

Voices of Afghan Teachers of Human Rights

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The Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL) is an Afghan women's non-governmental organization founded in 1995. AIL has been a leader in human rights education, especially for Afghan women. In 1999, AIL began the first human rights education workshops for Afghan refugee women in Pakistan despite the controversial nature of this education program among conservative, rural Afghan refugees. AIL has expanded its human rights education program to Afghanistan and has begun including information on women's leadership, peace, gender issues, and reproductive health. Over 7,000 women have received human rights education from AIL to date.

AIL's teachers and teacher trainers have been instrumental to the success of the human rights education program. Below are some reflections of the AIL teacher training staff on their experiences in teaching human rights over the years.

Afghan women suffer from various forms of human rights violations. Fathers sexually abusing their own daughters, rape, forced marriages, domestic violence, restriction on movement of wives and daughters, prohibition of education for women, among others, occur. Many women feel helpless and do not dare take action to improve their situation. Some women commit suicide as a way out of their miserable life.

Thousands of women lose their lives because of human rights violations.

This situation is the context for the many women who participate in the AIL activities. They come to the workshops and seminars with sad stories that they slowly learn to share with fellow women-participants.

Reconstruction and development

The wars that plagued Afghanistan destroyed the country's education system, especially for women. There were not enough schools. There were no qualified teachers. There were no resources for teaching. As a result, the number of illiterate people increased. Today, there are still not enough qualified teachers.

In order to reconstruct and develop the country, the first step was to build the education system. To re-train the teachers, we needed to teach them how to write lesson plans and use new methods that involve the students, and encourage them to think and solve problems. Some people organize seminars and workshops for capacity building, especially for women. These workshops teach different topics like logic, women's rights, human rights, leadership, social issues, and religion.

AIL decided to organize methodic seminars for all the teachers in Afghanistan and to

teach them new methods. It organized many workshops and seminars in Kabul city and province (Mir Bacha Kot, Shaikhan, Kalakan, etc.) and other provinces (Herat and Jalalabad).

We employ modern and interactive plans and methods, which were welcomed by all teacher-participants, be they men or women. All topics are taught using lesson plans, various materials, different methods (such as practice exercise, role play, competition, group work, individual work, and question-and-answer). All the lesson plans are taught step-by-step. The Afghan Ministry of Education has approved the workshop plans and procedures.

Traditionally, workshops for teachers were taught through dictation and rote memorization. The methods of learning were listed for the teacher-participants to remember. But in AIL workshops, methods are explained, not just listed. AIL trainers give examples for each method. They also define the objectives of using each method, the differences between the methods, and their benefits. Following the modeling and description of the methods, all teachers practice the methods through peer teaching. Even if they have completed much training using the traditional style, teachers and teacher-trainers who are trained by AIL like the methods, plans, and training of AIL.

Results of interactive training seminars and workshops

In AIL's human rights workshops, women for the first time are able to share their stories and to educate people about the horrible violations that have happened to themselves and their families and friends. Through their stories the women can identify which human rights were violated and how these violations of human rights led to the disastrous/tragic outcomes for the women involved. The workshops give women the opportunity to comfort and console each other. The women have the opportunity to discuss these issues and to agree as a group that these actions are wrong. In the

process, the workshops help build the conviction of the women to stop these actions. Finally, the workshops provide a forum through which women can problem-solve and develop strategies to protect and realize their rights.

AIL teacher trainers emphasize that education is the key to overcoming the human rights violations experienced by Afghan women. They specifically cite the importance of using interactive, student-centered teaching techniques. Using these methods, participants in AIL workshops share their opinions and experiences rather than receive lectures from teachers. Women are empowered through these interactive learning opportunities to develop solutions to their own problems and to support and problem-solve with other women. Through interactive education that develops critical thinking skills, women are empowered to realize their rights.

As trainers, we see that the AIL seminars are beneficial to the teacher-participants. They learn lots of things. They express their appreciation for the seminars in their evaluation feedback. They feel that they became qualified teachers after the seminars. By using interactive methods, they can make their lessons interesting to the students, and make them learn the lessons quickly because they participate in the lessons and do not just memorize information. The students learn how to analyze and think. After taking the methodic seminars, the teacher-participants are completely changed (in terms of point of view, behavior with students, and teaching methods).

Based on the results of the human rights seminars and workshops of AIL, we have the following conclusions:

1. Because of the interactive methodology used, the AIL seminars and workshops held by AIL are a vast improvement over workshops that used lecture techniques. They have become more effective in achieving their goals as shown by their impact on the participants.

2. The workshops reveal the problems faced by every Afghan family – be they personal, official, social, economic, or other problems – that lead to violence. The participants learn to analyze problems and find solutions.
3. The main problem that creates violence is the lack of education. AIL wants to continue to organize such workshops to build the capacity of people, especially women to address this problem.

Everybody knows that peace is necessary for a future society where each person enjoys freedom and peace as a matter of right. This ambi-

tion is possible through the development of the education system. Our purpose is to educate mostly women and children. Women are the basic components of society. They always want to take an active part in securing peace all over the world so that they are free and not live in fear; that they live happily with their families; that widows overcome life's difficulties; and that persons with disabilities do not maintain a negative perspective in life.

When all human beings – regardless of race, language, and religion – work toward the development of science and technology at its highest peak, they will achieve the goal they are struggling for.