

Introduction

THIS TENTH VOLUME of *Human Rights Education in Asia-Pacific* was prepared mainly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Several authors had to pause in finalizing the articles in order to help those affected by the COVID-19 lockdowns.

The COVID-19 pandemic provides an important context in discussing human rights education. The COVID-19 pandemic brings out the problem of access to basic needs (food, medicine, health service, among others) and to government services in order to survive the harsh situation of lockdowns while dealing with the spreading virus infection.

It forces people to see the value of communication technology in disseminating vital information about the virus and the means to obtain basic necessities during the time when movement of people is restricted.

The COVID-19 pandemic reveals discriminatory thinking of some people against those who get infected by the virus (or suspected of having been infected) and the health workers who risk their own lives in order to save the lives of others.

At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic exposes the kindness and sense of responsibility of people by extending in their own limited way whatever they can provide to those in need.

Human rights education can take the form of responses to the pandemic situation. Educational activities can stress the importance of addressing in a fair and equal manner the needs of people affected by the virus, the lockdowns and other health safety measures. These activities can promote the need to respect and protect the rights of people especially those who have been infected, the frontliners (medical doctors and nurses, other health workers and medical institution staff), the workers who manage the food and other basic needs delivery systems, and the government officials who have to ensure that people in the community are shielded from getting infected by COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic provides a sharper picture of society where human rights have to play a significant part in measures that are meant to protect people's health.

Discrimination Against Minorities

This tenth volume has several articles that discuss educational measures addressing discrimination against minorities.

CamASEAN, in Cambodia, was established to help the members of the sexual minority (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer, or LGBTIQ) “air their views and grievances in public.” The LGBTIQ Cambodians generally suffer from discrimination arising from the lack of legal recognition of their rights as LGBTIQ people. The organization designed programs to help the LGBTIQ Cambodians live decent lives (through economic activities) and educate the public on the situation and rights of the LGBTIQ people.

Navsarjan Trust, on the other hand, aims at eliminating caste-based or Dalit discrimination. It focuses on education as a key intervention towards the elimination of this type of discrimination. It has programs on creating a “counter-consciousness and sense of unity within the minds of children to combat such discrimination.” The programs bring “together all the Dalit children of one village, across sub-caste lines.” Among the Dalit people, there are sub-castes who do not interact with each other even if they belong to a single village to the extent that “untouchability between sub-castes is often practiced.”

The children’s programs “emphasize unity and equality through cultural programs, book readings, and group discussions.” The Navsarjan programs are based on an inclusive approach to eliminating Dalit discrimination.

Some government-issued school textbooks in India include issues such as “‘Diversity and Discrimination’ [that] introduces the caste system as a division of labor that not only hierarchizes work but associates with the differing kinds of jobs, a differential degree of social esteem;” and also “‘Equality in Indian Democracy’ [in a] grade 7 textbook *Social and Political Life II* (SP – II) [that] illustrates that caste remains to be an important social identity that one grows up with.” The contents of these textbooks follow the National Curriculum Framework 2005 of India.

Community Program

Some articles discuss community programs that enable local people to understand issues, engage in dialogue on those issues and participate in activities that address the issues.

CamASEAN engages people in local communities through its photo exhibits (Rainbow Life Museum) and dialogues. Photos of LGBTIQ couples are exhibited in different communities and dialogues are held with the people in the community to discuss LGBTIQ issues. These activities make the local people know better the lives of LGBTIQ couples and accept them as ordinary couples in society. At the same time, the activities advocate for the rights of the LGBTIQ Cambodians.

Bal Mitra Gram in India promotes the concept of communities that protect and realize the rights of children. Its community-based program relies on the empowerment of the children and their parents to enable them to participate in the community decision-making processes and to engage in livelihood activities that do not involve children. This two-pronged strategy of rights protection/realization and livelihood development makes the child-friendly program in the communities sustainable.

In addressing child labor and discrimination against lower caste people, *Bal Mitra Gram* facilitates the creation of community children's council called *Bal Panchayat* to enable children's involvement in decision-making processes of the community, and the implementation of activities that bring children to school and provide support to the livelihood of families in the community.

Navsarjan has a community-based program aimed at empowering the people towards elimination of Dalit discrimination. It supports the establishment of *Bhimshala*, "an extra-curricular education center run by a Navsarjan trained volunteer from the local community usually out of her or his home." The *Bhimshala* volunteer "plays a key role in eliminating discrimination at school, by lodging protests with the school administration, and — with the help of Navsarjan — by taking legal action when necessary." Navsarjan puts up a library in the house of a *Bhimshala* volunteer to make available to children books that are "centered around the values of equality and non-discrimination." The anti-discrimination books produced by Navsarjan are available in this library. The *Bhimshala* program helped reduce discrimination in "dozens of village schools, and Dalit children are getting extra help with their studies, receiving further encouragement to stay in school."

