

# Human Rights Education in Secondary Schools in Nepal

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Nepal has had a multi-party system for over 13 years. One of the poorest countries in the world, it is facing numerous political, economic, and social problems, and its development is increasingly affected by the armed conflict between the government and the Maoist movement.

The neglect of Nepal's minorities, and problems related to the Dalits<sup>1</sup> are also factors in the rise of insurgency. Dalits should become aware of their rights while the mainstream society must recognize their rights under the Constitution and laws.

Over the last 8 years violations of human rights have increased at an alarming rate as lootings, kidnappings, and mass killings are daily reported in the news media. Human rights are overshadowed by conflicts and violations. The promotion of peace, good governance, human rights, and social inclusion through peace building and development has become pertinent issue in Nepal. Planning for conflict resolution, peace building, and human rights promotion has also become important. People, especially the marginalized such as the Dalits, need to be educated, and solutions sought through social change, economic development, and involvement of people in peace building.

Civil and political rights have been emphasized to the virtual exclusion and neglect of the economic, social, and cultural rights of the Dalits and other minorities. Given the human rights violations, the Ministry of Education and Sports has realized the need for human rights curriculum in secondary school. However, the curriculum that has been developed by the ministry's Curriculum Development Center (CDC) is just an outline, inadequate and in-

sufficient to serve human rights education. There is an urgent need to elaborate on the 2-page long human rights curriculum of CDC.

Different research reports show that the number of Dalit students in higher education is low. Human rights education should therefore be provided at the secondary-school level so that Dalit and non-Dalit students undergo human rights education.

## **Human Rights and Environment Forum**

The Human Rights and Environment Forum (HUREF), established in 16 May 1996, started a human rights education program in August 1996 called the Pilot Legal Literacy Project in Jhapa district, eastern Nepal.

HUREF has implemented a number of human rights projects since late 1990s with a particular focus on prisoners. In 1997 it launched a Skills Training and Income Generating Program for women prisoners in the Central Jail in Kathmandu. 27 women prisoners were trained on typewriting and wool spinning. A similar program was held for women prisoners in Palpa Prison. In 1999, it launched Human Rights Courses for the prisoners in Kaski Prison in Pokhara. The prisoners gained knowledge about human rights particularly the rights of prisoners. In 2000, it implemented the package program "Promotion of Awareness on

Human Rights and Penal Reform in Nepal.” This program consisted of 3 activities: a national seminar on “Human Rights: Burning Problems and the Ways to Resolve Them” (18 August 2000), a 5-day Human Rights Training given to the Rajbansi tribe in Jhapa and Morang districts of Nepal which is threatened with extinction (7-11 September 2000), and production of a documentary film on penal reform in Nepal which was telecast through Nepal Television on 7 January 2001. It also produced a documentary on prisoners and their children who stay with them in the prisons. As a result of the broadcasting of the documentary, the government operated a separate Child Care Center for the dependent children.

Human rights strategies should be preventive. The prevention and realization of human rights could be increased through widespread human rights education. It brings people into the national mainstream and empowers them to produce leaders. The role of social studies teachers is highly important. However, they need human rights training.

Our human rights education program addresses the conflicts in and around the project area by setting up a human rights center in each school selected. The human rights center records cases of domestic violence, girl trafficking, torture, Dalit-related issues, and other human rights violations; and mobilizes local human rights activists, business people, and social workers to sustain the program and help run the human rights education program.

#### Some practical ways of implementing the program

To implement its program, HUREF adopted four major activities: establishment of human rights centers, teacher training, extracurricular activities, and community work.

##### *Establishment of human rights centers*

HUREF facilitates the establishment of human rights centers in the schools to provide

alternative ways of resolving conflict at the community level. The objectives of human rights centers are to

- facilitate class activities,
- organize events on human rights once a month, and
- register human rights violation incidents in and around schools.

Each center has the following members:

- Chairperson: School headmaster  
 Secretary: Teacher, social studies  
 Member: A Dalit student representative of class 9  
 Member: A Dalit student representative of class 10  
 Member: One of the female student representatives

An advisory committee can be organized to support the centers. The committee may have the following members:

- central member of ANNTA (pro-leftist teachers association in the region),
- central member of NTA (pro-congress party teacher’s association in the region), and
- government curriculum specialist.

The centers undertake the following activities:

- human rights awareness-raising activities for social studies teachers;
- human rights awareness-raising activities for students;
- calling members of the community to register cases of human rights violations, including those on domestic violence. These cases may be resolved jointly by the teachers and students;
- depending on the nature of the cases, seeking help from the local social and human rights activists to resolve the problems peacefully.

