

Human Rights Promotion and Education in Local Communities: Some Examples from Japan

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LOCAL GOVERNMENTS play a significant role in human rights promotion and education. They have resources, though limited, that can be used to ensure that the people within their jurisdiction understand human rights, act on them and respect the rights of others.

Japan has a long history of local human rights movement that involved the anti-Buraku discrimination movement, and subsequently movements by other sectors in society. These movements greatly influenced the local governments in the country in helping promote human rights and resolve human rights issues.

The human rights promotion and education activities of local governments and organizations getting their support are varied. They cater to local contexts of people and cover recent human rights issues such as those related to the internet and problems faced by persons with disabilities, non-Japanese residents and other sectors of society.

Human Rights Education Policy

Kenzo Tomonaga, then Director of the Buraku Liberation and Human Rights Research Institute (BLHRRRI), summarized the development of human rights education policy of the Japanese government since the mid-1990s:¹

On 15 December 1995, in response to the UN Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004), the Japanese government established the Promotion Headquarters for the Decade (HQ). The HQ is chaired by the Prime Minister, vice-chaired by the Cabinet Chief Secretary and 4 other Cabinet ministers.² It also designated the vice-ministers of 22³ ministries and government agencies as senior staff. The HQ Secretariat is stationed at the Cabinet Councilors' Office on Internal Affairs.

On 4 July 1997, the HQ announced the adoption of a National Plan of Action on Human Rights Education (1997-2004). This plan was finalized after getting comments from the public, though not all comments were incorporated in the final version. The plan [paid] special attention to the promotion of human rights education not only in schools but also in private corporations and the civil society in general. It provide[d] for the development of human rights programs for professional groups such as public servants, teachers, members of the police, personnel of the Self-Defense Forces, medical professionals, social care workers, and journalists. It highlight[ed] the rights of women, children, the aged, persons with disabilities, Buraku people, Ainu people, foreigners, persons with HIV/AIDS, and former convicts. It also emphasize[d] the need to support the work of the UN in assisting the development of human rights education programs in developing countries.

In December 2000, the Japanese parliament enacted “The Law on the Promotion of Human Rights Education and Human Rights Awareness-raising.” This law define[d] human rights education as educational activities aimed at nurturing the “spirit of respecting human rights,” and human rights awareness-raising as public relations and other activities aimed at popularizing and deepening respect for and understanding of human rights. This law [made] the national and local governments responsible for carrying out human rights education/awareness-raising activities. As required by this law, the “Basic Plan for the Law on the Promotion of Human Rights Education and Human Rights Awareness-Raising” was adopted in March 2002. This new plan [was] meant to supplement the 1997 plan.

The main legal and policy bases of local human rights promotion and education initiatives in Japan are the 2000 law and the 2002 Basic Plan.⁴ The 2000 law aimed to “clarify the responsibilities of the national government, local governments, and citizens for the promotion of policies concerning human rights education and human rights awareness-raising, to provide for necessary measures, and thereby to contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights.” Article 4 provides:

(Responsibilities of Local Governments)

Article 5 Local governments shall be responsible for formulating and implementing policies on human rights education and human rights awareness-raising based on the conditions of

the community, in accordance with the fundamental principle [of this law], while coordinating with the national government.

The 2002 Basic Plan was partially amended in 2011 with the addition of a provision on the abduction of Japanese by North Korea.⁵ On 6 June 2025, the government issued the second Basic Plan for Human Rights Awareness.⁶ HURIGHTS OSAKA reports that⁷

[t]he Second Basic Plan, which takes into account changes in the socio-economic situation and international trends since the formulation of the First Basic Plan, lists the following as its main changes: (1) the addition of a section on “business and human rights,” (2) the reorganization of “human rights violations on the Internet” as a cross-cutting theme for each human rights issue, (3) the addition of “hate speech” and “sexual minorities” as individual human rights issues, and (4) the separate discussion of “leprosy [Hansen’s disease] patients, former patients and their families” from the discussion of “patients with infectious diseases, etc.”

The law and the 2002/2025 Basic Plan (amended and second plan) are cited by local governments in Japan in explaining their human rights promotion and education programs.

In this article, human rights promotion covers human rights awareness-raising activities at the local level.

The 2002 Basic Plan lists the institutions responsible for implementing the plan at the national level:⁸

Human Rights Bureau of the Ministry of Justice, and its subordinate organizations, such as human rights departments of Legal Affairs Bureaus and District Legal Affairs Bureaus. Additionally, there are volunteers in the private sector, who are appointed by the Minister of Justice, under the Human Rights Volunteers System. These human rights bodies of the Ministry of Justice are coherently carrying out human rights awareness-raising activities.

It stresses that⁹

other ministries and agencies are engaging in various human rights awareness-raising activities in relation to affairs under

their jurisdiction, respectively, and local governments, public interest corporations, private organizations and companies, etc. are also carrying out diverse human rights-related activities.

It provides for collaboration and cooperation with local governments, etc.:¹⁰

Roles of local governments, public interest corporations, private organizations and companies are significant in promoting human rights education and awareness-raising. All these entities are expected to make voluntary efforts in line with the purport of the Basic Plan, while maintaining organic mutual collaboration as needed depending on their positions and fields of expertise. In the meantime, the national government should give due consideration to efforts and opinions of these entities when implementing the Basic Plan.