Navsarjan's youth awareness activities "educate the youth on village government schemes, land laws, the *panchayat* (village council) system, addictions (to alcohol and tobacco) and gender issues, all of which help to less-

en feelings of powerlessness and cynicism.” A community structure for the youth (Village Youth Forum) is established and meets once or twice a month to discuss local issues such as village infrastructure, atrocities against Dalits, and how to solve their own issues. Unemployed members of the community can avail of vocational training and social empowerment provided by Shakti Kendra (Dalit Empowerment Center) that Navsarjan established in 1999. As a result, the youth feel more engaged and empowered to take control of their lives.

Online Media

The rapidly increasing use of social media has influenced the circulation of information to the public. There is no doubt about the power of social media in shaping public opinion and in spreading lies and hatred. Several articles in this publication feature the use of social media for human rights and related purposes.

CamASEAN saw early on the value of using social media in supporting members of the LGBTIQ community, making LGBTIQ Cambodians express their ideas and experiences, and informing the public on the rights of LGBTIQ Cambodians.

Its Facebook accounts present “positive stories [about LGBTIQ Cambodians] to inspire people and the media,” and the work of “members of the police, monks and commune council members” that support the LGBTIQ Cambodians. CamASEAN sees Facebook as a platform for “sharing, explaining, analyzing, brainstorming, counseling, providing advisory information, knowledge, and professional experiences regarding ASEAN issues and Cambodian social issues.”

It also trains “elderly LGBTIQ couples ... on using social media from a smartphone.” The training includes “livestreaming the exhibition talks on Facebook as well as messenger to mass announce the exhibits.” One LGBTIQ Cambodian comments:

I am so proud that I can share my life story through technology and [with] just couples photos and short captures can change [the] mindset of Khmer people to understand, accept, protect and support us as homosexual people. And more than that I can be part of advocacy to stop hate and defend love.

Another organization in Cambodia, the Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM), has observed that

The youth spend much time online and actively participate in sharing, commenting, posting, and reacting to certain trends because of the interesting contents, entertaining videos, beautiful pictures, and fun memes. However, while they are having fun, they also risk being subjected to online harassment, false information and digital security hacking.

CCIM has a project that promotes Media and Information Literacy (MIL) in Cambodia through training activities for young people and students. With the introduction of MIL in the secondary school curriculum, CCIM started a training program for secondary school students. It also provides MIL training to university students through the Media 101 Clubs, to help them “identify the characteristics and impact of social media, distinguish between disinformation (so-called ‘fake news’), misinformation and malinformation.” The training also helps students “explore the side-effects of social media like hate speech, cyber-bullying, and learn how to protect their privacy and security.”

A group in India called Kriti Team, on the other hand, found the online platform as a way to deal with the lockdown situation. In March 2020, it started recommending films available online to give the “audience a chance to develop empathy and capacity to support the more vulnerable, and ‘enable us all to make socially sensitive, gender just and sustainable choices.’” The online film recommendation project evolved into “Weekend Watch” that features old and new films. And despite the pandemic, Kriti Team was able to celebrate its twentieth anniversary using the online platform. It has decided to integrate the online platform in its “#thoughtprovokingcinema” program as a new feature that arose as a need during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

Also, under the Denmark–Myanmar Programme on Rule of Law and Human Rights 2016 – 2020, a “mobile application titled ‘A Khwint A Yay’ (Your Rights)” was developed to ensure that human rights conventions and optional protocols translated into Myanmar language would be available to the wider public.

Film Showing

Movies, documentaries and other types of films evoke emotion as well as thinking. Messages being conveyed by films may influence future action in both positive and negative senses. However, films that contain valuable messages are not always accessible to people. Documentaries with good social content are not shown in commercial theaters.

The issue therefore is on access of people to movies, documentaries and other types of films that convey messages with societal value.

Articles from India, Bangladesh and Papua New Guinea feature film showing and festival as effective means of making the public watch films that promote human rights.

Kriti Team started showing films using an old television set in a house in New Delhi. It had a clear objective of making use of documentaries to support the movement for social change. It continued to show documentaries not only inside the house but also in public halls where more people could watch and discuss the documentaries. The initiative paved the way for the public showing of documentaries that would otherwise stay on shelves. It also networked with filmmakers and documentarists that supported the showing of their films much more widely. The audience in the film showings is given the opportunity to be entertained, educated and disturbed on the issues being presented in the films, and to express thoughts and opinions about them (and can even prod them to act on issues soon after the film showing). Indeed, Kriti Team is interested in making people think of social change in watching films and thus has adopted this hashtag: #thoughtprovokingcinema.

