Asia staff member to apologize to a participant in an activity. Following another allegation of sexual harassment against a staff associated with a Forum-Asia member, Forum-Asia in October 2019 issued a statement acknowledging swift action taken by its member i.e. a formal investigation

into the allegation and the removal of alleged staff member from his position.⁵³ However, interviews with Forum-Asia members indicated some may perceive the application of the policy by Forum-Asia on its members as an infringement on their jurisdiction. More work needs to be done to discuss the roll-out of this policy with members.

At an annual review meeting with Sida in 2016, Forum-Asia announced a gender audit of Forum-Asia members in order to identify those working on women and LGBTI issues and related campaigns, and as a next step identifying gender focal points at all levels of the network. It remains unclear whether this has been done. A membership consolidation and expansion drive in 2018 is said to have targeted CSOs led by women and/or active on women's rights.

Interviews for this evaluation reveal a strong interest in and thorough reflection on gender and intersectionality among the members of the GMWG that should be harnessed. However, at present Forum-Asia is not yet viewed by staff, members and partners as a gender aware organization. Staff expectations towards the new ED to lead on gender are high. Forum-Asia has drafted a ToR for a Gender Consultant to be hired subject to availability of funds. The ToR states that while the initial efforts by GMWG have been productive and valued, Forum-Asia requires the expertise of a Gender Advisor, especially skilled to systematically and strategically guide the organization.

ii. Mainstreaming

The 2012 Gender Policy requires that Forum-Asia applies gender analysis at all stages of its programmes. In 2018 the Gender Mainstreaming (GM) Working Group (GMWG; see above) and Planning Monitoring and Evaluation Programme refined a checklist for gender mainstreaming to be used as a reference for all programmes to integrate a gender perspective in the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of all projects/activities. Mission proposal and report templates were amended in 2015 and again in 2019 to include a section on gender integration where programme staff is required to use the GM checklist. Nevertheless, several staff indicated the use of the checklist in practice remains voluntary and is not consistently pushed by the Forum-Asia leadership. The GMWG, with assistance of a gender expert, plans further revisions of the Forum-Asia Gender Policy, GM checklist and all relevant templates to make it more practical for staff.

Forum-Asia's Specific Objectives, related results, outputs/activities and indicators presented in the organization-wide logical framework are not gender-sensitive beyond a generic introductory reference that "all data below will be differentiated in as much as possible by gender". Nevertheless, annual progress reports provide gender-disaggregated data. Forum-Asia is also transparent when activities have not reached

⁵³ <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=27576>

the desired number of Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs). The Communications and Media Programme also collects gender-disaggregated data such as female users of social media (40 % of those that ‘like’ Forum-Asia Facebook page; 40% of Forum-Asia Twitter followers in December 2019).

Several Forum-Asia staff demonstrated in interviews a nuanced understanding of gender concepts and are actively working through the GMWG to improve binary gender definitions in the 2012 Gender Policy.⁵⁴ In that regard it should be noted that EIDHR has requested HRD protection consortium partners to collect data on beneficiaries of HRD protection belonging to gender and sexual minorities i.e. disaggregate by number of female, trans-male, trans-female, non-binary, intersex and ‘other multiple not-specified’. Discussions on this matter within Forum-Asia and the consortium are ongoing to ensure beneficiaries are not put under pressure to declare their sexual orientation or gender identity. Emergency assistance to WHRDs under threat or at risk has extended to their infants and a support person or carer.

Interviews with Forum-Asia staff and a review of reports of the flagship training programme GALP confirm gender perspectives were integrated. The 2017 GALP included an advocacy strategy session on responding to gender-based violence and the 2018 GALP featured a case study of a gender equality campaign in the Maldives and group work developing a gender equality campaign in Thailand. Both GALP sessions appear to have had gender-diversity in learners (participants and facilitators) and GALP 2020 anticipates having participant(s) who self-identified as transmen. GALP 2019 benefitted from contributions of two participants from Thailand and Myanmar knowledgeable on LGBTI rights and equality issues. Forum-Asia is considering benefits of adding separate gender modules/sessions but is mindful of avoiding a tokenistic approach.

Some Forum-Asia publications have integrated gender: The biennial HRD review of Forum-Asia ‘Defending in Numbers’ has a chapter on Women Human Rights Defenders interpreted to include lesbian, bi-sexual, transgender, intersex and gender non-conforming persons. It examines gendered experiences of WHRDs including misogynistic vilification in online attacks. Annual ANNI reports review compliance of Asian NHRIs with Paris Principles including pluralism and representativeness, thus reporting on gender-balance in NHRI Commissioners or staff. A fourth Working Paper published by Forum-Asia in 2018 ‘Sustainable Development Goals - A Human Rights Based Approach’ includes a chapter on ‘Are the SDGs Doomed to Fail? The Cost of Inaction on Gender Equality’. A 2019 Forum-Asia publication ‘Freedom of Expression under Threat’ has a chapter on ‘Women in the Digital Age’. A seventh Working Paper

⁵⁴ One aspect under consideration is the use of participants’ lists that are publicly accessible at FA events, with the traditional M/F columns. There are suggestions of adding a third (may have been done in some cases but not all) or more discretely collecting data directly with individuals when they pre-register or in follow-up contact.

published in November 2019 - ‘Insights from the Struggle’ - entirely focuses on Women Human Rights Defenders.

In October 2019 Forum-Asia launched a Stories of Change videos series, in partnership with filmmakers from different Asian countries showcasing the narrative of individuals and their stories of how human rights changed their lives, both in cases where their rights are being violated or being recognised. Two out of four stories feature topics relevant to gender equality: The Women Movement in India and the LGBTI movement in Taiwan.

4.4.3 Environment/climate change

Environmental mainstreaming in Forum-Asia’s policy framework has far less progressed compared to gender mainstreaming. A review of Forum-Asia policy framework by the Evaluation team identified that in 2011 the organization formulated an Environment Impact Policy “in response to the requirement under the grant agreements with Sida”. The 2016-2022 Strategic Plan states that Forum-Asia shall recognise the right to a healthy and sustainable environment and under its thematic priority of a human rights based approach to sustainable development Forum-Asia commits to working in solidarity with environmental organizations and defenders to protect the environment and deliver climate justice.

In its no-cost proposal to extend its agreement with Sida, Forum-Asia in 2019 expressed hope to increase staff capacity to specifically address issues related to environment and human rights. The network aimed to bring together case studies from its members and promote better understanding of the links between environment, sustainable development and human rights. Interviewees reported that mid-November 2019 Forum-Asia conducted a Simplified Environmental Assessment linked to the development of a new programme proposal to Sida. A reading of the assessment document confirms an acknowledgement by the organization that its environmental impact policy needs to be completely reviewed and revamped, and that its capacity for environmental management – in terms of staff capacity, policies, guidelines, environmental management system – is limited. Environment also seems not mainstreamed in the organization-wide logical framework: No relevant results or indicators could be identified.

There are examples of Forum-Asia’s capacity building efforts exploring the interlinkages between environment and human rights. At the 2017 GALP the Chair of the Forum-Asia board presented a case study about rights violations against herder communities and environmental impact stemming from mining operations in Mongolia. Other learners shared a case study on legal intervention and advocacy to address environmental violations and sustainability issues in India’s Vishwamitri Riverfront Development Project and examined responsibility of the transformative State on the cross-border projects in Thailand. The 2018 GALP also covered a case study on public participation for environmental impact assessments in Thailand shared by a Forum-Asia member organization that has won landmark litigation in that area. A

2018 holistic security training built capacity of land and environmental HRDs from the Philippines. The 2018 Asian HRD Forum (AHRDF8) had a discussion session on environment.

Forum-Asia in 2019 with support of Bread for the World started developing a pilot project aimed at collecting testimonies of local communities living in conditions of poverty and affected by human rights violations and climate crisis in Nepal and Indonesia. The 2019 Forum-Asia proposal to Sida shows that the Development and Knowledge Management Programme intends to apply a multipronged strategy to work on Poverty, Climate Change and Human Rights.

A review of Forum-Asia publications and public statements by the Evaluation Team shows that in recent years, Forum-Asia has on several occasions advocated for the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. In May 2019, Forum-Asia and one of its members conducted a fact-finding mission to Mongolia and published a Fact-Finding Mission Report on the impacts of mining on defenders and environment in Khentii and Dornod Provinces. Its conclusions and recommendation take an integrated approach of international environmental and human rights standards. The Fact-Finding Mission findings were presented in-country and led company representatives to openly admit to attacks on environmental HRDs. The third instalment of the Working Paper Series “Business and Human Rights” entirely focuses on corporate accountability for human rights and environmental sustainability with case studies from Thailand, Mongolia and India. The Mongolia article was later picked up in a publication issued by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).⁵⁵

On occasion Forum-Asia’s public advocacy statements draw attention to environmental rights, mostly through the angle of protection of environmental HRDs. For example, on Human Rights Day 2019, Forum-Asia issued a joint statement on “Time to act: Protect defenders who speak up against business impact on people and planet”⁵⁶ and in July 2019 the organization issued a statement on the Philippines “Take Concrete Steps to Protect Land and Environmental Defenders” echoing a Global Witness report and corroborating their findings with Forum-Asia reports.⁵⁷

Forum-Asia’s biennial ‘Defending in Numbers’ review of the situation of HRDs has a dedicated chapter on land and environmental defenders encapsulating all those working to protect land, environment, and all associated risks, including but not limited to the

⁵⁵ The Environment and Development Division of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), in collaboration with the Center for People and Forests (RECOFTC) published a report titled ‘Environmental Change Through Participation – A closer look at how Inclusive Engagement can achieve Environmental Outcomes’. <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=29283>

⁵⁶ <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=30607>

⁵⁷ <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=29439>

right to access natural resources, and the right to a clean and healthy environment. The 2017-18 report found that “roughly 35 per cent of all cases of violence against HRDs and 55 per cent of all killings recorded were perpetrated against land and environmental defenders.” Forum-Asia has reported that environmental HRDs made up 33 % of HRDs benefitting from the protection plan in 2017-2018 (19 out of 61 HRDs) and 20 % of urgent appeals that Forum-Asia in 2018 communicated to the Special Rapporteur.

The 2019 Simplified Environmental Assessment identifies the negative impact of “relatively high amount of airplane travel of Secretariat staff and participants for meetings, workshops and trainings organised by FORUM-ASIA as well as organised by other organisations which contribute to carbon emission and air pollution.” To the Evaluation Team it seems clear that opportunities for using virtual learning through webinars and e-learning (online modules) could be much better explored. Board meetings and other meetings involving participants from several countries could to a much higher extent be held through web conferencing. As mentioned below, environmental aspects should also be included in Forum-Asia’s procurement policy.

4.4.4 Conflict sensitivity

The conflict perspective is one of the thematic perspectives highlighted in Swedish development cooperation. Applying a conflict perspective is, according to Sida, “essentially about having a good knowledge about the context where a development program is implemented, taking into account how contextual factors affect the implementation of a development program, and how the development program can intentionally or unintentionally affect ongoing and submerged conflicts/tensions.”⁵⁸

Desk review and interviews by the Evaluation Team did not indicate that Forum-Asia and its work have contributed to conflict or caused harm. Together with its members, Forum-Asia is contributing to giving marginalized and vulnerable groups “voice”, i.e. an increased ability to raise their concerns with decision makers, which can contribute to addressing abuse and solving conflicts through peaceful means, and in particular ensuring that conflicts do not lead to violence. Even though human rights promotion and protection can be associated with serious tension between rightsholders and duty bearers, peaceful actions to safeguard human rights cannot, in the view of the Evaluation Team, be considered contributing to conflicts. Efforts at breaking patterns of impunity, which both Forum-Asia and its partners are striving to contribute to, are generally recognized as essential for preventing future human rights violations and violence.