It discusses the existing efforts of local government on human rights awareness-raising:

B. Awareness-Raising Activities by Local Governments

Prefectural and municipal governments are carrying out various awareness-raising activities depending on their regional circumstances, respectively. These activities range from the preparation and delivery of awareness-raising materials to surveys and studies on relevant means and holding of events and training sessions. Concrete content thereof varies by region. In particular, prefectural governments conduct projects to lead municipal governments, projects that are difficult for municipal governments to handle, and projects to assist municipal governments, depending on respective circumstances, from the broad-based standpoint of encompassing municipalities and from the perspective of complementing municipal governments. Municipal governments are promoting meticulous activities closely linked to local communities upon diverse opportunities from the standpoint of being closest to local residents and responsible for local administration necessary for their everyday life.

The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) launched its “Project of Entrusting Human Rights Awareness-Raising Activities to Local Authorities” (also referred to as “Entrustment to Local Authorities”) “to entrust a wide range of

awareness-raising activities covering all human rights issues to prefectures and government-designated cities, etc. Specific activities include holding lectures and training sessions, preparing reference materials, placing commercial messages on TV, and making advertisements on the internet, newspapers and local papers, etc.”

Another project of the MOJ called “Project of Vitalizing Local Human Rights Awareness-Raising Activities” is an

[e]ntrustment to Local Authorities in collaboration with the network associations of human rights awareness-raising activities ... This cross-sectional network consists of the human rights bodies of the Ministry of Justice and prefectural and municipal bodies and public interest corporations engaging in human rights awareness-raising activities.

Ministry of Justice Awareness-raising Activities

In line with the “Human Rights Education and Awareness-Raising Promotion Act,” and the “Basic Plan,” the MOJ undertakes several awareness-raising activities aimed at disseminating and raising the “concept of respect for human rights such as workshops, sharing information, and public relation activities, excluding human rights education.”

The MOJ lists these activities:¹¹

Human Rights Week¹²

In Japan, the Ministry of Justice and the National Federation of Associations of Human Rights Volunteers¹³ designated the week ending on December 10 each year as Human Rights Week in 1949, and have carried out human rights awareness-raising activities throughout the country to facilitate spreading the idea of respecting human rights.

Human Rights Lectures¹⁴

“Human Rights Lectures” are [...] human rights awareness-raising activities where citizens learn about the preciousness of life and compassion. This is conducted mainly by Human Rights Volunteers nationwide.

Human Rights Lectures target elementary school students primarily but also target junior high or high school students, university students and adults.

National Essay Contest on Human Rights for Junior High School Students¹⁵

MOJ “has organized the annual National Human Rights Essay Contest for Junior High School Students since 1981. This program aims to help junior high school students, who will be major players in the next generation, to deepen their understanding of the importance and necessity of respecting human rights, and foster awareness of human rights, through writing essays on human rights issues.”

Human Rights Flower Campaign¹⁶

The Human Rights Flower Campaign, which has been held since 1982, is an awareness-raising activity targeted mainly for elementary school students.

During the campaign, children are given flower seeds or bulbs and grow them by cooperating together. Through this experience, children are anticipated to realize the preciousness of life, nurture a warm-hearted spirit and learn tenderness and compassion.

Local Human Rights Promotion and Education Initiatives

A number of institutions at the local level in Japan that undertake human rights promotion and education activities have existed for decades prior to the 2000 law on human rights education. They were established with specific focus but subsequently widened their main agenda with the adoption of human rights (instead of rights specific to a sector in society) as general focus.

These institutions, consisting of museums, archives, human rights centers, research institutes, etc. in Hokkaido, Mie, Shiga, Kyoto, Nara, Osaka, Tottori, Tokushima, Hiroshima, Fukuoka, Kumamoto and Oita prefectures, established a network in July 1996. This is the Human Rights Network with thirty members as of 2025 that collect, store, conduct research, and exhibit materials related to human rights, with the aim of contributing to research, education, and awareness-raising for the elimination of discrimination and

the understanding of human rights, and promoting mutual exchange.¹⁷ There are other local human rights centers, however, that are not members of the network yet.

On the other hand, many local governments support human rights promotion by printing leaflets and flyers, newsletters and posters; producing videos, organizing lectures; and undertaking awareness-raising activities (exhibition of posters, photos and other materials, book fairs, film screenings).

The Human Rights Database of the Human Rights Library provides a list of different activities on human rights promotion in different cities and towns all over Japan.¹⁸

Objectives of Local Initiatives

In this article, specific examples of local level human rights promotion and education activities refer to the cities of Settsu and Yao in Osaka prefecture, Kobe city in Hyogo prefecture, and Kitakyushu city in Fukuoka prefecture.

The Yao City Human Rights Association started as the Yao City Dowa Business Promotion Council that was founded in 1968. The Hyogo Prefectural Human Rights Awareness Association, based in Kobe city, was established on 20 November 1991. The Settsu City Human Rights Association was established in 1997 as a civic group made up of school district promotion committees organized for each of the city's five junior high school districts and thirty-six related organizations, and supported by Settsu city.¹⁹

Local human rights institutions generally aim at raising awareness of human rights among the people by carrying out various awareness-raising and training activities, and contributing to the resolution of human rights issues, including the Buraku issue.²⁰

To achieve the objectives, these institutions perform a number of functions including research (surveys included), consultation and educational functions. The Yao City Human Rights Association has defined its functions as follows (taken from the booklet *We Have a Dream! The Story of the Yao City Human Rights Association*²¹):

What is Yao City Human Rights Association?²²

<Functions and characteristics of the Yao City Human Rights Association>

The Yao City Human Rights Association is a central cooperative organization for human rights administration in Yao City, and in addition to having social work functions, it also cooperates with the Osaka Prefectural Human Rights Association, a foundation.

The Yao City Human Rights Association is an institution that guarantees the participation of discriminated citizens (minority citizens) in city government.

The Yao City Human Rights Association serves as a center for various consultation activities related to human rights.

