



# HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN ASIA-PACIFIC VOLUME TEN

HURIGHTS OSAKA

**HUMAN RIGHTS  
EDUCATION  
IN ASIA-PACIFIC  
VOLUME TEN**

*Human Rights Education in Asia-Pacific—Volume Ten*

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## Acknowledgement

We sincerely acknowledge the contribution of individuals and institutions from different parts of Asia and the Pacific in completing this tenth volume of *Human Rights Education in Asia-Pacific*.

Their articles support the view that documenting experiences in undertaking educational activities that convey the human rights message has strategic value. This kind of documentation facilitates learning for both the people involved in the activities and the people who are seeking information on such experiences. This is a key character of this publication.

We also thank those who worked hard with the authors in preparing the articles in this volume, namely: Sophea Pheung and Sarath Khoun of CamASEAN Youth's Future; Munira Morshed Munni, Morshedul Islam, Rayeed Morshed and Abir Ferdous Mukhar of the Children's Film Society Bangladesh; Kedar Poudyal, Alithia Barampataz and Patience Pip of the Human Rights Film Festival Committee Papua New Guinea; Tathya Macwan and Indu Rohit of Navsarjan; and Vibol Mam of Cambodian Center for Independent Media and Thorsten Karg of DW Akademie.

Finally, we acknowledge the excellent work of Fidel Rillo of Mind Guerilla for the lay-out and cover design of this volume.

## Foreword

In the midst of unprecedented global insecurity and uncertainty that have been prevailing since the beginning of 2020, we have seen that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected most seriously the already vulnerable populations. They include women, people with disabilities, elderly, homeless, single parents and their children, foreign residents and refugees, among others.

One thing that has become ever more evident is that human rights constitute the most important principle that should guide us in building back better. To be able to have universal health coverage with COVID-19 vaccines, decent work through secured employment, women's and girls' empowerment without fear of gender-based violence and harmful traditional practices including unconscious biases, human rights are indispensable.

And for this to take place, human rights education is essential.

We are pleased that this tenth volume of *Human Rights Education in Asia-Pacific* provides you with a good variety of practices, experiences, and lessons, in both geographical coverage and thematic scope, on human rights education from Asia and the Pacific. We hope that the articles of this volume will contribute, in one way or another, to your work of ensuring human rights.

May the year 2021 become a year of renewed hope for peaceful, just and sustainable society where human rights leave no one behind.

ATSUKO MIWA  
Director

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## Introduction

**T**HIS 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.

JEFFERSON R. PLANTILLA  
Editor

# CamASEAN: Social Inclusion by Raising Awareness and Capacity of the LGBTIQ

Srom Srun

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**W**HEN THE CAMBODIAN GOVERNMENT decided to host the 21<sup>st</sup> ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Summit in Phnom Penh in November 2012, a group of young Cambodians became very keen in understanding this intergovernmental institution and its role in promoting and protecting human rights. They saw the ASEAN Summit as an opportunity for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ) Cambodians to air their views and grievances in public.

There was an observation that Cambodians in general knew little about ASEAN. Nevertheless, the Cambodian youth had become more sensitized in debating ASEAN integration and development.

The group established the CamASEAN Youth's Future (CamASEAN) in Phnom Penh on 3 January 2012. At that time, the CamASEAN members pledged to help realize a people-oriented ASEAN Community by 2015 based on the Road Map for the ASEAN Community (2009-2015).<sup>1</sup>

CamASEAN is independent from any political party. But it is a "People's Political Team" whose members contribute their spare time and professional experience in disseminating existing information on ASEAN covering economic, cultural and political and security issues. The team members are Mr Srun Srom, Ms Pheung Sophea, Ms Phoeng Sophorn, Mr Khuon Sarat, Mr Vin Vichet, Mr Pheng Sahn (transman), Mr Noy Sitha (transman), Mr Chhea Channy and Mr Im Tol.

It has the mission of enabling:

ASEAN activists to participate in promoting and protecting the human rights of ASEAN citizens regardless of sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, nationality, color, religious, language, and other status.

It adopted the following theme: “One Community, Equal Conditions, Corporate Responsibility, Social and Economic Justice among ASEAN Nations.”

## **Situation of LGBTIQ**

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ) Cambodians have been suffering from poverty and homelessness.

Reference to diverse sexual behaviors and gender identities in Cambodia dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Other ancient descriptions of LGBTIQ people existed, and were likely destroyed during the Khmer Rouge era in the 1970s. There were surveys and studies about same-sex desire between men from the 1950s, as well as newspaper reports on transgender females in rural Cambodia during the 1950-1970 period. Sexual and behavioral studies starting in the 1990s, driven by the global HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) epidemic, resulted in raised awareness and discussion of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI). Pride events have been celebrated since 2003, and a public statement was made by Cambodia’s former King, His Majesty King Father Norodom Sihanouk, in support of same-sex relations in 2004. The 2000s decade also witnessed the first networking of men having sex with men (MSM) and transgender persons in 2006. Additionally, the first official recognition of a LGBTIQ organization occurred in 2014. Since then, the country has seen growing visibility of the LGBT community and increased amount of community organizing and social activities among its members.

The 2018 “Joint Statement on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) Rights and Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) in Cambodia” prepared by Cambodian NGOs for the Pre-Session - Third Universal Periodic Review of the Kingdom of Cambodia (December 2018, Geneva) provides a summary of the problems faced by LGBTIQ Cambodians.

Excerpts from the statement lists the following major problems:<sup>2</sup>

Firstly, LGBTIQ people in Cambodia face numerous forms of discrimination, partly because of a legal framework which denies them basic equality. Four forms of legal discrimination have been identified as priorities by the communities:

1. the lack of legal protection against discrimination and violence against LGBTIQ people;

2. the absence of legal recognition of self-defined gender identity;
3. the absence of marriage equality in Cambodian law;
4. the denial of full adoption rights to rainbow couples.