The centers are funded to function smoothly. The funds are used to undertake the centers’ activities in the field and community served by the

school and to cover expenses for stationery and during field activities. The field progress report prepared by the students and teachers includes the financial report for the activities undertaken. Apart from the regular nonformal education classes in the school and field, at least one activity every month to raise awareness on conflict resolution and human rights (discussions, workshops, seminars, or public hearings) is organized by the center. The general public and other interested individuals join the students in these activities.

### *Teacher training*

Teacher training is vital to the success of the human rights education program. A 15-day training of trainers for social studies teachers is deemed appropriate to increase their knowledge and skills on human rights education.

### *Extracurricular activities*

After the teacher training, an extracurricular human rights education program is carried out by the trained teachers. There are three classes per week for 9th and 10th graders, lasting 2 hours each. The teachers are remunerated for work done.

Broad topics cover the concept of human rights and fundamental rights, knowledge of international human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Constitution, rights of children and women, and freedom of expression. The students also learn about the institutions protecting human rights in Nepal, remedial measures for human rights violations, and knowledge on conflict resolution.

Reading materials are prepared and kept in the school library and in the human rights center of each school, accessible to teachers, students, and the public.

### *Fieldwork in the community*

Theoretical knowledge of human rights alone is not sufficient to understand its deep-

rooted aspects. Students also need to know practical aspects of conflict resolution and human rights through field activities, some of which involve street children, police stations, prisons, industrial labor groups, and other school children in communities in and around the school area. Field visits are arranged 6 months after the start of the project.

The participation of schoolteachers and students in human right issues and protection at the community and district levels has some risks. But good coordination with local bodies, human rights organizations, security personnel, and nongovernmental organizations, with an awareness-raising program, understanding reached with the political parties, and the interest of local people and leaders during the project implementation minimize the risk. As community members easily establish good linkages and relationships with local government organizations, leaders, and political parties, no major risk is associated with implementing activities.

### *Program implementation*

We have been implementing human rights education projects in nine schools in three districts (Jhapa, Morang, and Sunsari) of eastern Nepal. The participating schools are Himalaya Madhyamik Vidyalaya (Ma. Vi.)<sup>2</sup> Damak, Sukuna Ma. Vi. Morang, Sajilal Ma. Vi. Morang, Janata Ma. Vi. Itahari, Sarada Ma. Vi. Khanar, Sarswati Ma. Vi. Itabhatta, Janata Ma. Vi. Gouradaha, Public Ma. Vi. Rangeli, Amardaha Ma. Vi. Amardaha, with over 1,500 secondary-school students. The project commenced on 22 August 2002 and concluded on 22 December 2003.

The project has the following components:

#### *Stage 1: Teaching human rights in class*

We have been using a human rights textbook for the students of classes 9 and 10. Teaching is interactive and participatory. The students are now familiar with the concept, norm, and val-

ues of human rights. Students are given a free copy of the human rights textbook. Generally, the teachers were highly enthusiastic about implementing the human rights curriculum. They were also interested in interactive method and illustrating human rights examples generated within the country and abroad. More than 50% of the curriculum text has been taught to the students. For example, topics such as the concept of human rights, human rights and human responsibilities, types of rights, and international human rights instruments have been completed by most project schools. Topics to be taught soon are practical solutions for human rights violations and conflict resolution, etc.

We are satisfied that some students in every project school have developed knowledge and skills that they can run a peer-to-peer education and training for fellow students. Chetana Neupane of Sarada School Khanar, Sasmina Raut of Himalaya Ma. Vi. Damak, Khagendra Shuman Shrestha of Janata School Itahari, and Maniraj Adhikari of Saraswati Ma. Vi. are some of the students who have shown outstanding achievements. At a time when secondary-school students are being targeted by Maoist and Government forces, the Grades 9 and 10 students in the project schools have become aware of their rights and have been able to bargain for their protection. The students have begun to know that

a culture of human rights is one in which people are not thought of as belonging to anyone, or any entity, other than themselves. This is usually taken to apply to family structures.... (P)eople in such a culture aren't seen as belonging to the state either, or to the ideology to which the state adheres, or even dedicates itself.... In a culture of human rights no one should be used as a means to someone else's, or to the state's ends, without their voluntary informed consent....

When we first started teaching human rights, there was not even a copy of Universal Decla-

ration of Human Rights (UDHR) in the school library. The situation has since changed. The social studies teachers trained in human rights education are imparting knowledge of human rights through national and international human rights education materials such as the Convention on Rights of Child (CRC); Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); and other conventions, covenants, treaties, declarations, etc. The overall confidence level of social studies teachers has increased and has resulted in better outcomes. The teachers now possess a good knowledge of fundamental freedoms and civil liberties provided by our Constitution and laws, and of international human rights developments.