The Yao City Human Rights Association will identify and analyze cases of human rights violations that occur within the city, take the necessary steps to resolve the cases, and carry out activities necessary to provide relief to the victims of human rights [violations/abuses].

The Yao City Human Rights Association proposes human rights policies to the city administration and other organizations. It also conducts research and studies for that purpose.

The Yao City Human Rights Association serves as a center for educational and awareness-raising activities related to human rights.

The Yao City Human Rights Association is working to understand the reality of discrimination.

Programs

It appears that many city and town governments in Japan have complied with the 2000 “Human Rights Education and Awareness-Raising Promotion Act” and the 2002 “Basic Plan.” Some might have adopted a local version of the national policy that would address local context (issues, resources, programs, etc.). Again, the activities done by institutions at the local level, most of which are supported by local governments, follow the national human rights education policy (see The Human Rights Database of the Human Rights Library).

The Yao city government has adopted a human rights education plan. The Second Yao City Human Rights Education and Awareness-Raising Plan (2021) cites Article 5 of the 2000 law as its basis.²³

The Settsu City Human Rights Association (an organization supported by Settsu City), focuses on human rights issues that exist in the community such as those listed in Chapter 4, Section 2 of the 2002 Basic Plan:²⁴

1. Women: Sexual harassment, domestic violence, stalking, etc.
2. Children (bullying, corporal punishment, abuse, etc.)
3. Elderly people (bullying, abuse, etc.)
4. Persons with disabilities (bullying, abuse, etc.)
5. Buraku issues (employment, marriage, discrimination related to land, etc.)
6. Ainu People: Prejudice
7. Foreigners (prejudice, employment)
8. HIV-infected persons, leprosy patients, etc. (prejudice, assumptions) [leprosy/Hansen disease patients are separately listed under the 2025 second Basic Plan]
9. People who have completed their sentences and been released from prison (prejudice, finding a job)
10. Crime Victims, etc. (prejudice)
11. Human rights violations via the Internet (harassment, sexual assault)
12. The issue of abductions by North Korean authorities
13. Others.

The Kitakyushu City government in Fukuoka prefecture adopted in November 2005 the “Kitakyushu City Human Rights Administration Guidelines” in order to promote the “development of a human rights culture.” The city also established the Human Rights Promotion Center, which is responsible for human rights awareness, and the Human Rights Planning Department, Dowa Countermeasures Division, which is responsible for planning and coordinating human rights administration. On 1 April 2007, they were integrated and renamed the Kitakyushu City Human Rights Promotion Center, Human Rights Culture Promotion Division. In order to promote the “development of human rights culture in the city,” the city works to enhance human rights policies and human rights awareness projects.²⁵

The human rights promotion and education activities of local governments are similar to some extent to the activities being held by the MOJ at the national level.

There are also local government declarations for specific sectors such as for children, which support the rights of the child. Kitakyushu City adopted the “Child-Centered City Declaration” in November 2023, for example. Other local governments enact ordinances such as the “Kawasaki City Ordinance on the Rights of the Child,” passed by the Kawasaki City Council on 21 December 2000, and came into force on 1 April 2001.²⁶ These declarations and ordinances are bases of local level human rights promotion and education activities.

Activities

Selected activities of several cities in Japan are presented below to illustrate examples of human rights promotion and education activities.

a. Lectures and Seminars

Lecture sessions are held by the Kitakyushu city government during the Fukuoka Prefecture Buraku Issue Awareness Month. The lectures are given by NGO workers, artists and academics and discuss different issues. In 2024, nine lectures were held in the month of July:

1. The future of “Dowa” education (10 July 2024)
2. I fled from the village (12 July 2024)
3. Thank you for being born (13 July 2024)
4. Protecting children’s rights (19 July 2024)
5. “Halfway” to eliminating Buraku discrimination – Let’s be inspired together (20 July 2024)
6. Let’s think with Momomaru-kun! What lies at the root of the Burakumin problem (20 July 2024)
7. Building a city with a culture of human rights through music (20 July 2024)
8. Future human rights and Dowa education (22 July 2024)
9. Consider human rights and Buraku discrimination issues as issues that concern you, here and now (27 July 2024).

As part of its human rights awareness activities, the Settsu City Human Rights Association holds seminars for local citizens. This is the “Human Seminar” series of the Association. It also holds “Memorial Lectures” after holding its regular general meeting.

The Hyogo Prefectural Human Rights Promotion Association holds human rights symposiums. On 12 November 2024, it held a human rights symposium titled “How to Live in a Diversifying Society: Based on the Results of the Prefectural Citizens’ Awareness Survey on Human Rights.”

Human Rights Learning Academy

The Yao City Human Rights Association launched in 1998 a human rights education course called *Jinken Rakugakujuku* (じんけん楽習塾) or Human Rights Learning Academy. This course continues to run till the present.

Jinken Rakugakujuku aims at making people understand “Jinken” (human rights) not as a concern of “other people” but a concern of “you” (each person, everyone).

People learn about human rights in workshops, along with learning facilitator’s skills, planning human rights learning activities, and other matters. Since different types of people gather in *Jinken Rakugakujuku* sessions, one attraction is the excitement of meeting new people.

Jinken Rakugakujuku has been taking up a variety of issues relating to children, women, persons with disabilities, Burakumin, Hansen disease victims, day laborers, non-Japanese residents, among others, and about peace, democracy, internet, literacy, diversity and other issues.