The annual International Children Film Festival organized by the Children's Film Society Bangladesh is held in different cities in Bangladesh. Its focus on children as makers of film is unique. It sees filmmaking as a means for children to exercise freedom of expression. Its Teen Film Workshop provides "young filmmakers direct access to leading industry professionals who conduct in-depth discussions and activities on the different sectors of filmmaking." The film festival shows films that promote child rights. It also has a social film section that "aims to make the children become aware, understand and cope with social issues in a positive way." Discussion after the film showing provides avenue for children to raise questions and give opinions on child rights issues.

The annual Papua New Guinea Human Rights Film Festival (PNG HRFF) is a United Nations-organized and Papua New Guinea government-supported film festival that shows commercial and non-commercial movies along with film documentaries produced by United Nations agencies and other institutions. Every year, the festival shows films made by Papua New Guinean filmmakers. It is held in various cities and towns in Papua New Guinea. Each year, films relevant to the annual human rights theme are shown and discussion sessions on the theme are held with resource persons from the United Nations and other institutions providing input in the discussions.

The three film showing initiatives engage their audiences in different ways. Kriti Team would invite specific groups such as children from a poor community to watch and discuss films on issues relevant to them. The ICFF would have special film showing sessions on human rights issues where children and youth can raise questions and opinions. The PNG HRFF exposes both the general public and the students to human rights through the films and also the discussion sessions, exhibits and other activities held during the film festival.

Theater

Navsarjan reaches out to non-Dalit children through its Chhote BHIM theater competition. It encourages children to form theater groups in their village and participate in the competition. The competition facilitates interaction between Dalit and non-Dalit children as members of theater groups. As Martin Macwan reports:

These groups would have non-Dalits act out Dalit characters while the Dalit children act out non-Dalit characters in the plays. The same was done in the case of the Hindu and the Muslim children and the boys and the girls.

Thevanayagam Thevananth discusses the significance of reviving popular theater in northern Sri Lanka to enable the people there to express their thoughts and feelings about the issues they face after the civil war ended. Members of a theater group learned how to communicate ideas to the public in a meaningful way. In a theater project during the 2008-2013 period, youth recruited from several villages in northern Sri Lanka became theater

performers and developed stories that dealt with issues that people in the area suffered from: unemployment of graduates, politics in the search for persons who remained missing after the civil war ended, aged people living alone in insecure situations, rape of a school girl, human rights violations/abuses (by both Sri Lankan army and the LTTE [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam]) that affected women, suffering of a refugee and a father's search for a missing daughter. The reaction of people who watched the theater dramas ranged from appreciating the importance of "people-oriented dramas" to seeing the need for using theater to change people's thinking.

Theater is indeed a powerful medium that has capacity to breakdown division among people based on social identities such as caste and unite people in understanding common problems.

Schools, Universities and Beyond

Human rights education in the school system has always been a challenging field. The formal education system is governed by a national curriculum that does not always provide a clear space for human rights education. In practice, integration of the human rights content in the different curricular subjects has become the main path to teaching human rights during regular class hours. But even this path is not always feasible without supporting factors existing such as training of teachers on human rights knowledge and pedagogy, training on how to integrate human rights in their subjects, and availability of appropriate teaching/learning materials. The next option, which may also be an effective one, is the use of extracurricular activities or out-of-school programs.

The study of Dev Mittal provides an example of challenges in teaching/learning about human rights inside the classroom in accordance with the formal school curriculum and using government-issued textbooks that discuss Dalit discrimination. Her study reveals that the social background of the teachers and the students affect the understanding of the Dalit issues. As she observed:

The students' knowledge largely stood in contrast to the textbook knowledge. While they maintained caste prejudice, they dismissed the claim that caste continues to be a menace in contemporary society. This failure to self-introspect and to reflect on the everyday life of school can be attributed to the school culture. The school culture has normalized caste-based

bonding and even prejudice. The lack of active intervention by teachers also contributes to this culture.

School culture reflects to a large extent the prevailing thinking and practices in society. In this case, both teachers and students have strong caste-based self-identification and thus think and behave according to what is supposed to be prescribed by each respective caste. Without addressing the school culture issue, teaching Dalit discrimination inside the classroom based on textbooks and the curriculum does not seem to significantly change the knowledge and perspective of students about discrimination.

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) of Cambodia starting in school year 2016-2017 included media literacy in the school curriculum that covers discussions about social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Line, Instagram, and Google+. An official of the MoEYS explained the importance of media literacy:

Young Cambodians need to become conscious of how the media shape popular culture and opinion and how they influence personal choices. They need to know how to navigate the internet and how to protect themselves in the cyber world...