The Evaluation Team considers Forum-Asia to have good knowledge of the contexts in which it operates, in particular because of its ability to draw on the extensive knowledge of its broad membership. There are examples of Forum-Asia together with

⁵⁸ Sida, Sida’s approach to an integrated conflict perspective, January 2017

other INGOs withdrawing from contexts and alliances which have been assessed to be at risk of developing in a direction that could potentially be harmful from a conflict perspective. Forum-Asia has in recent years also excluded from its membership at least one member considered affiliated with a political party and supporting principles and actions in contravention of established human rights norms. It can also be mentioned that Forum-Asia has acted to reduce serious tension between human rights groups at national level.

4.5 ORGANIZATIONAL ABILITIES

4.5.1 Implementation of past recommendations

This section looks at the extent to which Forum-Asia has implemented key recommendations of past evaluations. These include issues relating to the organization's governance, fundraising and financial management, human resources management and internal communication.

i. Governance

Membership consolidation

The 2015 Dastgeer evaluation recommended that “(a) A process of membership consolidation should be undertaken to enhance the effectiveness of the network. (b) Conditions for becoming and being retained as members should become more stringent. (c) While dormant/passive members should be dropped, invitations to and applications of potentially strong and effective contributors to the network should be extended and accepted.”⁵⁹

Forum-Asia has since the Dastgeer evaluation strived to revitalize its membership. A total of six organizations have been found to be inactive, not living up to Forum-Asia's membership criteria or shown little interest in the organization generally. At the same time, several new organizations have been admitted and the number of members has grown rapidly and currently comprises 67 full members and 14 so called associate members, i.e. members that can participate in activities but do not have voting rights. In the process of accepting new members there has been a focus on groups being led by women and youth. In 2018, organizations from Central Asia were for the first time invited to apply for membership and two organizations from Kazakhstan and one from Kyrgyzstan were accepted as new full members, and a third organization from Kazakhstan became an associate member.

The process of identifying members that no longer meet Forum-Asia's requirements and potential new members has been handled by the Secretariat under guidance of the Sub-Committee on Governance and Membership Development and review of the EC, as provided for in the Governance Manual. The ultimate decision on accepting new

⁵⁹ Ali Dastgeer and Camilla Riesenfeld, Evaluation of FORUM-ASIA's Performance and Achievements (2011-2014), May 2015

members rest with the GA. There are different views amongst those interviewed by the Evaluation Team on whether Forum-Asia should have increased its membership or not. The Evaluation Team is not aware, however, of any major concerns raised about how this process of revitalizing the membership was handled, even though removing and adding members is obviously a potentially sensitive issue, and it appears that the membership criteria applied are sufficient.

Governance manual

Several evaluations and reviews have raised concerns about an unclear division of labour and responsibilities between different bodies in the organization. The 2016 Review report on policies, systems and practices of Forum-Asia stated for instance that “It is important for Forum-Asia to develop a clear, concise and functional Governance Manual to build a robust, predictable, transparent, accountable and effective system of governance within Forum-Asia.”⁶⁰

A Governance Manual was adopted in December 2018. It addresses governance issues concerning membership, the EC, Sub-committees, as well as integrity commitments of the members. The Manual suggests amendments and additions to relevant sections of the Statutes and By-Laws for approval by the General Assembly. It is of great value for staff and board members trying to understand the functioning of the organization and takes important steps towards ensuring a more comprehensive regulation of Forum-Asia’s governance.

However, to the Evaluation Team it is not always entirely clear which aspects of the Manual that should be applied, and which are just suggestions which have to be approved by the next General Assembly. The Evaluation Team also believes that the Manual could benefit from more consistently showing which policy document, board decision or similar a particular section or statement is based on. In other places, the Manual makes reference to specific articles in the Statutes and By-laws without saying what these articles state, making it necessary for the reader to look up what is stated in these documents to understand the governance issue in question. It is in the Manual suggested that it be updated at least every five years. If a document of this nature should be of value it must, however, be continuously updated to ensure that it correctly reflects the latest policy decisions and allows for corrections to be made.⁶¹

In the past, some EC members have been of the view that they have not been properly informed of Forum-Asia’s work and have therefore not been able to effectively fulfil their oversight role. The SMT and other staff members have at the same time sometimes perceived that the EC has unduly interfered in day-to-day matters. According to

⁶⁰ John Samuel, Review Report on policies, systems and practices of Forum-Asia, Trancivic, 2016

⁶¹ The number of years an Executive Director can hold her or his position is not correctly presented in the current version of the Manual.

interviews, the relationship and division of labour between the EC and the Secretariat is currently working well. The Governance Manual has an important role in guiding this relationship, but as in any organization the future of Forum-Asia's governance will ultimately depend on its members, position holders and staff accepting the limits of their powers.

The Executive Committee's financial oversight role

The EC is responsible for ensuring that the organization maintains proper accounts and that these are audited annually. It also approves budgets and in between GA meetings the organization's annual financial reports submitted to donors. The EC has a Finance and Audit Sub-Committee, which is tasked with assisting the EC in maintaining oversight of the organization's financial health; reviewing annual financial statements and developing and reviewing the Fundraising Plan;

A BDO review of Forum-Asia's internal management and control in July 2019 (hereafter the BDO review) raised concerns, however, that the EC, as well as the SMT, is not regularly discussing and reflecting on the financial situation of the organization, that the EC Sub-Committee on Finance and Audit is not effectively fulfilling its financial oversight role and that EC is not required to have financial management expertise amongst its members and, especially, that the treasurer is not required to have any specific financial competence.

Forum-Asia has in response indicated that it is a membership-based organization that can or should not put in place specific requirements on its board members. To address BDO's concern, the Sub-Committee has instead appointed an adviser assessed to have the required expertise. This action appears appropriate to ensure stronger financial oversight in the short-term but has not helped address BDO's long-term structural concern. The fact that Forum-Asia is a membership based organization with an EC elected amongst its members does not hinder it from putting in place requirements ensuring that it has an EC which comprises specific competences, but it would require a change of the organization's Statutes, which is something that has to be done by the GA. In relation to organization's requirements on its treasurer it should be noted that the Governance Manual actually does say that the Treasurer "is expected to have practical experience and domain knowledge of financial management" (section 4.9.3).

Forum-Asia has in its response to BDO's comments also explained that financial matters are regularly discussed in the SMT and that every EC meeting has dedicated sessions on finance management and audit. It has nevertheless committed to ensure that more attention is paid to these issues in the future and that the discussions held are properly documented. It has recently also been decided that the Finance and Audit Sub-Committee will meet twice a year for purposes of due diligence and verification and that their findings will be documented. As discussed below, the recently established special Staff Finance and Budget Committee has started to work and can also be expected to contribute to greater scrutiny of financial matters.

Induction of Executive Committee members

There are different views of current EC members on the extent of their induction. Some are very positive about the range of background documents received as well as individual briefings and advice from former EC members and current SMT. Others felt induction was minimal in part because EC members had to hit the ground running in order to address immediate challenges consisting of a legal challenge by a former staff and the departure of Director(s). It should be noted that this may not be a major obstacle given that all EC members interviewed stressed they already were familiar with the organization anyway due to their active participation in it as Forum-Asia members over many years.

Senior Management Team capacity and guidance

In 2013 two additional Directors were appointed and a Senior Management Team was established composed of the ED and the two new Directors. The 2016 Samuel review found that it created an added layer of management that not necessarily made the organization more effective. There was also confusion over respective roles and responsibility of SMT members. Sources interviewed during the current evaluation clarified that the size of Forum-Asia's leadership was not intended to be top-heavy but correlated to an anticipated size of the network. There was an expectation that the organization would continue to grow exponentially in staff, financial resources and programmes. The incoming ED and EC could re-assess the need for three directors in relation to current staffing, programme and budget size. In response to a recommendation of the 2016 Samuel review for a clear division of responsibilities, Forum-Asia at the end of 2016 drafted SMT guidelines. They provide greater clarity in many respects such as management oversight of each programme now to be assigned to a director, respective roles of SMT members in preparation and reporting of EC meetings and rules for decision-making in the SMT. The annex to the SMT Guidelines is however out of date as it aligns with a previous programme structure and organigramme and is tailored to specific individuals, two of whom who have since left and a third one is only acting as interim ED.

Due to a SMT changeover and as part of the related transition plan agreed between ED and EC, a Leadership Management Team (LMT) was established “to temporarily replace the SMT structure as of 21 March 2019 until 30 June 2019 or until all vacancies at the SMT level have been filled.”⁶² The LMT consists of director(s) in function – at the time of the evaluation the interim ED and one director - and the managers/team leaders of each of Forum-Asia's programmes. In practice it also quickly started including lower level staff of programmes that are currently without a programme manager, such as the NHRI Advocacy and the Knowledge Development and Management Programmes. The SMT has committed to continue to expand LMT,

⁶² ToR of LMT

presenting it as an excellent platform for sharing and communication and a collective and inclusive leadership framework.

While most staff indeed cited the LMT as one of the recent practices instrumental in an improved staff morale, clearer communication between management and staff and thus better programme delivery, some staff observed no difference in decision-making between SMT and LMT and challenged that despite the stated decision-making “areas” in its ToR, in practice the LMT did not actually give programme managers a say in decisions. To enable management decisions on administrative matters senior management on 26 November 2019 decided to resume SMT meetings that had not been regular given they were considered “subsumed” to be part of LMT.⁶³ As a result at the end of 2019 SMT and LMT operated as complementary bodies. Unless an SMT decision is urgently needed SMT generally meets before LMT at least every two weeks.

If current modality of concurrent SMT/LMT meetings remains, it may need a few adjustments. Updated SMT guidelines should align with the current organogram, programmes and organizational policies (e.g. designated SMT member serving on redressal committee addressing sexual and gender-based harassment complaints). The ToR of the LMT may also need fine-tuning to clarify the extent of decision-making by programme managers. Care should be taken not to duplicate the entire Secretariat in an LMT by drawing in an increasing number of staff. Inclusiveness needs to be balanced by a workable model of decision-making. Eventually the final say rests with the ED.

ii. Fundraising and financial management

Fundraising

The 2015 Dastgeer evaluation noted that Forum-Asia relied on the support of two donors, Sida and Ford Foundation, and that its attempts at broadening its donor base had been limited. Forum-Asia’s financial dependence on Sida has since been reduced, in particular because of a EuropeAid grant which in 2018 provided roughly 83% of the organization’s total income. The current agreement with EuropeAid is, however, coming to an end in mid-2020 and the cooperation with Ford Foundation ended in March 2019. This means that Forum-Asia is in urgent need to secure new funding if its operations should not be affected. Forum-Asia expects that it will be particularly challenging to obtain the high level of non-earmarked core funding the organization has had in recent years. Earmarked funding was in 2018 obtained from Freedom House and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and a few smaller donors which jointly contributed less than 2% of the organization’s total budget.