In 2025, *Jinken Rakugakujuku* sessions consisted of the following:²⁷

- 1st session, 14 May 2025: “Staring” at discrimination and the deepening issue of discrimination against foreigners
- 2nd session, 28 May 2025: Choices we can make as people living in the nuclear age to abolish nuclear weapons
- 3rd session, 11 June 2025: Sex Work Is Work - Discrimination against the sex industry
- 4th session, 25 June 2025: Writing, reading and talking about “Buraku Feminism”
- 5th session, 9 July 2025: Learning from Jane Elliot’s “Buraku Experience Workshop”

- 6th session, 23 July 2025: Time to stop and think - Reflecting on myself and society through current events.

The sessions are facilitated by diverse sets of resource persons including people working with non-governmental organizations, academics doing research on human rights issues, and professional trainers.

For the past five years, six sessions were held on different topics per year (see Annex A for the list of topics for the sessions held from 2021 to 2024).

b. Human Rights Week

The Settsu City Human Rights Association organizes the Human Rights Week that includes human rights education awareness exhibition, art exhibitions in each junior secondary school district, “human seminars” (series of human rights awareness lectures), and lending of DVDs and books.²⁸

The Kitakyushu city holds Human Rights Week from December 4th to 10th of each year. The events during the week include commemorative lectures (lectures on human rights issues), street awareness-raising (distributing awareness leaflets on the streets), and promotion of human rights awareness information material (such as the information paper “Life, Love, Heart” [いのち あい ころ]).

c. Human Rights Festivals

Japanese communities have a tradition of holding festivals that likely provided a reason why a human rights festival can easily be appreciated. In Minoh city in Osaka prefecture, Rightpia 21 (Kayano Chuo Culture of Human Rights Center) organizes the Kayano Otakara Jinken Matsuri (Kayano Human Rights Festival). The Tokyo Metropolitan Government organized the Human Rights Festa Tokyo 2024 with the aim of providing a space for a wide range of citizens to think about and deepen their understanding of the importance of human rights. The Human Rights Festa 2024 was held in several venues in Tokyo. Each venue had its own unique program. At Shinjuku Station West Exit Plaza, dance performances and live music allowed people to experience “inclusion” where “everyone can shine through.” At AEON Mall Musashimurayama, sign language singing performances and deaf table tennis demonstrations were meant to enable everyone from adults to children to enjoy the activities. At the Tokyo International Forum, programs touched on and encouraged people to think about various human rights issues, such

as human rights violations on the internet and talk shows on the theme of LGBTQ+.²⁹

Fureai Festa

The Kitakyushu city government holds the annual Fureai Festa, which features events related to human rights such as panel exhibitions and presentations on the daily activities of human rights and welfare organizations.

The program of Fureai Festa 2024, held on 24 November 2024, included

- an awarding ceremony for the Art Exhibition for People with Disabilities held in collaboration with the 17th Kitakyushu City Arts Festival for People with Disabilities;
- performance of “Makoto’s Genki Adventure” by a famous gymnast; and
- lecture by a lawyer entitled “The Internet and Human Rights.”

People from inside and outside the city gave song and dance performances.

At the Community Square, human rights and welfare groups introduced their activities, held panel exhibitions, and sold small items.

The events during Fureai Festa are held in an atmosphere of fun to encourage people to think about human rights, with the voluntary participation of citizens and human rights groups.

Hyogo Human Festival

The Hyogo Prefecture adopted the Hyogo Vision 2050,³⁰ which serves as a guide for the prefectural government. Hyogo Vision 2050 aims to realize a society in which the human rights of all people are respected, the ability to think from the perspective of others is cultivated, the individuality of each person is valued regardless of age, gender, disability, nationality, etc., and no one is left behind.

To achieve this, raising awareness on human rights is important in order to cultivate a “spirit of coexistence” and that each and every resident of the prefecture hone the sensitivity to understand and be considerate of the feelings and positions of others.

Human rights activities are held during summer, in the month of August. The Hyogo Human Festival is held within this month.

The “Hyogo Human Festival 2024 in Minami Awaji” [「ひょうご・ヒューマンフェスティバル2024 in南あわじ」] had the following program:³¹

- Minamiawaji Junior High School Folk Performing Arts Club
- Awaji Puppet Theatre “Ebisu Mai”
- Opening ceremony on presentation of the Hyogo Human Rights

Declaration

- Human Rights Lecture: “Always Keep Respect in Your Heart”
 - ◇ Lecture by a former Japan Women’s National Soccer Team Member
- Arena interaction event
 - ◇ Healthy jogging class with Hyogo Human Rights Ambassador
 - ◇ Blind & walking soccer experience class
 - ◇ Para sports experience (boccia, table tennis, volleyball, para sports equipment exhibition, etc.)
- JINKEN [Human Rights] Summer Festival 2024 (various group exhibition events)
 - ◇ Screening of a human rights awareness video “Important People” (theme: Internet and Buraku discrimination)
 - ◇ Intellectual and developmental disability simulation, color vision simulation
- Children’s Multicultural Education Forum and Children’s Multicultural Center Exhibition
- Consultation corner (human rights consultation, educational consultation regarding foreign students, etc.).

d. Publications

Local governments produce publications that provide the public with easy-to-understand information and discussion of issues and human rights. The Yao City Human Rights Association publishes an annual booklet series entitled *We Have a Dream! The Story of the Yao City Human Rights Association* [私たちには夢がある!ブックレット]. The booklet records human rights work including information and education related to human rights, such as the following:³²

- Booklet 11 (2020) has the theme “Transforming human rights from being the concern of other people to being your own concern.” It features Jinken Rakugaku Juku. It explains that the words “Rakugaku Juku,” which are pronounced as “gakushujuku,” are shortened into

“rakugaku” instead of “gakushu” because of the serious image of learning about human rights. The character “raku” expresses the desire to learn and make people learn in a fun way.³³