A key objective is to impart knowledge of human rights to supplement the inadequacy of the present government social studies textbooks for classes 9 and 10. The students want to know the practical implications of human rights through discussions. Teachers from project schools reported that some topics included in the curriculum attracted students so much that they were very attentive and engaged in the activities with great interest. Much liked were topics such as Mignonette, Developing Rights and Responsibilities, An Imaginary Country, etc.

The teachers use interactive teaching methods such as debate, concept mapping, group communication, flip charting, role-play, simulation, and discussion.

The teachers and some of the students know how to prepare a first information report (FIR) in a police station, and the features of habeas corpus, mandamus, injunction, and other petitions that protect citizen's rights under the Constitution and the laws.

The spread of the human rights theme of the curriculum in and around the catchment area has triggered registration of human rights

violations at the project schools' human rights centers.

The number of students interested in enrolling in human rights classes has gone up tremendously in almost all the project schools in this final phase of teaching activities. All the students from classes 9 and 10 are interested in attending human rights classes. Even class-8 students are requesting to be included in the classes. The teachers are busy planning these classes. Our textbook has been found supportive of the social studies course under the government curriculum, so student interest in this textbook rose immensely.

To meet such demand we need to increase the remuneration of teachers while designing same kind of project in the future.

### *Stage 2: Human rights centers in participating schools*

Human rights centers have been established and are operating in all nine project schools, where incidents of violations are being filed. The centers' committees meet every 2 weeks to discuss human rights issues and organize activities for the students.

All human rights centers established in the project schools are doing their job effectively by convincing the students to let the human rights classes run smoothly. Most rural youth in public schools are poor and are not easy to handle. The human rights centers proved to be instrumental in managing and handling them in human rights classes and running all activities.

The human rights centers also organize monthly events such as drawing, essay, poem, and story competitions; one-act plays; song writing, etc. Some centers have organized seminars and talk programs on human rights. For example, the human rights center of Saraswati Ma. Vi. organized a 1-day seminar on human rights education on 8 March 2003, inviting human rights centers from Jhapa, Morang, and Sunsari, where they discussed the curriculum and methodologies and shared experiences in

registering human rights violation incidents and handling complaints.

Almost all the centers have registered one or other types of human rights violations. Registered incidents varied according to the location and accessibility of the centers. Itahari and Sajilal schools, for example, are in a densely populated area and attract many pupils; thus, the registered incidents of human rights violations are relatively high. The center at Itahari provided a woman victim Nepalese rupees (NPRs) 5,000 (paid by the perpetrators) as a preliminary payment for the treatment of her mental ailment. In another incident, the center at Itahari initiated legal procedures that resulted in essential remedies for the victim in a hospital in Kathmandu.

The human rights center at Saraswati Ma. Vi. Damak registered a human rights violation on 13 October 2003, where a boy was abducted by security personnel. The center then sent a letter to several local newspapers, which published the news. The abducted boy, a former student at Saraswati, was friendly to his fellow students and loved by the teachers. The center sent a delegation to discuss the matter with the district security authority of Jhapa district.

Training is necessary to empower the members of the center to deal with human rights violations. In difficult situations, members of the human right center are unsure of conflicting jurisdictions of the local court system, Village Development Councils (VDCs) and the National Human Rights Commission. They need outside counsel for legal advice.

Some schools are increasingly becoming popular and trustworthy in the community, and this increases their load. There is a need to give them the necessary skills and ideas to deal with complaints, which they are now handling in their own way.

The school also need advice on how to localize the human right centers and integrate them as a key component facility, accessible to all, particularly to women and children.

Schools are keen on integrating activities with other schools in the program. Enthusiasm among students is great, and they want to see what the other schools are doing to raise human rights awareness in their areas. This practice needs to be encouraged.

Above all shortcomings, sustainability is a major point that needs to be addressed immediately. This was discussed with various center members particularly with headmasters and mayors. The headmaster of Itahari said that the required fund for a center (around NPRs 85,000 or 1,090 US dollars) could be raised by asking the Bus-Park Management Committee to collect a token amount from vehicles passing through the terminal. The mayor of Itahari, who favors this move, says he will take the steps to realize the concept. We are encouraging the eight other schools to take similar steps.

### *Stage 3: Fieldwork in the community*

On 22 September 2003 the office of HUREF in Damak circulated a notice to prepare students for field activities. On 12 October 2003 the chairperson of HUREF (this author) wrote a letter to the Police Superintendents of Mechi and Koshi seeking permission to organize field activities at the police station of these zones. After several discussions and phone calls, the Police Superintendents eventually allowed the students to inspect and interact with the police in their stations. On 16 October 2003 students from Himalaya Ma. Vi. Damak visited the Area Police Station in Damak, where the police inspector received them. The team leader of the students asked the inspector about practical remedies to human rights violations by different actors. The inspector informed them that the police has established its own human right center at the headquarters in Kathmandu, and a women's human rights cell in Biratnagar. However, he assured the students that human rights violations in his area would fall directly on his shoulder and he would investigate such