In a 2019 proposal to Sida, Forum-Asia states that “resource mobilisation and donor diversification will be an absolute priority during the 2020-2022 period.” Several

⁶³ Minutes of SMT meeting

significant steps towards attaining a more solid and diverse funding structure have already been taken. These include the appointment of a programme officer who spends roughly 50% of his time on resource mobilisation and a decision that one of the organization's directors should also give special attention to the issue. In 2019, Forum-Asia obtained at least one new donor with potential to provide more significant support in the future, several proposals were submitted and experiences for more effective responses to calls for proposals were gained according to interviews.

In 2019 Forum-Asia also adopted a new Fundraising Strategy and developed a Fundraising Plan. The Strategy sets out nine different “fundraising vehicles”. Several of these are obvious sources of funding for an organization like Forum-Asia, including bilateral and multilateral donors and charitable foundations and trust. It also includes a number of strategies which may significantly impact on the organization's nature and focus. It is for instance stated that Forum-Asia may “start raising money at the national level” as donors are “allocating less funds to regional-level initiatives and are instead prioritising national-level projects”. While the strategy states that Forum-Asia “will ensure that it is not competing with its own members and other national groups”, it is difficult to see how this will be maintained in practice and how Forum-Asia will secure its added value as a regional organization if it strives to access such funding. The strategy also states that Forum-Asia may bid for consultancies, including in areas of research, evaluation and capacity development as long as it is compatible with the overall purpose of the organization. For a non-profit organization to bid on a for-profit market is not uncomplicated, however, and Forum-Asia would probably have to make significant structural adjustments if it should combine the role of an NGO with the role of a consultancy.

Another “vehicle” is the so-called Asia Dignity Fund (ADF) which Forum-Asia is planning to incubate and establish. Funds should according to interviews be raised from current human rights donors, but it is also hoped that the Fund will be able to attract funding from philanthropists and foundations that have not traditionally contributed to the human rights movement in Asia. Even though the ADF according to the Fundraising Strategy will be a legal entity separate from Forum-Asia, the idea raises a number of questions and concerns, including whether it is appropriate for Forum-Asia to have more than an advocacy role in relation to funding of the human rights community and whether it has the required expertise and knowledge required to establish a mechanism of this nature. Whether it is attractive for donors to channel funds to a funding mechanism that earmarks, as planned, some of the funds for a particular organization, i.e. Forum-Asia, also seems questionable.

The creation of a new large sub-granting mechanism for human rights groups would also come with a number of other challenges that inevitably are related to a centralization of money and power. There is a risk that existing difficulties in diversifying funding faced by many organizations are exacerbated. Experience from other contexts shows that groups that do not conform to a mainstream agenda often perceive that similar types of mechanisms attracting donor funding for purposes of sub-

granting in effect undermine their possibilities of accessing funding. Members have also raised concerns that ADF draws attention from more pressing issues for the Forum-Asia Secretariat to work on. In response to these concerns, responsibility for developing the ADF idea has been made a matter for the EC rather than a task for the Secretariat.

It should be noted that even though ADF is intended to be a separate legal entity, the 2019 proposal to Sida indicates that Forum-Asia foresees that the organization itself may play a future sub-granting role. The funds Forum-Asia has channelled to other organizations in recent years are limited, but the BDO Review found a need for the organization to develop guidelines on the issue, including of capacity assessments of recipient organizations. In November 2019, the EC adopted a new procedure for assessing organizations receiving funds from Forum-Asia.

Financial management and procurement

The BDO Review recommended that Forum-Asia should “ensure that accounting team members are properly trained and aware of the financial reporting requirements of the donor organizations, and that procurement committee members have the necessary procurement training and certifications...”⁶⁴ Forum-Asia has responded that it does not currently have the resources required for the trainings. While the Evaluation Team shares the impression of a need to enhance capacity in these areas it assumes that Forum-Asia must have sufficient inhouse capacity to train the procurement committee members on procurement and finance staff on donor requirements.

The revised procurement policy adopted by the EC in August 2019 specifies the different types of procurement that are applied, the thresholds at which these procurements apply, and the authorisation procedure for purchases, as called for by BDO. The policy also requires a three-way matching between the invoice received, the purchase order and goods received note called for by BDO. Spot checks carried out by the ET showed appropriate documentation of the procurement process. Nevertheless, interviews indicate awareness and understanding of the procurement policy still needs to be strengthened amongst concerned staff. While not a recommendation raised in past audits, it should be noted that the procurement policy does not include provisions aimed at integrating environmental, human rights and gender equality standards into the procurement process.

BDO’s 2019 report recommends Forum-Asia to ensure that “comparison of actual against budgeted expenditure is regularly carried out and that significant variances are properly investigated and explained.”⁶⁵ The comparison should be reviewed and

⁶⁴ BDO, Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development: Review of Internal Management Control, July 2019

⁶⁵ BDO, Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development: Review of Internal Management Control, July 2019

approved by an appropriate senior management and the review and approval should be documented. It is also said that Forum-Asia should ensure that budgeting policies and procedures are properly documented, and it is recommended that Forum-Asia should have a written policy that sets out a proper process for review and approval where there are significant budget amendments.

Forum-Asia has explained that it regularly compares actual against budgeted expenditure and the main challenge appears to be one of proper documentation. A spot check performed indicates that comparisons of actual and budgeted expenditures are performed and now properly documented. A new Budget Development and Management Guideline dealing with budget preparation, implementation, monitoring, changes and verification has been produced. A template to keep a track record of budget reallocation and approvals has been developed and is used. As a general measure to strengthening the budget management process, a new Staff Finance and Budget Management Committee has been established to discuss budget development and adjustment issues and make recommendations to SMT for approval. According to interviews, the committee has started to meet but its role and functioning may not yet be entirely clear to all of its members. It nevertheless appears that the committee can be an important measure for strengthening the budget management process. The need for a committee of this nature also appears to confirm, however, the need for finance staff training.

iii. Human resources management

Human resources management policy and manual

The 2016 Samuel review recommended that Forum-Asia develops a robust and comprehensive Human Resource/People Management Manual in consonance with the values, culture and character of the organization. A review of Forum-Asia policy framework by the Evaluation Team found that a Staff Handbook developed in 2017 includes Terms and Conditions of Service as well as policies on Recruitment, Induction, Performance Management, Sexual and Gender Based Harassment in the Workplace. The Handbook also provides a list of “further organizational policies” including Code of Conduct, Human Rights Interns Policy, Financial Rules and Regulations Equipment Of Goods And Services Policy, Gender Policy, Environmental Protection Policy, Communications Policy and SMT Guidelines. However, the latter set of policies are not integrated or annexed in full to the handbook. The GMWG survey in mid 2018 found some hurdles in accessing policies on NextCloud, indicating its directory needs improvements. In November 2019 the SMT flagged that recently adopted policies should also be annexed to the Staff Handbook. There is thus a need for consolidation of all policies and to make them easily accessible in full within one manual or clearly organized e-platform.

According to interviews conducted for this evaluation in 2019 Forum-Asia staff took the initiative to develop a Well-Being Policy, a clear indication that not all staff needs were met in existing policies. The draft policy suggests “to employ a dedicated and qualified human resource person to overlook the implementation all staff related

policies in the organization.” It remains to be seen whether a part-time consultant hired for 2020 can fulfill staff expectations. The consultant has been found very helpful by all staff and management in the past but four days a month may not suffice. In the long term it seems more effective to give priority to building human resource management capacity of staff rather than to have a consultant managing human resources. Staff also requested SMT to ensure availability of a psychosocial counsellor. The Well-Being Policy also works towards institutionalising working from home in specific circumstances for up to 20 days per year. Given increasing difficulties with obtaining work permits in host countries of some Forum-Asia offices, Forum-Asia leadership has flagged working from home may become a new model for Forum-Asia.

Based on evaluation interviews, there appears to be an unwritten rule that there is a pathway for interns/fellows who perform well to gain employment with Forum-Asia as a Programme Associate. It is also common practice for well performing staff to be promoted after three years. A review of board minutes reveal that to make promotions policy-guided and establish their predictability, Staff Promotion Guidelines have been developed and discussed with the board in 2019. EC suggested SMT to fine-tune the guidelines after consultations with staff.

Staff induction and teambuilding

The 2016 Samuel review found that Forum-Asia did not have a clear system and process of induction for newly recruited staff. A 2017 Staff handbook now has a clear Induction Policy tasking the Administration team and relevant supervisor with the induction. Staff should be provided with an electronic set of documents and briefing sessions with colleagues of all programmes should be scheduled. Interviews with Forum-Asia staff confirm that overall this policy is consistently implemented. During periods when the organization had a Human Resources Management Consultant, she led the induction process. Cybersecurity has been part of the induction process of recent recruits. The GMWG staff survey mid-2018 revealed some gaps: Newly recruited staff was not aware of a Gender Policy, other staff knew it existed but had not actually been briefed on it.

Forum-Asia has annual planning meetings in the beginning of the year, as well as mid-term reviews. Discussions during those events inherently contribute to building a common vision. Through the knowledge sharing sessions of the GMWG, staff have also started to build a collective understanding on gender. The draft Well-Being Policy suggest to SMT that “depending on the availability of resources, activities to ensure well-being may be organized to provide rest and respite for Forum-Asia staff members. The said activities may be in form of: staff retreat, bonding activities, sports, and other relevant activities.”

Staff performance planning and assessments

A review of Forum-Asia’s policy framework confirms that Forum-Asia has developed a Performance Management Policy and an improved and expanded policy (to also include behavioural competencies) has been integrated in the November 2017 Staff

Handbook. Staff should prepare annual performance plans in collaboration with their direct supervisor as well as higher line management levels (section 3 of the policy). Staff performance should be continuously monitored by supervisors at review meetings with staff preferably on a quarterly basis but at a minimum twice a year (section 4). An annual evaluation process involves a self-assessment by staff, feedback from peers, immediate supervisor, task managers and successive levels of management as well as sub-ordinates. This information should be discussed at a meeting between staff and their supervisor and a related rating should then be recorded in a written summary as per annual performance template. A final meeting with an evaluation panel composed of the supervisor and the supervisor's supervisor serves as a dialogue on the content of the written evaluation and could suggest remedial action (section 6).

There are arguably some inconsistencies within the policy itself such as; the required frequency of the review meetings (quarterly vs. twice a year), the mandatory or optional ('may include') nature of feedback from supervisor, the need for sharing evaluation ratings with the entire SMT (three member SMT while for most staff the evaluation panel would only include one or two SMT members). Furthermore, evaluation interviews gave indications that this policy is not strictly adhered to. Most staff are confident that they developed a performance plan but less confident on its annual occurrence and even less confident on whether or not they have regular review meetings with supervisors and annual meetings with an evaluation panel.

Several staff reported that they had not received a written summary of the evaluation, at times not even after they had specifically requested it. There are misconceptions among staff, including at senior level, on the mandatory nature of written performance records. The absence of a dedicated human resources management staff or consultant in 2018-2019 may have contributed to these weaknesses, as per Performance Management Policy the Human Resources Officer is tasked with scheduling milestones of the evaluation process. While the policy envisages a two-way performance assessment, staff reported some reluctance from management levels to receiving feedback from sub-ordinates. A reading of minutes of EC and SMT meetings in November 2019 shows an acknowledgement that more needs to be done to put in place a robust performance management process but that EC and SMT are confident the Human Resources Management Consultant will manage this process in 2020. The Evaluation Team believes priority should be given to building capacity of staff and leadership on performance management rather than the consultant leading the process. Forum-Asia has assured the ET that this will be the approach of the consultant.