- Booklet 10 (2019) has the theme “Human Rights Milestones” and features the three laws on eliminating discrimination that came into force in 2016.³⁴ It also discusses the reality that severe cases of discrimination and human rights violations still occur relating to issues covered by the laws. Since the three laws provide that these issues need to be resolved by society as a whole, it is hoped that the laws would change people’s awareness and lead to efforts to eliminate discrimination.³⁵
- Booklet 9 (2018) has the theme “Recommendations for learning about the Buraku issue” and was prepared in consideration of inexperienced teachers and staff who wanted to promote and expand the study of the Buraku issue in Yao city. It is hoped that by studying the Buraku issue, children would look at their own lives, connect with their peers, and create their own way of life. This booklet series contains many examples of studying human rights in social studies subjects.³⁶
- - Booklet 8 (2017) has the theme “Yao’s Way of Dealing with Discrimination.” This booklet was created with the aim of encouraging people to think about discriminatory incidents that have occurred in Yao City. Simply listing events could result in a gloomy, hopeless read, and above all, it would fail to grasp the issues in depth, so we enlisted the help of seven people who are active in Yao City. From Chapter 2 onwards, these seven people talk about the issues they are raising, the status of their activities, and their own “dreams.”
- Booklet 7 (2016) has the theme “What is the ‘Buraku problem’ in Yao?” The booklet addresses the problem of “public opinion,” or the “popular mood” leaning towards discrimination. There is no end to discriminatory incidents and anonymous information about discrimination and prejudice against Burakumin continues to flood the Internet and spread more and more every day. The main objective of this booklet is to ensure that “public opinion that does not tolerate discrimination” is not swallowed up by “public opinion that leans toward discrimination,” by learning about the reality of dis-

crimination and its background, and taking firm steps throughout society to overcome it.³⁷

In Hyogo prefecture, the Hyogo Human Rights Promotion Association publishes *Kizuna*, a quarterly newsletter. For 2024-2025 issues, the following were the main themes:³⁸

- Have you received my little SOS? - May/June 2025 issue
- Are you taking care of yourself? Your body and your mind - March/April 2025 issue
- Is nationality important in judging people? - January/February 2025 issue
- Are your human rights respected in the workplace? - November/December 2024 issue.

Kizuna is available in e-book and pdf formats.

The Kitakyushu City government publishes the booklet called *Let's think with Momomaru-kun!*, an “awareness booklet” meant to help eliminate human rights abuses on the Internet. It also produced human rights awareness information paper entitled *Life, Love, Heart* [いのち あい ところ], which is distributed to each household.³⁹

The Settsu City Human Rights Association produced the Human Rights Education Awareness Collection series (人権教育啓発作品集) from 2018 to 2022.⁴⁰

Local governments also publish instructional materials for moral education in school with contents related to different human rights issues.⁴¹ Most of the human rights issues listed in 2002/2025 Basic Plan are covered by instructional materials. However, the instructional materials do not have contents on several issues (as of 2024) such as “Social Integration,” “Ainu people,” “Disaster-Related Human Rights Issues and Harassment.” The issues “Internet Human Rights Violations” and “COVID-19 Prejudice and Discrimination” appear in one material each, and “Gender Identity/Sexual Orientation” appears in two materials. The Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education, “a local public body” “has continuously supplied instructional materials” on human rights issues to support moral education. It is cited for having “implemented the Human Rights Education Program School Education Edition.”⁴²

Local Governments and Human Rights Promotion and Education

The role of local governments in human rights work is given global recognition as shown in the World Human Rights Cities Forum being held annually

in Gwanju city, Korea and supported by the city government of Gwangju. The conference promotes the idea of human rights city, which is explained as follows:⁴³

Human Rights Cities recognize cities as key players in promoting and protecting human rights. The term generally refers to cities where local governments and residents are governed morally and legitimately under human rights principles. The Gwangju Declaration on Human Rights Cities, adopted during the very first World Human Rights Cities Forum, defines human rights cities as ‘both a local community and a socio-political process in a local context, where human rights play a key role as the fundamental values and guiding principles.’ Human rights cities emphasize the importance of inter-local and international cooperation and solidarity among cities engaged in the promotion and protection of human rights, securing wide participation from all actors and interest groups, in particular socially marginalized and vulnerable groups, and the importance of effective and independent human rights protection and management systems.

The experiences of local governments in Japan provide concrete examples of how cities can act as “key players in promoting and protecting human rights.” It appears that many local governments in Japan work with other institutions particularly the local human rights organizations in “promoting and protecting human rights” of the local residents.

Though the cities of Yao, Settsu and Kitakyushu have not expressed the desire to become human rights cities, they do tasks that support human rights. Their activities, supportive of the national law and basic plan on human rights education, illustrate locally contextualized human rights promotion and education. They work with local organizations and dwell on issues relevant to the people in the local communities.

Sakai city, however, in Osaka prefecture has a long history of adopting policies and programs that support human rights and human rights promotion and education.

The city adopted the “Human Rights Protection City” Declaration in 1980, after Japan ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1979. It enacted in 2007 the Sakai City Peace and Human Rights

Promotion Ordinance to support the development of Sakai city as a City of International Peace and Human Rights.

On gender equality, Sakai City became the first local government in Japan to declare itself a city aiming to achieve gender equality in January 1995. In 2002, the city also became Osaka Prefecture's first local government to enforce the Ordinance regarding the Promotion of the Formation of a Gender Equal Society. In 2013, the city joined the Safe Cities Global Initiative of UN Women, the first city in Japan to do so.