This curriculum change gave CICM the opportunity to provide MIL training to secondary students. But it faces challenges such as students' limited time for training during regular school days and thus the need to constantly look for free time during weekends, and the fact that secondary school students outside the major cities do not have smartphones. This latter challenge prevents students from practicing outside the school what they learn inside the classroom on MIL.

Several articles in this publication provide different examples of human rights education using extra-curricular activities.

The Jordan Model Parliament (JMP) project of King's Academy is an example of an extracurricular activity that has the full support of the school. It is not an ordinary extracurricular activity. And its participants are not limited to the school's students but also those from many other schools in Jordan. In this sense, the project has nationwide scope.

What makes the project attractive from a human rights education perspective is the need for students to debate on human rights issues. Students prepare before they could participate in the different activities including plenary sessions and small group discussions where students debate on is-

sues such as tribal conflicts, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, freedom of the press, women's rights, the Syrian crisis and refugee rights, the Arab Spring, the threat of ISIS, and the *Tawjihi* system (general secondary education certificate examination in Jordan). Students learn the human rights issues by doing research prior to the debates during the JMP sessions.

At the tertiary and higher education levels, such as law departments and law schools, human rights can be studied in different subjects. The Kathmandu Law School offers human rights courses as part of the study of the constitution, criminal law and procedure, administrative law, labor law, international law (international human rights and humanitarian laws) and also legal research. It offers practical study of human rights through its centers for child rights and other issues, legal clinics and research projects. Finally, it offers national and international masteral programs on human rights.

Teaching human rights at tertiary and higher education levels, however, faces challenges. The challenges faced by the Kathmandu Law School are echoed by the programs in the universities in Myanmar and Timor Leste. Institutionalizing human rights education in tertiary and higher education levels need to overcome a number of challenges including:

- a. Limited number of teachers who are prepared to teach human rights in different subjects in the university and higher education levels;
- b. Limited availability of appropriate textbooks and teaching materials in the language and context of the teachers and the students. Much of the existing materials are in English and written mainly for (and in the context of) Europe, north America and other regions;
- c. Limited opportunities for training on human rights knowledge and teaching methods, including capacity to integrate human rights in various subjects, of the teachers in universities and law schools;
- d. Limited opportunity for teachers in universities and law schools to do research on the concept and practice of human rights;
- e. Limited opportunity for students to experience practical use of the human rights concepts such as through legal clinics;
- f. Inadequate information and communication technology facilities to access online information and communicate with other teachers and students.

Ravi Prakash explains the need to develop “indigenous” human rights literature:

limited indigenous human rights literature and over reliance on euro-centric version of human rights ... deprive the students of much needed local jurisprudential understanding. The idea that culture is hindrance to the universality of human rights is flawed and it is important that through indigenous writings of which there is dearth an appropriate balance between cultural relativism and universality is elaborated.

May Thida Aung and Louise Simonsen Aaen, on the other hand, discuss the need for research on human rights issues in Myanmar because it is “important for researchers not only to improve research skills but also for the better understanding of the human rights issues in practice so that they could practice human rights through their heart in the future.” They explain the need to develop the capacity of the teachers to do research and to establish peer review system in order to maintain the quality of research papers being produced.

Adriano Remiddi explains the value of establishing a human rights center to mainstream human rights education in in the National University of Timor Leste. The activities of the Human Rights Centre based at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the university is helping produce a

new generation of future lecturers, researchers and managers ... through three structural “Studies and Training Programmes” for which twenty-seven local professors, renowned human rights defenders and young graduates were selected. These resource persons will be the protagonists of the mainstreaming of human rights courses within the University curriculum from 2021, contributing to a more just and equitable Timor-Leste.

In the same manner, the human rights resource centers established in the central libraries of two universities in Myanmar would ensure that human rights resources are not only available to “law lecturers and students but also to students, lecturers and researchers from other disciplines also interested in acquiring human rights knowledge.”

Final Note

Strictly speaking, people engaged in human rights education have to have appropriate knowledge, skills, materials and equipment/facilities in order to make impact. But transmitting human rights knowledge and skills in order to affect thinking and behavior can be done in numerous ways including simple talks, lectures, film showings, art and photo exhibits, theater performances, cultural activities (singing, poetry reading, making artwork, dancing), dialogues, debates, field visits, workshops, comprehensive training courses, and formal education programs. In many of these activities, learning human rights can be a participatory process that involves sharing of information, knowledge and skills by everyone involved.

Human rights education, similar to any educational activity, can be done using wide latitude of ways and means. What is important is that the human rights message is conveyed to and appreciated by people it is aimed at.

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