Staff development

Learning and Development is a component (section 8) of the performance management policy incorporated in the 2017 Staff Handbook. Learning opportunities should enhance professional skills and assist staff in meeting annual deliverables. Staff can pursue development during work time provided that it was agreed with supervisors and included in the annual performance plan. A random sampling of staff of the East Asia and ASEAN programme and the South Asia programme confirmed that they have all

benefitted from staff development. However, these learning opportunities were mostly identified by staff and covered through external support (at no cost to Forum-Asia). A review of the budget in recent years confirms budget allocated for staff development has been underspent.⁶⁶ It should be noted however that FA did invest in staff learning by allocating six out of 55 participant opportunities to Forum-Asia staff in 2017 and 2018 sessions of the GALP, Forum-Asia's own current flagship capacity development programme.

iv. Internal communication

According to evaluation interviews with Forum-Asia staff the use of the above mentioned online storage and sharing platform NextCloud in the Secretariat has improved communication flow as all documents are now more easily accessible to staff. A consolidated calendar allows staff to provide inputs for each other's upcoming missions. Programme-designated WhatsApp groups are also commonly used by staff to have easy exchange of information. Some staff also joined a different programme's WhatsApp group to keep informed and to build upon mutual outputs. The 2019 LMT (see above) has ensured an improved flow of information between directors and programme managers.

Communications between staff and the EC may need strengthening. EC meetings tend to include updates by key programme staff. However, some staff indicated there is limited opportunity for questions from staff to EC. Some staff feel this is at present only possible on a bilateral basis, not with the EC as whole. EC members in interviews with the Evaluation Team assured that they are open to direct engagement with staff. Staff representation is also recognised in the Staff Handbook's terms and conditions of service (article 8). It includes the right of staff representatives to meet with the Chairperson of the EC. However, allegedly previous leadership discouraged this and staff representation at EC only became institutionalized in 2019. A summary of EC decisions is communicated to staff but staff representatives have requested access to the full minutes of EC meetings. SMT feel this may not always be appropriate.

4.5.2 Learning and monitoring capacity

As shown above, Forum-Asia has during the past couple of years, and in particular in recent months, made extensive efforts to implement recommendations put forward in external reviews and evaluations, not least on matters relating to the overall functioning of the organization. Other examples of Forum-Asia's capacity to adjust its operations to what has worked well and less well range from major reforms decided during the most recent General Assembly meeting to staff adjustments in the Secretariat and adjustments to improve regular activities. Some interviewees believe, however, that the

⁶⁶ For 2017 USD 27 000 was budgeted for "Organisational/Staff Development" but only USD 3,400 was used. For 2018 USD 14,000 was budgeted and again only USD 3 400 used. In 2018 there was also some funds allocated (USD 5,500) and used (USD 1,400) for staff training on project management.

organization has not sufficiently adjusted its programmes to the changing context in which it operates.

Forum-Asia uses a broad range of tools for learning and monitoring. The organization's Strategy Plan for the period 2016-2022 and the related log-frame provides overall guidance for the organization's formal learning processes. The log-frame is divided into four Specific Objectives (which, as mentioned, have changed somewhat during the period covered by the evaluation) with corresponding results and indicators. However, the primary organizing principle of FA's narrative, as well as financial, progress reports is not the Specific Objectives. The central part of the narrative report are instead structured around the organization's individual programmes.

While it is somewhat inefficient to have a logical framework and a narrative reporting structure that are not synchronized, both the narrative progress report and the so called consolidated progress reports (which are an updated results assessment framework) do provide essential information about the organization's work and the effects of individual activities. There is, however, room for more frank reflections on the extent to which programmes and activities are actually contributing to outcome level results. The Evaluation Team's interviews indicate that Forum-Asia's current PME team has the capacity, plans and commitment to further strengthen results assessment efforts and learning.

Amongst Forum-Asia's formal learning structures are the internal annual reviews and mid-term reviews of the organization's annual action plans, as well as regular reviews of selected strategies such as the review of the Fundraising Strategy which is scheduled to take place in September every year. Even though the monthly staff meetings and the recently introduced LMT meetings may be more information sharing rather than structured learning sessions, a sound flow of information between different parts of an organization can be regarded as a pre-condition for learning. The internal data sharing and storing system NextCloud is according to several interviewees also contributing to an increased flow of information, as is an improved relationship between the staff and the leadership of the organization generally.

One of the core purposes of Forum-Asia is to promote learning between human rights organizations working on different thematic issues and in different geographical contexts. Through newsletters and other communication outputs, regional workshops, trainings, committee meetings and its General Assembly Forum-Asia does provide various opportunities for exchange between members. Forum-Asia's data collection as well as the Evaluation Team's interviews and survey indicate that some learning takes place between members during these sessions. The new Development and Knowledge Management initiative can also facilitate learning between Forum-Asia members and other representatives of the human rights community by providing these actors a space to share their experiences and reflections, but the extent to which it actually does so seems uncertain.

5 Conclusions

This section presents the conclusions the Evaluation Team draws from the findings presented above. The conclusions are structured around the overarching criteria and issues guiding the evaluation.

5.1 RELEVANCE

Forum-Asia is a highly relevant network for many key actors in the Asian human rights community. It gives them voice, connects them to the international arena, assists them in situations of crisis and offers opportunities for capacity building. As a result of an increased membership, its relevance as an advocacy actor has increased. At the same time, as Forum-Asia increases its membership and strives to diversify its funding base there is a risk that it stretches its limited resources too thin and thereby loses both relevance and effectiveness. In other words, Forum-Asia and its members and donors have to accept that Forum-Asia cannot be all things to all actors and that it cannot try to meet all needs of all its members. For the member organizations, most important are those programmes which directly increase their effectiveness and enhance their capacity and security.

In relation to the goals of Sweden's regional strategy for development cooperation in Asia and the Pacific region, as well as in relation to EU's broad main objective in Asia, Forum-Asia is a highly relevant actor. In some of its programmes it is, however, possible for the organization to ensure that it more effectively and consistently draws on its added value as a regional membership-based human rights organization. While there are many actors that can assist the member organizations with issues of organizational development and programme management, there are few other actors that have the knowledge and resources to provide capacity development on issues of human rights.

5.2 EFFECTIVENESS

In general, all programmes have made steady contributions towards the four specific objectives (SO) Forum-Asia sets out to achieve, and programme focus aligns with the thematic priorities of its strategic plan. Fostering an environment conducive for better human rights protection in Asia (SO2) is seemingly the area where the most significant results have been achieved. This is not surprising as the objective closely aligns with the idea of solidarity with HRDs that drives the network. There is little doubt that without Forum-Asia HRDs in the region would be less protected. Another objective where there is considerable progress towards results is an enhanced impact of HRD advocacy, at least at UN level (SO3). Members and diplomats alike view FA as a critical network that – informed by its members – effectively brings first-hand

experiences of Asian HRDs and voices of rights-holders in Asian communities to the international arena. Impact at the ASEAN and SAARC level has been far less successful, due to political and other factors. Nevertheless, Forum-Asia's persistence in continued engagements in particular with AICHR are appreciated insofar as civil society recognises that some level of engagement needs to be sustained. It is more a question of how much resources are poured into it.

To achieve an enhanced advocacy capacity of Asian CSOs and HRDs (SO1) Forum-Asia has facilitated a lot of training initiatives but some questions remain about their quality and relevance. To the Evaluation Team it is clear that Forum-Asia adds most value when it focuses its efforts on issues that are best addressed at a regional level and are of direct relevance from a human rights perspective. It has been suggested that Forum-Asia could develop a more coherent approach on building capacity of the human rights movement in the region, informed by a scoping exercise with Forum-Asia members to assess their advocacy capacity needs. Forum-Asia at present does not make significant use of online training and webinars, a cost-effective and environmentally friendly alternative option that could complement face-to-face training.

Contributing to positive human rights developments requires both an ability to use windows of opportunity and an ability to carry out sustained campaigns. While Forum-Asia has been fairly successful in maintaining a focus on what it considers as key human rights issues, it has rarely developed this focus into broad and sustained campaigns. Many interviewees have noted that the systematic data collection and documentation work carried out on issues such as NHRIs and the functioning of judiciaries will be of limited value unless they are accompanied by much more well-developed advocacy campaigns involving both Forum-Asia and its member organizations.

5.3 EFFICIENCY

Forum-Asia are in financial terms prioritizing programmes that have the greatest capacity to show results and that are most appreciated by members. The costs of individual capacity building activities appear reasonable. To assess costs in relation to activities and outputs on the basis of its financial reports is, however, not straightforward. Considering the significant costs associated with most regional trainings, consultation and workshop activities, it seems relevant for Forum-Asia to amend the structure of its financial reports to facilitate access to detailed information about the costs of different activities. Forum-Asia has become better at developing realistic budgets and have taken promising steps towards further improving the budgeting process.

The Geneva office is relevant and effective, but the costs have been high in relation to the organization's overall budget. The office has been able to carry out its core activities also after the reduction of one staff member at the end of 2018. From an efficiency perspective, taking into account also that many members receive assistance from other

organizations with their UN advocacy efforts, it is thus reasonable to maintain the current level of presence also during coming years.

As the cost of hiring staff in Jakarta is much lower than in Geneva, the total costs of the Jakarta office are significantly lower than the costs of the Geneva office. Even though the effectiveness of the Jakarta office is impacted by the limited relevance of the ASEAN human rights machinery, the efficiency of the ASEAN advocacy office is, however, best served by Forum-Asia maintaining a presence in Jakarta. Moving the operations to Bangkok would not reduce costs notably. The costs of the Kathmandu office are low, as is the added value of the office. It seems unlikely that the planned strengthening of the Kathmandu office with one additional staff member will lead to significantly better results and increased efficiency.

5.4 SWEDISH DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION PERSPECTIVES

Overall, the Evaluation Team assesses that Forum-Asia through its democratic membership structure, and its focus on strengthening the influence and capacity of its member organizations, has a reasonable system for ensuring target group influence over the organization's strategic direction and programme implementation even though effectiveness and fairness of this system appears to be somewhat undermined by informal power structures and alliances. A Secretariat that operates under the strategic direction and supervision of the elected EC, but independently decides on the day to day management of the organization is essential. While the Dastgeer evaluation's observation of a need for "greater consultation of members on Forum-Asia strategy, programmes and emerging challenges" still appears to have some relevance the overall opportunities for the members organizations to have a fair say in activity design, planning and follow-up have improved. A more frequent use of web conferencing could potentially help to further improve the situation.

Gender equality has been integrated in many Forum-Asia publications, in advocacy learning programmes and in Forum-Asia's policy framework but to a far lesser extent in programme design. Knowledgeable and passionate staff at the Secretariat are currently driving gender mainstreaming by improving gender policies (non-binary), developing operational tools (checklists) and facilitating regular knowledge sharing sessions for programme staff. An operational accountability mechanism has now further progressed for sexual and gender-based harassment in the workplace than for other grievances and consideration could be given to consolidating all in one grievance mechanisms. Environmental mainstreaming in Forum-Asia's policy framework has far less progressed compared to gender mainstreaming. Forum-Asia has openly acknowledged its Environmental Impact Policy needs an overhaul. Environment is not integrated in other programme policies such as procurement and in programme design. Nevertheless, the plight of environmental HRDs and corporate responsibility for environmental protection is visible in recent Forum-Asia publications and advocacy learning programmes.