incidents. In response to a query by a student, he began by showing his revolver and its bullets and asking his subordinates to put their guns on the table before him. He began to lecture in a melancholy mood, saying, "We are in a verge of war. We sleep hardly 3 hours at night, with weapons all around us. It is not a normal time of policing. We have very little time to assess the situation while we encounter the terrorists (Maoists). Despite our awareness of human rights concerns, even innocent people sometimes get victimized." The students then inspected the custody of the police station, where they found a 10-year-old boy incarcerated on charge of rape. The officer attending the custody explained that the boy was not the actual rapist but served as a lookout for two other people who committed the rape and who were kept in the same custody. After the visit to the custody cell, the police inspector was surrounded by the students asking clarifications on child rights. They told the inspector that by no means could the 10-year-old boy be imprisoned and charged of any offense under the Child Rights Act, 2048. The inspector assured them that he would serve justice to the boy under his discretionary power. The students were then taken to the litigation section where a sub-inspector gave detailed information on criminal justice system based on the latest homicide case registered. The same procedures were followed during the field visits of the students from Saraswati School Damak and Janata Ma. Vi. Gouradaha on 17 and 19 October 2003, respectively.

On 20-21 October 2003 students from Sukuna School and Sajilal School were brought to the Area Police Station of Itahari to meet Police Inspector Prabin Pokharel and inspect the custody section, where they found 10 Maoists being kept. The police intervened while the students were talking to the Maoists and strictly warned the students not to show interest in subjects other than their direct business. The inspector, however, allowed the students to take photos of even the inspector's

room but not of the custody section. We noticed that the exercise of authority by the police inspectors varies according to the nature of the person who holds the power. Police inspectors are the top authority of area police stations and decide on security issues. Both the inspectors from Damak and Itahari seemed to be educated and trained, and their behavior towards students was gentle and civilized.

On 22-23 October 2003 students from Itahari and Khanar were brought to the same area police station of Itahari and followed the same procedures to acquaint them with the human rights situations in the law enforcement agency.

On 24-25 October 2003 students from Amardaha Ma. Vi. Amardaha and Public Ma. Vi. Rangeli were brought to the Area Police Station Rangeli, where they met police personnel and inspected the human rights situations of the prisoners.

The community work (field visit) enabled the students to learn more about human rights. At the police stations they saw FIR, detention orders, medical examination orders, postmortem reports, and various criminal judicial procedures, including statements of accused and charge sheets made by the police.

Field activities warrant procedures to be followed, such as getting permission from the authority and fulfilling various conditions by officers in charge.

To avoid tough work, we should now think that clearance should first be secured from central authorities such as the Home Ministry or Defense Ministry before going to field activities at law enforcement agencies.

#### *Stage 4: Monitoring and evaluation of project (ongoing)*

Since December 2002 this author has been monitoring the progress of the program by visiting all areas and maintaining contact with the principals. On 16-19 February 2003 a monitoring team consisting of this author and

Roland Tam went to a number of schools to monitor, access, and assist their activities. Aside from this, Kamal Pyakurel is constantly monitoring the curriculum program and human rights centers from his base in Damak, Jhapa.

HUREF constantly seeks feedback from participating schools on how to improve the program. HUREF calls on the school principals regularly and has conducted a teacher and student survey. The questionnaires used have proven useful in developing the course, and participant schools appreciate our seeking their response.

A recent survey of participating schools has proved that human rights education in secondary schools is necessary since the design of the program covers almost all the necessary aspects of human rights at the local level. The same survey shows the need for human rights education when rural areas are constantly under threat from either government soldiers or Maoist guerrillas. Knowledge of human rights has equipped the people with the skill to deal with a situation where human rights are in danger.

#### **Conclusion**

HUREF is happy with the progress of the project. All schools have indicated that they are satisfied and encouraged. Communities are becoming involved in the program. Every school surveyed indicated a great necessity for these types of program, particularly with the social climate. As with all new projects, logistical difficulties need to be worked through. At times budgeted operational expenses proved to be far larger than expected. However, HUREF is confident that the goals and expected outcomes of the project are being and will be met, and is looking forward to having its program include more schools to integrate the program into a national human rights course.

### Endnotes

1. Dalit literally means a person who is suppressed. In the context of South Asia, Dalit is a common term referring to culturally, economically and socially marginalized people and communities. In the context of Nepal, the word Dalit means a person or commu-

nity who suffers from caste-based discrimination. This definition is based on footnote number 1 in the Introduction in Prabodh M. Devkota, editor, *Dalits of Nepal – Issues and Challenges* (Kathmandu: Feminist Dalit Organization, 2002), page 11.

2. Madhyamik Vidyalaya (Ma. Vi.) literally means secondary school.