

Introduction

THIS TWELFTH VOLUME of the publication is a collection of articles on community- and national-level educational activities undertaken mainly by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and national human rights institutions (NHRIs) in Asia. There is unfortunately no available material from the Pacific NGOs and NHRIs for this volume.

This volume uses the phrase “human rights promotion and education” to stress the reality that many educational initiatives are not strictly “educational” in character. Many educational initiatives cover both activities that involve an organized process of teaching and learning knowledge and skill as well as informal awareness-raising and general campaigns to raise issues among the public. Both activities are undertaken as complementary and intersecting means of achieving a degree of understanding issues and the human rights relevant to them and of building capacity to act based on human rights principles on those issues.

The general trend of human rights promotion and education activities in Asia and the Pacific in recent years as presented below is reflected in the articles of this volume.

Trends

Many NGOs and NHRIs in Asia and the Pacific continue to focus on human rights promotion and education (even during the time of COVID-19 pandemic to some extent). They include

- a. grassroots programs (community-based programs such as those for marginalized communities in rural areas);
- b. grassroots-oriented programs (such as those held outside the capital cities by the NHRIs in order to reach the people in different parts of the country);
- c. programs for grassroots sectors (such as those for ethnic communities, stateless people, and other sectors).

The NGOs lead in using different means of educating the public such as street theater, film showing/festival, and art exhibition that bring out issues and point to relevant human rights that should be enjoyed and protected.

The NGOs in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Cambodia, India and Indonesia, among others, are engaged in these activities.

There are also programs for youth such as those in Burma/Myanmar and Uzbekistan, and for students and teachers such as the Model Parliament project in Jordan, the education to counter violent extremism in a number of countries including those in West Asia, and human rights education activities of teachers (such as those of the Japanese teachers' union).

The NHRIs also play a significant role in human rights promotion and education. Their programs are significant in a number of concerns:

- a. Education programs for the general public through the dissemination of information using online platforms or social media, pamphlets and other materials for different sectors of society (people with disabilities, the elderly), contests and awards, and online human rights courses (Korea, Philippines);
- b. Establishment of structures that support human rights education as seen in the online platforms including social media (Cyber Human Rights Training Center [Korea] and Human Rights Education Institute [Philippines] and the human rights library (online versions in Korea and Thailand);
- c. Training for government officials and members of the security forces – the NHRIs such as those in Bahrain, Korea, Mongolia, Philippines and Australia have shown their capacity and authority to get the support of the government and the police and military establishments in undertaking training activities for their officials, members and personnel;
- d. Support for establishment/operation of academic human rights centers (Indonesia, Korea, Thailand and the Philippines) that provide human rights education activities in their respective areas of operation (particularly in small cities and large towns). NGOs also have human rights centers that focus on specific issues;
- e. Support for the teaching of human rights in secondary schools (Malaysia) and in higher educational institutions (Thailand).

Another important work of the NHRIs is the survey of human rights awareness of the general public in partnership with relevant agencies. The surveys undertaken in the past years came out with recommendations on human rights promotion and education programs (Hong Kong, Maldives,

India, Bangladesh, and Mongolia) as well as human rights protection and policy advocacy programs.

These awareness surveys are important in at least two aspects:

- a. Assessment of extent of understanding and practice of human rights by members of society; and
- b. Provision of bases for developing educational and other interventions to promote human rights.

There are also subregional and regional level initiatives that facilitate the following:

- a. Development of materials for teaching and learning human rights;
- b. Training on human rights education;
- c. Networking among the educators.

Academic institutions play an important role in developing much needed teaching materials that suit national contexts. This is the role being played by the Southeast Asian Human Rights Network for the universities in this subregion, and supported by international initiatives such as the Global Campus of Human Rights.

The Global Citizenship Education (GCED) program of the Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding (APCEIU) is one example that operates at the regional level. This program ensures that human rights are integrated in GCED.

Challenges

National policy on human rights promotion and education and also World Programme for Human Rights Education (WPHRE) are hardly noticed at present in many countries in Asia and the Pacific. This is part of the perceived decline in government interest on human rights education.

Related to this is the frequent complaint on the lack of government support for the development of human rights teaching and learning resources for both formal and non-formal educational systems, as well as training of teachers and school and education officials.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected most of the human rights education activities. There was, however, a clear shift to online platforms in order to hold human rights education activities. Online platforms helped reach more

people, and facilitated holding more activities. Access to such online programs, however, remains a serious challenge to people in rural areas which suffer from lack of basic facilities and services such as electricity supply, equipment and internet signal.

Highlights

The experiences in Asia-Pacific point to several significant factors supporting human rights promotion and education:

- a. Continuing implementation of human rights promotion and education programs by holding of activities offline and online;
- b. Institutionalization of human rights work including human rights education to some extent by NGOs but to a large extent by NHRIs by establishing human rights education institutes/training centers, and human rights libraries and/or information centers;
- c. Continuing development of human rights promotion and education programs and teaching and learning materials;
- d. Assessing of human rights awareness of the general public through surveys by the NHRIs.

There remains a continuing decline of interest on human rights education by governments (education ministry primarily) in the region; however, they show interest on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Global Citizenship Education (GCED). The SDGs provide the content while GCED provide the means of integrating human rights in educational programs.

Human rights promotion and education require support from government and non-government institutions as much as interest from the general public.

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Note: This is a revised version of the presentation made via zoom by the author at the Global Forum on “Human Rights Education” held on 5 December 2022 in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. The presentation was entitled “Human Rights Education in Asia-Pacific: A Brief Review of Significant Practices.”