5.5 ORGANIZATIONAL ABILITIES

Overall the governance and management of Forum-Asia appears to be in a better shape than it has been in a long time. The organization's membership has been expanded and steps taken to revitalize it. A Governance Manual, which can contribute to a healthy relationship between the organization's governing bodies and the Secretariat, was adopted in late 2018. The Manual can, however, be further improved and it must be ensured that it remains a living document that is updated in a timely manner to reflect any policy related changes. Steps have recently been taken towards improved communication between the EC and staff, and internal communication in the Secretariat has been strengthened. The SMT guidelines need to be updated and consideration given to whether the organization, given its current size, needs three directors.

The EC has taken steps to strengthen its financial oversight role, and the Secretariat has acted effectively to address a range of the financial management related recommendations put forward in recent reviews. There appears to remain, however, a need for in-house training of finance and management staff on donor requirements and on the procurement process.

Forum-Asia has in line with past recommendations developed a new Staff Handbook. As with other Forum-Asia policies, guidelines and manuals, it needs a system for ensuring effective updating in a timely manner. The staff performance assessment system needs to be strengthened and the in-house human resources capacity developed.

Significant and important work has been done to strengthen Forum-Asia's fundraising capacity. There are, however, few convincing arguments as to why Forum-Asia would be an appropriate sub-granting actor or the right actor to facilitate the creation of a new funding mechanism. Sub-granting is after all a specialized skill which Forum-Asia has little experience of and to develop the skills and set up the systems needed takes time. Needless to say, the fact that there is a general shortage of funds for human rights work will not be addressed by the fact that Forum-Asia or ADF, rather than a more specialized and well-developed funding mechanism, channels funds to national and local human rights groups.

In many ways, learning and monitoring are more a matter of organizational culture than a matter of structures and systems. However, promoting systematic collection of evidence of "what works" and ensuring that time is set aside for reflection and discussion can in conducive circumstances contribute to enhancing a culture in which staff members continuously reflect on "what works", strive to learn from past successes and failures, and adjusts project implementation in accordance with such learning. Forum-Asia have such structures in place, even though there is still room to further engage staff and members in the learning process. The organization's capacity to learn and more radically adjust its programmes in line with learning from past experiences and in line with changing demands is, however seriously challenged by the fact that

significant changes to its current set of programmes will be ‘politically’ sensitive and likely met with serious opposition from some member organization that will perceive that they are disadvantaged by such a move.

Overall, Forum-Asia has during the past year or so made considerable efforts to address shortcomings in its administrative and financial management processes and systems. The recommendations of past evaluations and reviews have to a high extent been addressed. While there undoubtedly was a need for the organization to strengthen its administrative structures and capacities, these efforts are time and energy consuming. It is, thus, essential that Forum-Asia and its donors reach a point in which the organization can primarily focus on developing its human rights strategies and strengthening its programmes, while adjusting and improving its financial and management structures as necessary.

6 Recommendations

This section sets out the Evaluation Team's key recommendations. Forum-Asia is encouraged to also consider the suggestions on more specific issues raised in the Findings section of this report even though those suggestions have not necessarily been formulated as specific recommendations in this section.

- Forum Asia should ensure that it does not stretch its limited capacity to the extent that its effectiveness is impaired.
- Forum-Asia should strive to more effectively and consistently draw on its added value as a regional membership-based human rights organization. The means among other things that it should not take on activities that can be done by national organizations and focus on human rights related capacity development of partners rather than to enhance their capacity around organizational development and programme management. The latter issues are of vital importance but can be better delivered by specialized providers.
- Forum-Asia and its donors should ensure that the organization can primarily focus on developing its human rights strategies and strengthening its programmes, while adjusting and improving its financial and management structures as necessary.
- In coordination with relevant partners Forum-Asia should develop a coherent capacity building strategy informed by an assessment of Forum-Asia members' advocacy capacity needs. The strategy should give due consideration to Forum-Asia's added value as an organization with a regional perspective and a core human rights mandate and should consider alternative/complimentary use of online training and webinars.
- Forum-Asia should discuss with its members what level of resources should be allocated to ASEAN and SAARC related advocacy, in view of the political nature and ineffectiveness of these mechanisms.
- Forum-Asia with its member organizations should develop sustained campaigns on key human rights issues. The campaigns should be evidence-based, building on Forum-Asia's systematic data collection and documentation work.
- Forum-Asia should continue to strengthen the member organizations' opportunities to reflect on and influence the organization's overall strategic direction in light of changing human rights contexts and challenges. Better use of web conferencing can help facilitate this process.

- Forum-Asia should continue to develop its gender mainstreaming approach and in particular give attention to gender in programme design, implementation and follow-up.
- Forum Asia should update and operationalize its Environmental Impact Policy and integrate environment in other policies such as procurement and in programme design. Forum-Asia should facilitate capacity building of staff on environmental mainstreaming, which will potentially have multiplying effect on Forum-Asia members.
- Forum-Asia should strengthen its Governance Manual in line with the suggestions set out in the findings section of this report.
- Forum-Asia should continue its more inclusive management approach through the LMT preceding SMT meetings. SMT guidelines should be updated and Forum-Asia should in view of its current size of operations reconsider the necessity of three directors.
- Forum-Asia should put in place a routine which ensures that an up-to-date version of all its organizational policies adopted by EC are easily accessible and clearly organized (directory) in a one-stop electronic platform such as NextCloud; and all newly recruited staff are properly briefed on them.
- Forum-Asia should organize, in-house, training for finance and management staff on donor requirements and on the procurement process.
- Forum-Asia should consider amending the structure of its financial reports in order to facilitate an assessment of costs-effectiveness of capacity development activities.
- Forum-Asia should revise the staff performance assessment system and develop the in-house human resources capacity.
- Forum-Asia should consider establishing a whistle blower mechanism and one single grievance mechanism for all ethics violations.
- In line with the recommendation that Forum-Asia should focus on its core as a human rights organization, the organization should avoid entering into a sub-granting role. It should also strive to find an appropriate actor that can take over the work that has been done towards the establishment of the Asian Dignity Fund.

Annex 1 – Documentation

Author	Title	Date
European External Action Service	Asia	15 June 2016
Forum-Asia	Annual Report (public)	2015
Forum-Asia	Annual Report (public)	2016
Forum-Asia	Annual Report (public)	2017
Forum-Asia	Annual Report (public)	2018
Forum-Asia	Consolidated Year-End Progress Report (donor)	January - December 2015
Forum-Asia	Financial Report (Income and Expenditure Statement) - Excel	January - December 2015
Forum-Asia	Financial Report (Profit and Loss by Class) - Excel	January - December 2015
Forum-Asia	Annual Programme Assessment Report (donor)	January – December 2016
Forum-Asia	Appendix A. Progress towards Overall Objective, Specific Objectives, and Indicators (PME) – Excel	January – December 2016
Forum-Asia	Annex B: List of Statements, Press-releases, Reports, Publications, Media Briefings, Events Jointly Organised at UN HRC, Workshops, Conferences and Consultations, Advocacy Activities, Trainings, HRDs Supported by the Protection Plan, and Unplanned Activities	January - December 2016
Forum-Asia	Balance sheet	31 December 2017(file date 18/04/2018)
Forum-Asia	Financial report (expected income vs. actual income)	January – December 2017 (file date 18/04/2018)
Forum-Asia	Financial report (income by donor)	January – December 2017 (file date 18/04/2018)
Forum-Asia	Annual Programme Assessment Report (donor)	January – December 2018
Forum-Asia	Annex A: Progress towards Overall Objective, Specific Objectives, and	January – December 2018

	Achievements by Indicators. (PDF & Excel)	
Forum-Asia	Annex B: List of Statements, Press-releases, Reports, Publications, Media Briefings, Events Jointly Organised at UN HRC, Workshops, Conferences and Consultations, Advocacy Activities, Trainings, HRDs Supported by the Protection Plan, and Unplanned Activities. (PDF & Excel)	January – December 2018
Forum-Asia	Minutes of Annual Review Meeting between Sida and Forum-Asia	2015 (16 October)
Forum-Asia	Minutes of Annual Review Meeting between Sida and Forum-Asia	2016 (15 June)
Forum-Asia	Minutes of Annual Review Meeting between Sida and Forum-Asia	2017 (22 June)
Forum-Asia	Minutes of Annual Review Meeting between Sida and Forum-Asia	2018 (26 July)
Forum-Asia	Strategic Plan	2016-2022
Forum-Asia	Statutes	Adopted by GA on 13 Feb 2006, last amended on 29 Sept 2018
Forum-Asia	By-Laws	Adopted by GA on 22 Nov 2009, last amended on 22 Sept 2018
Forum-Asia	Environmental Impact Policy	2011
Forum-Asia	Gender Policy	Adopted by EC on 14-15 August 2012
Forum-Asia	Guidelines of Senior Management Team (SMT)	25 October 2016
Forum-Asia	Staff Handbook	November 2017
Forum-Asia	Governance Matters A Manual for Effective Governance	December 2018
Forum-Asia	Financial Rules and Regulations (FRR)	Approved by EC 18-20 Nov 2016; Revised September 2018
Forum-Asia	Procurement Policy of Goods and Services (Annexe 1 of the Financial Rules and Regulations:)	Approved by EC on 24 August 2019
Forum-Asia	Financial Transaction Policy (To be incorporated into FRR Chapter 3: Financial Procedures as point number 3.5.9)	Approved by EC on 24 August 2019

Forum-Asia	Report on 9th General Assembly (and its decisions) Denpasar (Bali), Indonesia	28-30 September 2018
Forum-Asia	Staff list	4 November 2019
Forum-Asia	Membership Directory of FORUM-ASIA	Sept 2019
Forum-Asia	Organisation-wide logical framework	October 2019
Forum-Asia	EuropeAid/European Commission, Civil Society and Local Authorities Strengthening Regional, European and Global CSO Umbrella Organisations, Application form for a Framework Partnership Agreement and related Grant Application Form	12/06/2015 (final 2 June 2016)
Forum-Asia	“Institutional Three-year Core Grant Proposal”	2011-2013 (Version 26 October 2011)
Forum-Asia & Sida	Agreement between Sida and Forum-Asia on core support during 1 June 2011- 31 December 2016 (Sida Contribution No: 51020016)	12 Dec 2011 (date of signatures)
Forum-Asia & Sida	Request for No-Cost Extension of Sida Contribution (activity period extended until 30 September 2017)	22 Feb 2017 (approval SIDA)
Forum-Asia & Sida	Third amendment to Agreement between Sida and Forum-Asia on core support during 1 June 2011- 31 December 2016 (Sida Contribution No: 51020016)	20 Oct 2017
Forum-Asia & Sida	Fourth amendment to Agreement between Sida and Forum-Asia on core support during 1 June 2011- 31 December 2016 (Sida Contribution No: 51020016)	28/06/2019
(Forum-Asia commissioned) Dr Mike Hayes	Outcome-Based Evaluation through Participatory Process of Forum-Asia’s Results in January 2008-June 2010	25 August 2010
(Forum-Asia commissioned) John Samuel & Trancivic	Review Report on Policies, Systems and Practises of Forum-Asia	2016 (ToR Dec 2015)
(Sida commissioned) Ali Dastgeer & Camilla Riesenfeld	Evaluation of Forum-Asia's Performance and Achievements (2011-2014) - Final Report	13 May 2015
(Sida commissioned) BDO	Review of internal management and control - Final Report	25 July 2019
(Sida commissioned)	System Based Audit Of Forum-Asia	14 June 2012