Sakai city subsequently adopted the Sakai Equal Participation Plan, Basic Plan for Prevention of Spousal Violence and Protection of Victims, Sakai City Human Rights Policy Promotion Plan, and the Plan for Advancement of Children and Youth. It also created the Human Rights Office, and established the Peace and Human Rights Museum and the Henomatsu Human Rights History Museum.⁴⁴

Finally, the city supports the Sakai City Human Rights Education Promotion Council (*Jinkenkyo*), established in 1979 with member-organizations composed of "civil groups, business and religious corporations." The Council organizes human rights education activities in the city.⁴⁵ It publishes a newsletter named *Kokoro-no-Hibiki* "to help increase awareness of human rights."⁴⁶

In the same manner, local human rights promotion and education activities receive support from the World Human Rights Education Programme, which in its Phase 2 provides for training of civil servants.⁴⁷ UNESCO promotes the training of local government officials regarding management of local government system. In the Outcome Document of the UNESCO-supported "Human Rights Go Local: What Works" – Academy and Conference on Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels, 1-8 February 2023, the following is recommended:⁴⁸

5. train the representatives of local governments, the local governments' future leadership, local administration, as well as front-line public servants in contact with rights-holders in the appropriate use of human rights-based management tools, and inform the civil society, the youth as the next generation experts, as well as the public on their role and function in human rights-based governance.

Specifically on public management, the Outcome Document provides:

encourage local level governments worldwide to

1. embed and highlight human rights in their public management systems with a view to govern by human rights objectives and fulfil their human rights obligations,
2. make an informed and explicit commitment to a human rights-based public management system that shall provide a continuous basis for respecting, protecting, and promoting human rights and good governance in local administrative practice.

Training of local government officials not only on how to promote human rights but also on how to embed human rights principles in their public management system is an essential part of the human rights work of local governments.

Conclusion

The experiences of a few local governments in Japan discussed in a limited manner in this article provide concrete examples of locally relevant activities that can help promote human rights to members of local communities.

The significance of these experiences lies in the fact that they are supported by local governments or results of implementation of local government programs. Involvement of local governments in human rights promotion and education at the local level is a major factor in facilitating public awareness of issues, their human rights implications and the need for enjoying/asserting rights by people in the local communities.

Annex A

Sessions of *Jinken Rakugakujuku* held since 2021 and reported by OYAOYA (OYAOYA News).

Year	Session and date	Topic
2021 ⁴⁹	1st session 19 May 2021	Considering the challenges of modern literacy – Osaka’s literacy and Japanese language learning movement and Us
	2nd session 2 June 2021	Crossroads of Diversity Education: Experience diverse values through card games
	3rd session 12 June 2021	Kamagasaki’s history and present
	4th session 30 June 2021	See, notice, and think - Your connection to color vision problems
	5th session 14 July 2021	Report on Nukku’s activities and the current situation and support for children we meet at Nukku
	6th session 28 July 2021	Jane Elliot Returns
2022 ⁵⁰	1st session 18 May 2022	Let’s celebrate the “100th Anniversary Declaration of the Suiheisha” together!
	2nd session 1 June 2022	Development of children with disabilities and outside school [sexual rights]
	3rd session 15 June 2025	The birthplace of poetry - Talking about leprosy literature
	4th session 29 June 2022	Yamadoku NEET
	5th session 13 July 2022	What is majority privilege?
	6th session 27 July 2022	Thinking again about the current era: Do you believe in democracy?
2023 ⁵¹	1st session 7 May 2023	Thinking about learning Buraku issues in an internet society
	2nd session 31 May 2023	Internet and Human Rights Violations
	3rd session 14 June 2025	Theater “Hosenka”: Peace efforts using soft power by ordinary citizens
	4th session 28 June 2025	Sexuality education –Education for living happily–
	5th session 12 July 2023	For children to grow up in the community
	6th session 19 July 2023	Children’s Challenge: Why? Sugoroku adult experience

2024 ⁵²	1st session 15 May 2024	For children to protect their own safety
	2nd session 29 May 2024	Experiences of refugee applicants on specific activity visas
	3rd session 12 June 2024	Easy Japanese is a Courtesy in a Multicultural Society
	4th session 26 June 2024	Considering the issues faced by people without family registration from the perspective of support workers
	5th session 10 July 2024	Changing Buraku discrimination in modern society - Based on the findings of racism research
	6th session 24 July 2024	My Perspective on the Hansen's Disease Issue

Endnotes

1 Kenzo Tomonaga, The National Human Rights Education Program in Japan: Some Notes, *FOCUS Asia-Pacific*, Volume 30, December 2002, www.hurights.or.jp/archives/focus/section2/2002/12/the-national-human-rights-education-program-in-japan-some-notes.html.

2 Under the January 2001 Cabinet reorganization, the four Cabinet Ministers are from the Ministries of Education, Culture, Sports and Technology; Justice; Foreign Affairs; and the Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications.

3 The number of Ministries since January 2001 has been reduced to 15.

4 The titles of the law and plan used in Japanese government documents are the following: Act on the Promotion of Human Rights Education and Human Rights Awareness-Raising (Act No. 147 of 2000) also referred to as the “Human Rights Education and Awareness-Raising Promotion Act,” and the Basic Plan on Human Rights Education and Human Rights Awareness-Raising also referred to as “Basic Plan” (adopted in March 2002 and partially amended on 1 April 2011. The English text of 2000 law and Basic Plan is available in the 2018 White Paper on Human Rights Education and Awareness-Raising, edited by the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, page 11, www.moj.go.jp/ENGLISH/HB/activities/pdf/white_paper2018.pdf. 2018 White Paper on Human Rights Education and Awareness-Raising, op. cit.

5 See partial changes to the Basic Plan for Human Rights Education and Awareness-raising, Cabinet decision, April 1, 2011, Ministry of Justice, www.moj.go.jp/content/000072340.pdf.