Professional Management Lina Lenefors & Arne Svensson		
Save the Children	Practice Standards in Children's Participation	2005
Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation	Program Evaluation Standards, https://jcsee.org/program/	2010
Forum-Asia (submitted to Sida)	Creating a Conducive Environment for Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Sustainable Development in Asia (including annexes)	15 November 2019
Forum-Asia	(Draft) Development and Fundraising Strategy	9 October 2019
Forum-Asia	(Draft) Development and Fundraising Plan (2019-2022)	9 October 2019
(Forum Asia commissioned)	Asia Dignity Fund Trend Analysis & Strategic Framework	June 2019
(Forum Asia commissioned)	Asia Dignity Fund Business Plan June 2019	June 2019
(Forum Asia commissioned)	ANNEX of Discussants Asia Dignity Fund – Trend Analysis, Strategic Framework and Business Plan March and April 2019	June 2019
Forum-Asia	Code of Conduct for Staff	undated
Forum-Asia	Draft Well-Being Policy	20196
Forum-Asia	Communication Strategy	2017 version
Forum-Asia	Statement policy	2016
Forum-Asia	Simplified Environmental Assessment	15 November 2019
Forum-Asia	GMWG Qualitative Results of Gender Policy Survey	2018
Forum-Asia	GMWG Qualitative Results of Sexual Harassment Policy Survey	2018
Forum-Asia	ToR for GMWG	August 2019 (approved by EC)
Forum-Asia	Draft ToR Redressal Committee for Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment in the Work Place	June 2019
Forum-Asia	Gender Mainstreaming Checklist	2018 (update)

Forum-Asia	Draft Terms of Reference for Gender Advisor/Consultant Gender Mainstreaming and Implementation of Gender Policy in Forum-Asia	2019
Forum-Asia	List of gender knowledge sharing sessions by GMWG	2018-2019
Forum-Asia	Emailed communication by EC Chair to Forum-Asia members on Forum-Asia's gender policies	30 October 2019
Forum-Asia	Organizational Chart	December 2019
Forum-Asia	Mission Report Template	2018 (update)
Forum-Asia	Mission Proposal template	2018 (update)
Forum-Asia	Terms of Reference Leadership Management Team	March 2019
Forum-Asia	SMT Minutes Meeting	26 November, 16 December and 26 December 2019
Forum-Asia	EC draft summary records and decisions	30 October-1 November 2019
Forum-Asia	Budget development and management guidelines	2019
Forum-Asia	Procedures for assessing recipient organisations	
Forum-Asia	Manual Protection Plan for Human Rights Defenders at Risk	2017 (update)
Forum-Asia	Pre-survey results Security training 25-27 November 2019	2019
Forum-Asia	Security check-list analysis 28-30 May 2018	2018
Forum-Asia	Pre-training security checklist (template)	2018
Forum-Asia	Third GALAA documentation	August 2015
Forum-Asia	Fourth GALAA documentation	August 2016
Forum-Asia	First GALP report	November 2017
Forum-Asia	Post training survey GALP 1	February 2018
Forum-Asia	Second GALP report	November 2018
Forum-Asia	Post training survey GALP 1	February 2019
Forum-Asia	Post training survey results Campaign Accelerator Training (2-3 May 2019 Bangkok, Thailand)	September 2019
Forum-Asia	Post-Workshop Survey Leadership and Secure Communication Capacity Building Workshop for Young HRDs in Bangladesh; 25-27 July 2018; Kathmandu, Nepal	November 2018
Forum-Asia	Evaluation Forms Regional Workshop on Monitoring and Documenting the Threat to Civic Space Freedom of Expression	May 2018

	Peaceful Assembly and Association and its Impact on Pre and Post-Election; 23-25 May 2018; Bangkok, Thailand;	
Forum-Asia	Evaluation Forms National Security Training for Cambodian Human Rights Defenders; 6-9 January 2018; Bangkok, Thailand	January 2018
Forum-Asia	Strategy for Human Rights Advocacy in South Asia for the Establishment of a Regional Human Rights Mechanism	January 2019
Forum-Asia	Draft Advocacy plan for the establishment of South Asia People's Commission for Human Rights (SA-PCHR)	2019
Forum-Asia	Draft Strengthening South Asia Office: Reflection, Review and Future Plan	August 2019
Forum-Asia	Memorandum of Understanding between The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (Forum-Asia) and The Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence (KontraS)	August 2019
Forum-Asia	Internal Finance Checking Mechanism Jakarta Office	2019
Forum-Asia	EA-ASEAN Programme: Internal Working Mechanism	2018
Forum-Asia and Diplomacy Training Program	Memorandum of Collaboration between Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development and Diplomacy Training Program, UNSW	August 2019
Forum-Asia	FORUM-ASIA Usefulness of Publications & Other Resources Survey Report 2018	2018
Forum-Asia	FORUM-ASIA Usefulness of Publications & Other Resources Survey Report 2018	2017
Forum-Asia	Overview of FORUM-ASIA's Statements, Press Releases and Letters (2014, 2015) – Main Findings & Recommendations	2015
Forum-Asia	(grant proposal submitted to Sida) Creating a Conducive Environment for Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Sustainable Development in Asia (including annexes)	15 November 2019
Forum-Asia	Annex VI Interim Narrative Report (submitted to EU) Grant for an action under a Framework Partnership, 29 June 2017-28 June 2018	August 2018

Forum-Asia	Annex VI Interim Narrative Report (submitted to EU) Grant for an action under a Framework Partnership, 29 June 2018-28 June 2019	August 2019
Forum-Asia	Our Struggle for Human Rights 25 Years of Forum Asia	2016
Forum-Asia	ANNI report	2019
Forum-Asia	Defending in Numbers: Resistance in the Face of Repression 2017-2018	May 2019
Forum-Asia	A decade in review: Assessing the Performance of the AICHR to Uphold the Protection Mandates	May 2019
Forum-Asia	Working Paper Series (2) Perspectives on a Decade Of Asian Foreign Policy at the UN Human Rights Council	September 2017
Forum-Asia	Working Paper Series (3) Business and Human Rights'	March 2018
Forum-Asia	Working Paper Series (4) Sustainable Development Goals - A Human Rights Based Approach	September 2018
Forum-Asia	Working Paper Series (5) Civic Space	December 2018
Forum-Asia	Working Paper Series (6) Human Rights Systems and Mechanisms	August 2019
Forum-Asia	Working Paper Series (7) Insights from the Struggle (WHRDs)	November 2019
Forum-Asia	Freedom of Expression Under Threat: Perspectives from Media and Human Rights Defenders in Asia	2019
Forum-Asia	South Asia Judicial Barometer	November 2017
Forum-Asia	Instruments of Repression: A Regional Report on the Status of Freedoms of Expression, Peaceful Assembly and Association in Asia	2018
AICHR	Guidelines on the AICHR's Relations with Civil Society Organisations	11 February 2015
ASEAN Directorate, Indonesian Government	Invitation to Forum-Asia and related Concept Note Consultation and Focus Group Discussion "Review ToR AICHR 2019" 13 – 15 October 2019; Bogor, Jawa Barat, Indonesia	October 2019
Government of Sweden, Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Strategy for Sweden's regional development cooperation in Asia and the Pacific region 2016–2021	2016
Sida	Sida's Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change - flyer	No date
Sida	Sida – PowerPoint Presentation on how to access Regional Gender Equality Support Function (helpdesk)	No date

Annex 2 – List of persons consulted

Name	Position	Organization
Adilur Rahman Khan	Executive Director	Odhikar (Bangladesh)
Ahmed Adam	UNA Programme Manager	FORUM-ASIA
Alexander Chapman	Policy Officer	United States and Indo-Pacific Strategy Division, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Anjuman Ara Begum	South Asia Programme Officer	FORUM-ASIA (Kathmandu)
Asfinawati	Director (& current Board FA)	YLBHI (Indonesia)
Aung Myo Min	Executive Director	Equality Myanmar
Babloo Loitongbam	Executive Director	Human Rights Alert (India)
Badar Farrukh	Thailand Team Leader	Regional Office for South-East Asia Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Benny Agus Prima	HRD Programme Officer	FORUM-ASIA
Betty Yolanda	Asia Regional Manager	Business and Human Rights Resource Centre
Bijaya Raj Gautam	Executive Director	INSEC (Nepal)
Bob Last	Deputy Head, Political and Human Rights	UK Mission to the UN
Cecile Gaa	PME Senior Programme Officer	FORUM-ASIA
Chalerm Sri Prasertsri	Staff	Community Resource Centre (Thailand)
Chalida Tajaroensuk	Executive Director	People's Empowerment Foundation (Thailand)
Chandanie Watawala	Executive Director	Anfrel
Charlotta Bredberg	Counsellor Senior Programme Manager – Human Rights and Democracy	Section for Swedish Regional Development Cooperation in Asia and the Pacific, Embassy of Sweden, Bangkok
Chutamas Wangklon	Administration Manager	FORUM-ASIA
Cindy Kartika	Admin Associate	FORUM-ASIA (Jakarta)
Cornelius Damar Hanung	ASEAN Programme Associate	FORUM-ASIA (Jakarta)
Cristina Palabay	Secretary General	Karapatan (Philippines)

Debbie Stothard	Coordinator	ALTSEAN-Burma (Myanmar)
Dhirendra Panda	Secretary	Centre for the Sustainable Use of Natural and Social Resources (India)
E-Ling Chiu	Executive Director	Taiwan Association of Human Rights
Emanuel Amistad	Director	TFDP (Philippines)
Emile Kinley-Gauthier	Resource Mobilisation and Management Support Programme Officer	FORUM-ASIA
Frederick Rawski	Director of the Asia & Pacific Programme	ICJ
Fritzielyn Palmiery	OIC-Executive Director	Tanggol Kalikasan (Philippines)
Henri Tiphagne	Executive Director	People's Watch (India)
Jagat Deuja	Executive Director	CSRC Nepal
Joseph Sycip	Admin & Finance Officer	FORUM-ASIA (Geneva)
Joy Anne Icayan	East Asia and ASEAN Programme Officer	FORUM-ASIA
Kan Tanee	Staff	Community Resource Centre (Thailand)
Khin Ohmar	Founder	Progressive Voice (Thailand)
Le Thi Nam Huong	Assistant Director, Head of Human Rights Division	Political and Security Directorate, ASEAN Political-security Community Department
Lorenzo Urbinati	Development & Knowledge Management Senior Programme Officer	FORUM-ASIA
Lubha Neupane	Executive Director	WOREC (Nepal)
Lway Poe Ngeal	Director	Women's League of Burma
Marte Hellema	CM Programme Manager	FORUM-ASIA
Mohammad Hafiz	Executive Director	HRWG (Indonesia)
Mohammad Abdus Sabur	Director	Asian Resource Foundation (Thailand)
Muhammad Ullah	PME Programme Manager	FORUM-ASIA
Mukunda Kattel	Director	FORUM-ASIA
My Dung Ho	Second Secretary, Programme Specialist Human Rights & Democracy	Development Cooperation Section – Regional Asia and Pacific, Embassy of Sweden, Bangkok
Naly Pilorge	Advocacy Director	Licadho (Cambodia)
Omer Dawoodjee	Director	FORUM-ASIA