6 See Japan Govt OKs 2nd Basic Plan for Human Rights Awareness, Jiji Press, 6 June 2025, <https://sp.m.jiji.com/english/show/40597>. For the text of the second Basic Plan (in Japanese), see Jinken (Human Rights), Ministry of Justice, www.moj.go.jp/JINKEN/JINKEN83/jinken83.html; www.moj.go.jp/content/001440366.pdf. The Human Rights Awareness Division, Human Rights Protection Bureau, Ministry of Justice of Japan solicited public comments on the draft renewed Basic Plan. 1,198 public comments were collected from 28 January 2025 to 26 February 2025. See Human Rights Awareness Division, Human Rights Protection Bureau, Ministry of Justice, <https://public-comment.e-gov.go.jp/pcm/1040?CLASSNAME=PCM1040&id=300120124&Mode=1>; Summary of Public Comments on the draft (in Japanese) <https://public-comment.e-gov.go.jp/pcm/download?seqNo=0000293810>.

7 “Basic Plan for Human Rights Education and Awareness” (2nd Edition) approved by Cabinet - First revision in 23 years (6/6), News in Brief, HURIGHTS OSAKA, www.hurights.or.jp/archives/newsinbrief-ja/section1/2025/07/2366.html.

HURIGHTS OSAKA notes that the summary of the public comments issued by the Ministry of Justice does not mention how much of the public opinions was reflected in the approved 2025 Basic Plan.

8 See 2018 White Paper on Human Rights Education and Awareness-Raising, op. cit.

9 2018 White Paper on Human Rights Education and Awareness-Raising, *ibid*.

10 2018 White Paper on Human Rights Education and Awareness-Raising, *ibid.*, page 41.

11 See Awareness-raising Activities, Ministry of Justice, www.moj.go.jp/ENGLISH/HB/activities/activities/campaign.html.

12 Human Rights Week, www.moj.go.jp/ENGLISH/HB/activities/activities/week.html.

13 The “Human Rights Volunteers” are also known as Human Rights Commissioners, see Henry Seals, “Being a Human Rights Commissioner in Japan,” *FOCUS Asia-Pacific*, September 2023, volume 113, www.hurights.or.jp/archives/focus/section3/2023/09/being-a-human-rights-commissioner-in-japan.html.

14 Human Rights Lectures, www.moj.go.jp/ENGLISH/HB/activities/activities/lectures.html.

15 National Essay Contest on Human Rights for Junior High School Students, www.moj.go.jp/ENGLISH/m_hishoo6_00018.html.

16 Human Rights Flower Campaign, www.moj.go.jp/ENGLISH/HB/activities/index.html.

17 For the list of human rights centers in these prefectures, see “List of organizations and institutions that are members of the National Network for Human Rights Materials and Exhibitions,” <http://e-jinken.net/list.htm> and also <https://www.fukuokaken-jinken.or.jp/institutions/net.html>.

18 Visit Human Rights Database, www.jinken-library.jp/database/list.php?p=task&c=other.

19 See www.city.settsu.osaka.jp/soshiki/shichoukoushitsu/jinkenjoseiseisaku-ka/jinkenkyoukai/1946.html, and www.settsu-jinken.jp/index.html.

20 See overview of the Hyogo Prefectural Human Rights Awareness Association, www.hyogo-jinken.or.jp/info.

21 This excerpt is from page 24 of the booklet, www.yaojinken.org/about-rinen.

22 The English text is from the automatic online translation function of a browser (Chrome).

23 The Second Yao City Human Rights Education and Awareness-Raising Plan (Revised Edition) Summary — Creating a city that is kind to its citizens and whose citizens are kind—: Yao City Human Rights Culture Interaction Promotion Section, March 2021, www.city.yao.osaka.jp/res/projects/default_project/page/001/009/632/english.pdf.

24 Issue number 12 was added by Cabinet decision on 1 April 2011. Human rights topics - www.settsu-jinken.jp/subjects.html; see pages 19-35 of the Basic Plan, [op. cit.](http://www.settsu-jinken.jp/subjects.html)

25 Human Rights Promotion Center, Human Rights Culture Promotion Division, www.city.kitakyushu.lg.jp/contents/924_11509.html.

26 Kawasaki City Ordinance on the Rights of the Child, www.city.kawasaki.jp/450/page/0000076916.html. Also, Tajimi City Ordinance on Children’s Rights, *Human Rights Education in Asia-Pacific*, volume 4, www.hurights.or.jp/archives/asia-pacific/section1/pdf/Tajimi%20City%20Ordinance%20on%20Children%27s%20Rights.pdf. On child-friendly city, see Isami Kinoshita, “Japanese Movements on Children’s Participation and the Child-friendly City,” *Human Rights Education in Asia-Pacific*, volume 6, 2015, www.hurights.or.jp/archives/asia-pacific/section1/3%20Japanese%20Movements%20on%20Children%E2%80%99s%20Participation.pdf.