ANNEX 2 – LIST OF PERSONS CONSULTED

Orawan Raweekoon	Programme Officer	Embassy of Sweden, Bangkok
Patrick Earle	Executive Director	Diplomacy Training Programme
Phil Robertsson	Asia Deputy-Director	Human Rights Watch
Prashant Singh	Director	Community Resource Centre (Thailand)
Rachel Arinii Judhistari	East Asia and ASEAN Programme Manager	FORUM-ASIA (Jakarta)
Ravindran Daniel		Independent human rights consultant
Rosanna Ocampo	UNA Senior Programme Officer	FORUM-ASIA (Geneva)
Rosemarie R. Trajano	Secretary General	PAHRA (Philippines)
Sandra Lyngdorf	Senior Advisor	Permanent Mission of Sweden, Geneva
Sandun Thudugala -	Director of programmes	Law and Society Trust (Sri Lanka)
Sejin Kim	HRD Programme Manager	FORUM-ASIA
Sekar Banjaran Aji	Legal advocacy staff	ELSAM (Indonesia)
Sevan Doraisamy	Vice-Chair	FORUM-ASIA
Shahindha Ismail	Executive Director	Maldivian Democracy Network
Somchai Homlaor	President	Cross Cultural Foundation (Thailand)
Sorrattanamane Polkla	Executive Director	Community Resource Centre (Thailand)
Thun Saray	President	Adhoc (Cambodia)
Wichai Prabpaln	Finance Manager	FORUM-ASIA
Yi-Lan Chou	CM Programme Officer	FORUM-ASIA
Yuyum Fhahni	ACWC Rep Indonesia (Children)	ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children

Annex 3 – Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference for the Evaluation of Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUMASIA)’s Performances and Achievements January 2015-June 2019

Date: 2019-09-18

1. Background and context

FORUMASIA was founded in 1991 with the mission to promote and protect all human rights, including the right to development, through collaboration and cooperation among human rights organisations and defenders in Asia. It is a membership-based non-governmental organisation with 60 members from 22 countries in Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and has a Consultative Relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR). Registered in Geneva as an international non-governmental organisation, the main office (Secretariat) of FORUMASIA is based in Bangkok. But, it also has offices in Jakarta, Geneva, and Kathmandu.

The main office or Secretariat is responsible for overall project implementation, including regular follow-up for quality control, monitoring and evaluation. The Jakarta office works at the ASEAN level focusing on standard setting and institution building of the ASEAN human rights systems, while the Geneva office monitors and follows up on Asian human rights issues and links them to global debates on human rights, and monitors developments at the international level and feeds FORUMASIA members and other concerned emerging trends and priorities at the global level. The Kathmandu office provides a presence to strengthen and consolidate human rights movements through effective collaboration with its member and partner organisations in South Asia.

FORUMASIA’s vision is to build a peaceful, just, gender-equal, equitable and sustainable societies in Asia where all human rights of all individuals, groups, and peoples without discrimination of any grounds, are fully realised in accordance with international human rights norms and standards. The overall organisational objective is to “create an enabling environment for capacity building of human rights defenders, and collaboration and cooperation among the human rights organisations and institutions in Asia and across the globe.”

Since about mid-1990s, Sida has been supporting FORUMASIA to achieve its mission and objective in various ways. Until the end of 2007, Sida supported in a project-based mode. Since January 2008, it has been providing a core institutional grant support. The first phase of the core grant covered the period from 1 January 2008 to 31 December 2010. The second phase began on 1 June 2011 and will conclude on 31 December 2019, including a no-cost extension (1 January – 30 September 2017), a cost-extension (1

October 2017 – 31 December 2018), and another no-cost extension (1 January – 31 December 2019). The second phase has been designed in the light of the findings and recommendations of the external evaluation of the first-phase core grant.

Ford Foundation has been another core donor of FORUMASIA since 1 October 2012 providing support through its window of “Grant Award for Investing in a New Era of Global Human Rights Leadership.” Among the focus areas of the partnership are strengthening advocacy capacity of human rights organisations and defenders in Asia in engaging with intergovernmental decision-making platforms at the global level, particularly the UN; enhancing independence and effectiveness of regional intergovernmental bodies, particularly ASEAN, in addressing the issues of human rights promotion and protection; and strengthening institutional capacity of FORUMASIA. The partnership with Ford Foundation came to an end on 31 March 2019.

In April 2016, FORUMASIA entered into what they call ‘Framework Partnership Agreement’ with the European Union (EU) to implement the “Strengthening FORUMASIA as a Regional Civil Society Umbrella Organisation in Consolidating Human Rights and Democracy in Asia” project under the EU’s ‘Strengthening Regional, European and Global CSO Umbrella Organisations’ component. The four-year project, begun in June 2016, covers all strategic priorities of FORUMASIA. Currently, the EU is the main donor that finances some 60 percent of FORUMASIA’s annual budget.

In addition to the three core donors, FORUMASIA has been supported on a project-based partnership by the EIDHR to implement the “EU Human Rights Defenders Mechanism,” also known as ‘ProtectDefenders.eu project.’ FORUMASIA is a member of an international consortium comprising 12 NGOs⁶⁷ working for the safety and security of human rights defenders from around the world. This project supports a significant portion of FORUMASIA’s programme costs under its Human Rights Defenders Programme until 31 October 2019 and will be extended under new agreement for three years until November 2022. Similarly, Freedom House has been supporting FORUMASIA through its “Lifeline: Embattled CSOs Assistance Fund” since November 2011. Under this Grant, FORUMASIA works as part of an international consortium of NGOs comprising seven international organisations⁶⁸ to

⁶⁷ The Consortium members are: Worldwide Movement for Human Rights (FIDH), France; World Organisation against Torture (OMCT), Switzerland; Reporters without Borders (RSF), France; Urgent Action Fund for Women’s Human Rights (UAF), USA; Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders (EMHRF), Denmark; Peace Brigades International (PBI), UK; Protection Support Fund (PSF), Belgium; Front Line Defenders (FLD), Ireland; The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA), Switzerland; International Network for Economic, Social & Cultural Rights (ESCR-Net), USA; East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP), Uganda; and, FORUMASIA.

⁶⁸ These organisations are: Freedom House, CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, Front Line: Protection of Human Rights Defenders, the International Centre for Not-for-Profit Law, People in Need, FORUMASIA, and the Swedish International Liberal Centre (SILC).

assist embattled NGOs to withstand attacks on civil society organisations and human rights defenders domestically, regionally, and internationally, and raise awareness about harassment and repression.

1. Past Evaluations

System Based Audit, 2012

In May 2012, Sida assigned the Professional Management, a Swedish management consultancy company, to carry out ‘Systems Based Audit of FORUMASIA’. The company audited FORUMASIA’s organisational structure, policies and systems, including management of operation and financial management and control. The Audit found the “systems for operational and financial management and control relevant and reliable” and “are adhered to and implemented on all levels within the organisation” while noting the “need for improvements of the systems,”⁶⁹ and offered specific recommendations to improve the systems where necessary, and add to them where gaps were found.

Evaluation of Performance and Achievements, 2015

In April 2015, Sida commissioned the ‘Evaluation of FORUMASIA’s Performance and Achievements (2011- 2014)’ based on a ToR mutually developed by FORUMASIA and Sida. The evaluation, undertaken by external consultants, found the work of FORUMASIA “relevant to the needs of the region and the work of its members.” As to the impact of FORUMASIA’s work the evaluation said: “... FORUMASIA is contributing to attitudinal and behavioural change of governments and several examples exist in this regard.”⁷⁰

The evaluation underlined “misunderstandings between the Executive Committee and Secretariat staff as well as the inability of the SMT to effectively manage”⁷¹ as the main challenge of FORUMASIA, and presented recommendations to address this challenge as well as other programmatic issues. The main recommendation was to “review structures, mandates and functions of the organisation, ... the division of responsibilities between the General Assembly, Executive Committee and Senior Management Team” and how they communicate and interact by engaging an expert in the field of management or organisational development.

Review of FORUMASIA’s Organizational Policies, Systems and Practices, 2016

To respond to the main recommendation of the 2015 evaluation discussed in the previous paragraph, FORUMASIA commissioned, in February/March 2016, an

⁶⁹ Systems Based Audit of FORUMASIA, p. 8.

⁷⁰ Evaluation of FORUMASIA’s Performance and Achievements (2011-2014), p.8

⁷¹ Evaluation of FORUMASIA’s Performance and Achievements (2011-2014), p. 6

external review of its organisational policies, systems and practices with a two-fold aim: to assess existing policies, systems and practices to identify gaps and insufficiencies at all levels of institutional structures; and, offer concrete practical recommendations to address underlying issues and concerns.

The review noted: “While in principle the statutes of the organisation its various policies demarcate the distinction between governance and management function, in reality there seems to be considerable confusion regarding the distinction between governance, management and operations... partly due to the fact that most of the leadership transitions of FORUMASIA have been rather difficult and painful. In the context of such a difficult leadership transition in 2008–09, the Executive Committee ended up appointing one of the members of the Executive Committee as the Executive Director of the organisation. Such ‘conflict of interest’ practices within the process of governance and within broad-based organisations would only accentuate the tension between membership, governance and management of the organisation. The proactive role of the Chair or the Executive Committee during leadership transition is often seen as blurring the distinction between governance and management”.⁷²

To address the issues and concerns, the Review recommended a few concrete steps, including development of a Governance Manual to establish role clarity between Board (Executive Committee) and management functions; institutionalisation of human resources management functions, particularly in terms of staff recruitment, induction and performance planning; streamlining of organisational systems and policies; and development of a management leadership transition plan.

System based Audit, 2019

In June 2019, Sida commissioned BDO LLP, an auditor firm, to review the internal management and control of FORUMASIA. The audit company looked into areas such as; organizational structure and management of operations, financial management and control, procurement, forwarding of funds, travel per diem and accommodation costs, and payroll and salary costs. There were in total 24 findings to which FORUMASIA has given management response and currently in dialogue with Sida regarding follow-up measures.

2. Evaluation Objective and Scope

This evaluation will take place in the context narrative above with a two-fold objective:

⁷² Review Report on Policies, Systems and Practices of FORUMASIA, p. 7

- a) To assess FORUMASIA's performance and achievements in terms of relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of FORUMASIA programs against the objectives of their Strategic Plan, and to summarise results against the results framework⁷³, and;
- b) To review the progress made against the recommendations of the four evaluations/reviews discussed above. All these evaluations/reviews relate to the Sida support, and build on – or relate to – one another.

The focus of evaluation will be on to what extent expected results have been achieved (objective a.) and improvements made against earlier evaluation/review recommendations (objective b.). Analysis of factors and reasons behind over or under-performance and deviations, if any, and recommendation of concrete measures FORUMASIA should initiate to address underlying issues will be central to the objectives. The conclusions and findings from the 2015 evaluation can be taken as point of departure, with focus on performances after April 2015. Progress against recommendations of previous evaluations will be evaluated based on the measures FORUMASIA has initiated in response to each of the recommendation, including policies and systems developed and/or improved as recommended, new structures created, positions filled and publications brought out. FORUMASIA's 'management response' to the recommendation will be a starting point of this strand of evaluation.

Furthermore, the evaluation should also address the perspective of the poor and the rights perspective as well as to what extent conflict sensitivity, gender equality and environmental considerations have been mainstreamed in their programs.

The scope of the evaluation and the intervention logic or theory of change shall be further elaborated by the evaluator in an inception report.