- 27 じんけん楽習塾 (Jinken Rakugaku Juku), www.yaoinken.org/kouza.
- 28 Activities - www.settsu-jinken.jp/index.html.
- 29 For more information on the activities in the Human Rights Festa Tokyo 2024, visit this link: www.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/information/press/2024/10/2024100209.
- 30 For more information on Hyogo Vision 2050, visit (in Japanese language, <https://hyogo-vision.com/>).
- 31 About the “Hyogo Human Festival 2024 in Minami Awaji,” www.hyogo-jinken.or.jp/archives/9542.
- 32 Selling human rights booklets, Yao City Human Rights Association, www.yaoinken.org/book.
- 33 The 2020 series contains the following:
 Prologue: A place to think without fearing change
 Chapter 1: The past and future of Jinken Rakugaku Juku
 Chapter 2 Participatory learning and Jinken Rakugaku Juku
 Chapter 3 Participants’ Comments
 Chapter 4: Programs from Jinken Rakugaku Juku
 Reference Material 1 History of Jinken Rakugaku Juku
 Document 2: 20 years of progress as seen through OYAOYA News
 Epilogue: Towards establishing human rights as a universal culture
- 34 According to the United Nations’ Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, there were two laws enacted in 2016: Act on the Promotion of Efforts to Eliminate Unfair Discriminatory Speech and Behaviour against Persons Originating from Outside Japan (June 2016) and the Act on the Promotion of the Elimination of Buraku Discrimination (December 2016). See Concluding observations on the combined tenth and eleventh periodic reports of Japan (26 September 2018), www.mofa.go.jp/files/000406781.pdf. But the Act for Eliminating Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities, enacted in 2015, took effect in April 2016.
- 35 The 2019 series contains the following:
 Introduction
 Chapter 1: Ordinances, policies and guidelines relating to human rights in Yao City
 Chapter 2: Human Rights Education and Promotion Act and the Three Laws on Eliminating Discrimination
 Chapter 3: The Constitution of Japan, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Human Rights Treaties
- 36 The 2018 series contains the following:
 Introduction
 Chapter 1: Building a foundation for learning about the Buraku issue
 Chapter 2: Making the study of the Buraku issue accessible to students
 Chapter 3: Creating a “Buraku Issue Study Plan”
 Chapter 4: Recommendations for learning about the Buraku issue
 Starting line before you begin learning about the Buraku issue
 Social Studies Historical Area 1: Middle Ages - The lives and culture of discriminated people in the Middle Ages

Social Studies Historical Field 2: Early Modern Period I - The Class System in the Edo Period

Social Studies Historical Field 3: Early Modern Period II – “Kaitai Shinsho”

Social Studies Historical Field 4: Early Modern Period III - Shibori Rebellion

Social Studies Historical Field 5: Modern I – “Encouragement of Learning”

Social Studies Historical Section 6: Modern Emancipation Proclamation (1871 Dajokan Proclamation)

Social Studies Historical Field 7: Modern III - Zenkoku Suiheisha

Social Studies Civic Field 1: Employment Discrimination

Social Studies Civics Field 2: The Struggle for Free Textbooks

Social Studies Civic Field 3: Marriage Discrimination

37 The 2017 series contains the following:

Prologue: Weaving a Dream

Chapter 1: Discrimination in Yao City

Chapter 2: Buraku discrimination issue

Chapter 3: Foreigner discrimination issue

Chapter 4: Discrimination against people with disabilities

Chapter 5: Age

38 The 2016 series contains the following:

Prologue: Bringing Buraku discrimination closer to home

Chapter 1: Buraku discrimination today

1. Discrimination based on “land”

2. Buraku discrimination in modernization (discrimination that remains)

3. The situation surrounding buraku communities as seen from survey results

Chapter 2: A series of discrimination cases

1. Recent major discrimination cases

2. Discrimination case in Yao City

Chapter 3: Efforts to eliminate discrimination

1. The “Report of the Committee on Appeals for the Complaint” and its Significance

2. Efforts in Yao City before and after the “Double-Judgment Trial”

Chapter 4: Young people living in “Buraku” communities

Epilogue: “Public Opinion” and “Public Opinion.”

39 Kizuna, www.hyogo-jinken.or.jp/document/kizuna.

40 「いのち あい ころろ」(Life, Love, Heart), www.city.kitakyushu.lg.jp/contents/924_11485.html.

41 人権教育啓発作品集 (Human Rights Education Awareness Collection series), www.settsu-jinken.jp/tsudoiphoto2.html.

42 See list of human rights issues contained in instructional materials published from 2008 to 2024 on moral education in Table 2, Number of Instructional Materials Related to Handling Human Rights Issues in Human Rights Education, Takanori Kawanobe, Prospects for Developing Teaching Materials on Human Rights Issues for School Education, Bull. Shikoku Univ. 63: 85 – 96 2024, page 88.

43 Kawanobe, *ibid.*, pages 87-88.

44 What are Human Rights Cities?, World Human Rights Cities Forum, <https://en.whrcf.org/HumanRightsCityGwangju>.

45 Much of the information on Sakai city is taken from Jefferson R. Plantilla, The Many Roads to Human Rights City: Examining Asian Initiatives, World Human Rights Cities Forum (WHRCF), 10 October 2019, <https://en.whrcf.org/meetingdata/?bmode=view&idx=46771472>.

46 From the newsletter of the Sakai City Human Rights Education Promotion Council, Kokoro-no-Hibiki, volume 42, 2020, page 8, https://www.jinkenkyo.jp/wp-content/themes/jinkenkyo-child/pdf/kokoro/vol42_en.pdf.

47 Kokoro-no-Hibiki, volume 42, *ibid*.

48 See Phase 2, World Human Rights Education Programme, www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/WPHRE_Phase_2_en.pdf.

49 “Governing the city by human rights objectives: Management concepts and instruments,” Outcome Document, UNESCO, 8 February 2023 www.humanrights-golocal.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/ACCO23_Outcome_Document.pdf.

50 OYAOYA (OYAOYA News), www.yaojinken.org/oyaoya2021.

51 OYAOYA (OYAOYA News), www.yaojinken.org/oyaoya2022.

52 OYAOYA (OYAOYA News), www.yaojinken.org/oyaoya2023.

53 OYAOYA (OYAOYA News), www.yaojinken.org/%E8%A4%87%E8%A3%BD-%E3%82%A4%E3%83%99%E3%83%B3%E3%83%88%E6%83%85%E5%A0%B1.