3. Evaluation rationale

FORUMASIA has been going through a turbulent time the past couple of years and many of the past challenges in governance issues have been addressed through different measures including the transition to a new governance and management system with the adoption of a new governance manual, election of new Executive Committee members and the adoption/revision of internal statutes and policies. During 2019, FORUMASIA will go through another transition period as a new Executive Director is currently being recruited and the Executive Committee has decided on a transition

⁷³ The results framework (LFA) being used currently was finalised in 2017 as an organisation-wide instrument and covers all projects being implemented now.

plan for the interim management of the Secretariat until the new Executive Director and senior management team is fully operational.

FORUMASIA has requested continued support from Sida beyond the current agreement period, which is valid until the end of 2019. The findings from an evaluation will inform such a decision.

4. Evaluation purpose: Intended use and intended users

The purpose or intended use of the evaluation is to help Sida and its partner FORUMASIA to assess progresses in implementation of FORUMASIA's Strategic Plan to achieve its core vision and mission and to learn from what works well and less well. The evaluation will be used to inform decisions on how FORUMASIA's work may be adjusted and improved, giving concrete recommendation on how FORUMASIA can continue to strengthen their work and methodology to ensure fit-for-purpose, and serve as an input for Sida to the decision on whether FORUMASIA shall receive continued funding or not.

The primary intended users of the evaluation are; FORUMASIA's leadership (management team of the Secretariat and the Executive Committee as well as programme implementation teams at the secretariat, Embassy of Sweden in Bangkok, the Development Cooperation Section (Sida).

The evaluation is to be designed, conducted and reported to meet the needs of the intended users and tenderers shall elaborate in the tender how this will be ensured during the evaluation process. Other stakeholders that should be kept informed about the evaluation include members of the FORUMASIA, current and prospective donors of FORUMASIA, and close collaboration partners to FORUMASIA.

During the inception phase, the evaluator and the users will agree on who will be responsible for keeping the various stakeholders informed about the evaluation.

5. Evaluation criteria and questions

The evaluation questions are:

- To which extent has the work of FORUMASIA and its core programs conformed to the needs and priorities of the human rights movement in Asia?
- Is the work of the Secretariat responding to the needs of FORUMASIA members, the program beneficiaries and responded to donor policies?
- Does FORUMASIA serve its role and mandate in relation to the needs and challenges that their members are struggling with in their respective countries/regions?
- Can the costs for FORUMASIA's programmes be justified by their results?

- To which extent have the programmes contributed to intended outcomes? If so, why? If not, why not?
- To what extent has lessons learned from what works well and less well been used to improve and adjust project/programme implementation? Is FORUMASIA's system for learning and monitoring adequate for their type of work?
- Has the project been implemented in accordance with the rights perspective: i.e. Have target groups been participating in project planning, implementations and follow up? Has anyone been discriminated by the FORUMASIA's activities through its implementation? Have projects been implemented in a transparent fashion? Are there accountability mechanisms in the project?
- How has FORUMASIA worked with gender equality? Could gender mainstreaming and integration in programme design have been improved in planning, implementation or follow up?
- How has FORUMASIA worked with environment/climate change issues? Could env/cc mainstreaming and integration in programme design have been improved in planning, implementation or follow up?

Questions are expected to be developed in the tender by the tenderer and further developed during the inception phase of the evaluation.

6. Evaluation approach and methods for data collection and analysis

It is expected that the evaluator describes and justifies an appropriate evaluation approach/methodology and methods for data collection in the tender. The evaluation design, methodology and methods for data collection and analysis are expected to be fully developed and presented in the inception report. A clear distinction is to be made between evaluation approach/methodology and methods.

Sida's approach to evaluation is utilization-focused, which means the evaluator should facilitate the entire evaluation process with careful consideration of how everything that is done will affect the use of the evaluation. It is therefore expected that the evaluators, in their tender, present i) how intended users are to participate in and contribute to the evaluation process and ii) methodology and methods for data collection that create space for reflection, discussion and learning between the intended users of the evaluation.

Evaluators should take into consideration appropriate measures for collecting data in cases where sensitive or confidential issues are addressed, and avoid presenting information that may be harmful to some stakeholder groups.

7. Organisation of evaluation management

This evaluation is commissioned by Embassy of Sweden in Bangkok. As the evaluation will serve as an input to the decision on whether FORUMASIA shall receive continued

funding or not, the intended user is the commissioner, but FORUMASIA's Executive Committee and Management team of the FORUMASIA Secretariat will also be users of the evaluation. The evaluand FORUMASIA has contributed to the ToR and will be provided with an opportunity to comment on the inception report as well as the final report, but will not be involved in the management of the evaluation. Hence the commissioner will evaluate tenders, approve the inception report and the final report of the evaluation. The start-up meeting and the debriefing/validation workshop will be held with the commissioner only.

8. Evaluation quality

All Sida's evaluations shall conform to OECD/DAC's Quality Standards for Development Evaluation⁷⁴. The evaluators shall use the Sida OECD/DAC Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation⁷⁵. The evaluators shall specify how quality assurance will be handled by them during the evaluation process.

9. Time schedule and deliverables

It is expected that a time and work plan is presented in the tender and further detailed in the inception report. The evaluation shall be carried out during October 2019-February 2020. The timing of any field visits, surveys and interviews need to be settled by the evaluator in dialogue with the main stakeholders during the inception phase.

The table below lists key deliverables for the evaluation process. Deadlines for final inception report and final report must be kept in the tender, but alternative deadlines for other deliverables may be suggested by the consultant and negotiated during the inception phase.

Deliverables	Participants	Deadlines
1. Start-up meeting in Bangkok or through video/Skype meeting	Sida	10 October
2. Draft inception report		31 October (Tentative)
3. Inception meeting in Bangkok or through video/Skype	Sida	7 November (Tentative)
4. Comments from intended users to evaluators	Sida and FORUMASIA	14 November (Tentative)
5. Final inception report		21 November
6. Debriefing/validation workshop (meeting)	Sida and FORUMASIA	3 January (Tentative)

⁷⁴ DAC Quality Standards for development Evaluation, OECD, 2010.

⁷⁵ Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management, Sida in cooperation with OECD/DAC, 2014.

7. Draft evaluation report		16 January (Tentative)
8. Comments from intended users to evaluators	Sida and FORUMASIA	31 January (Tentative)
9. Final evaluation report		14 February

The inception report will form the basis for the continued evaluation process and shall be approved by Sida before the evaluation proceeds to implementation. The inception report should be written in English and cover evaluability issues and interpretations of evaluation questions, present the evaluation approach/methodology, methods for data collection and analysis as well as the full evaluation design. A clear distinction between the evaluation approach/methodology and methods for data collection shall be made. A specific time and work plan, including number of hours/working days for each team member, for the remainder of the evaluation should be presented. The time plan shall allow space for reflection and learning between the intended users of the evaluation.

The final report shall be written in English and be professionally proofread. The final report should have clear structure and follow the report format in the Sida Decentralised Evaluation Report Template for decentralised evaluations (see Annex C). The executive summary should be maximum 3 pages. The evaluation approach/methodology and methods for data collection used shall be clearly described and explained in detail and a clear distinction between the two shall be made. All limitations to the methodology and methods shall be made explicit and the consequences of these limitations discussed. Findings shall flow logically from the data, showing a clear line of evidence to support the conclusions. Conclusions should be substantiated by findings and analysis. Recommendations and lessons learned should flow logically from conclusions. Recommendations should be specific, directed to relevant stakeholders and categorised as a short-term, medium-term and long-term. The report should be no more than 40 excluding annexes (including Terms of Reference and Inception Report). The evaluator shall adhere to the Sida OECD/DAC Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation⁷⁶.

The evaluator shall, upon approval of the final report, insert the report into the Sida Decentralised Evaluation Report for decentralised evaluations and submit it to Nordic Morning (in pdf-format) for publication and release in the Sida publication data base. The order is placed by sending the approved report to sida@nordicmorning.com.

⁷⁶ Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management, Sida in cooperation with OECD/DAC, 2014

always with a copy to the Sida Programme Officer as well as Sida's Chief Evaluator's Team (evaluation@sida.se).

Write "Sida decentralised evaluations" in the email subject field and include the name of the consulting company as well as the full evaluation title in the email. For invoicing purposes, the evaluator needs to include the invoice reference "ZZ610601S," type of allocation "sakanslag" and type of order "digital publicering/ publikationsdatabas.

10. Evaluation Team Qualification

In addition to the qualifications already stated in the framework agreement for evaluation services, the evaluation team shall have an adequate understanding of civil society organisations, human rights in Asia and Pacific, accountability, gender equality and social inclusion, gender mainstreaming, and organisational development/management.

It is desirable that the evaluation team includes good documented knowledge of human rights based approaches to advocacy campaigns and social movements linked to social transformation in general and human rights protection and promotion in particular, especially when it comes to the role of civil society in relation to the international human rights mechanisms and human rights system. They are also expected to have an adequate understanding of institutional governance, and capacity building of civil society organisations, and past experiences of involvement in similar areas of work.

A CV for each team member shall be included in the call-off response. It should contain a full description of relevant qualifications and professional work experience. It is important that the competencies of the individual team members are complimentary. It is highly recommended that local consultants are included in the team.

The evaluators must be independent from the evaluation object and evaluated activities and have no stake in the outcome of the evaluation.

Annex B: Data sheet on the evaluation object

Information on the evaluation object (i.e. project or programme)	
Title of the evaluation object	Core support to FORUMASIA 2011-2019
ID no. in PLANIt	51020016
Dox no./Archive case no.	UF 2011/43307/BANG
Activity period (if applicable)	2011-06-01 – 2019-12-31
Agreed budget (if applicable)	40 742 000 SEK
Main sector	Democracy, Human Rights and Gender Equality
Name and type of implementing organisation	FORUMASIA (NGO)
Aid type	Core Funding
Swedish strategy	Strategy for Sweden's regional development cooperation in Asia and the Pacific

Information on the evaluation assignment	
Commissioning unit/Swedish Embassy	Embassy of Sweden in Bangkok, Dev. Coop. Section
Contact person at unit/Swedish Embassy	My Dung Ho
Timing of evaluation (mid-term, end-of-programme, ex-post or other)	End- of - programme
ID no. in PLANIt (if other than above).	N/A



Evaluation of FORUM-ASIA's Performance and Achievements 2015–2019

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess progress in the implementation of Forum-Asia's strategic plan, to advise on how to strengthen its work and serve as an input to Sida's decision on future support. Forum-Asia is a network organization established in 1991 working to promote and protect human rights through collaboration and cooperation with human rights organisations and defenders in Asia. The evaluation found that Forum-Asia is a highly relevant network for many key actors in the Asian human rights community. The most significant results have been achieved in the area of fostering an environment conducive for better human rights protection in Asia and Forum-Asia adds most value when focusing its efforts on issues best addressed at regional level and of direct relevance from a human rights perspective. Key recommendations included to strive to effectively and consistently draw the added value as a regional membership-based human rights organization and ensure that the organization can primarily focus on developing its human rights strategies and strengthening its programmes, while adjusting and improving its financial and management structures as necessary.

SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY

Address: SE-105 25 Stockholm, Sweden. Office: Valhallavägen 199, Stockholm

Telephone: +46 [0]8-698 50 00. Telefax: +46 [0]8-20 88 64

E-mail: info@sida.se. Homepage: <http://www.sida.se>