In May 2018, the communities have raised these issues directly with Ministries' representatives during the First National Dialogue on Public Policies to promote LGBTIQ rights in Cambodia. The result of the public dialog was overall positive and offered possibilities for future progress in relation to these issues. However, no concrete process has been set in place by the government to this day to address the issues raised.

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Secondly, even though the LGBTIQ community is becoming more visible, in part due to a growing LGBTIQ rights movement, Cambodian LGBTIQ people continue to be discriminated against and excluded in several areas of social life. In addition, LGBTIQ people in Cambodia face discrimination in accessing and keeping employment, as well as discrimination and exclusion in the workplace. LGBTIQ people in Cambodia work principally in certain marginalized sectors, which prevents them from escaping the cycle of poverty. This is exacerbated by widespread family rejection and exclusion in schools and the wider community.

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Finally, there is limited knowledge and understanding on SOGIESC issues among health professionals in Cambodia, and sensitization and capacity-building on this issue has been very limited so far. Gender affirming health care services are not available and there are no laws, regulations or administrative documents stating whether such services are legal or illegal.

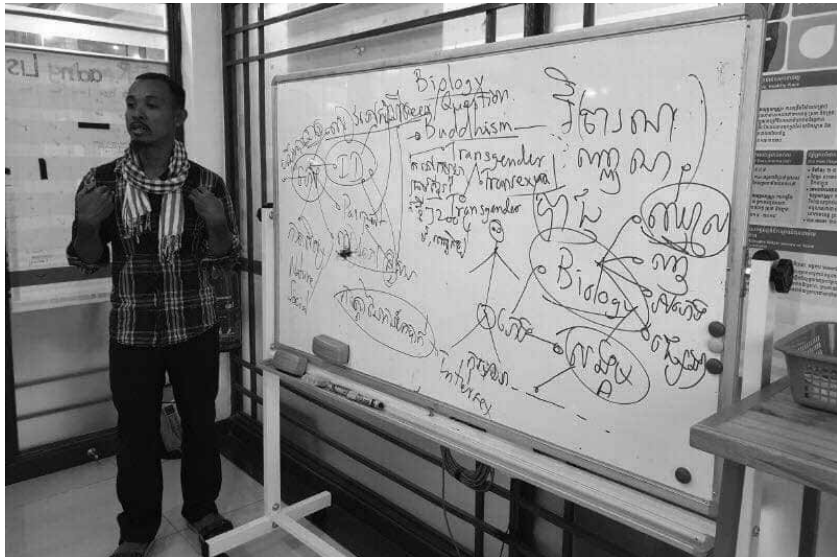
## **Measures to Overcome the Situation**

To address the issues faced by the LGBTIQ Cambodians, CamASEAN developed several measures such as financial support for old sex workers (five hundred U.S. dollars for food) and persons with disabilities (nine hundred U.S. dollar loan for small business).

CamASEAN also developed seven projects to promote ASEAN and human rights that use sessions on sharing experiences, social media (Facebook), meetings, and short film showings:

1. ASEAN & Human Rights Project (AHRP)<sup>3</sup> which aims to share and discuss human rights issues with students at schools and universities, and out-of-school youth;
2. CamASEAN Information Communication & Technology (CICT)<sup>4</sup> which aims to strengthen the use of technology in education. CICT works closely with university students by teaching them the basic use of information and communication technology (ICT) like Microsoft Office program, internet, e-mail, blog;
3. Cambodian Women and Choices Project (CWCP)<sup>5</sup> which aims to share the concept of “choice creators” among the women in the schools, universities and communities. The “choice creators” concept means all women should be able to choose their way to live comfortably as long as it is human rights-based rather than socio-cultural norm-based. Most Cambodian women wait or hesitate to decide on what to do or what they wish to do. They wait for their parents or others to decide; many times others decide for women and girls. Choice creators means confident decision-makers.
4. Children and Choices Project (CCP)<sup>6</sup> is a project on child rights protection and promotion and includes engaging retired persons who teach school children;
5. KYYS Group is a company established in 2012 to support the CamASEAN members’ effort to live independently. KYYS Group buys goods and products from wholesalers to be sold to retailers. After nine months of operation, KYYS Group started to import and export several important products such as scarves, clothes, dried meat, books, juices, and to operate printing and photocopy shops;
6. Cat Café<sup>7</sup> is a business initiative (using the Business Starts with You, not with Money model) which aims to bring the young people who are always focused on snookers and computer games to go back to school;
7. Koh Kong Charity Project (KKCP) supports children and disabled families by telling stories of hope. People from the city and university students share these stories to children in rural areas.

A Capacity Building Project (CBP) was likewise started to help the CamASEAN members to live independently through regular training sessions designed according to their needs. The training session has the following topics: a) Team Building; b) Leadership and Motivation; c) Problem



Srur Soron giving a presentation on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression to university students, Phnom Penh, 21 September 2019.



CamASEAN Team in seminar on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression for NGO workers, Phnom Penh, 17 May 2019.



Training of public school teachers on SOGIE rights in Kampong Chhnang province, November 2015.

Solving; d) Service Marketing; e) Research; f) Sales; g) Business Start-up; h) Project Management; i) Office work, etc.

### **Other Public Education Activities**

CamASEAN undertakes training and uses the social media, photography and arts to convey to the public the human rights issues affecting different sectors of society.

The activities consist of the following:

#### **Capacity-building**

Capacity-building activities are undertaken for secondary and tertiary students, teachers (through teacher-training) and NGO workers on LGBTIQ rights, SOGIE (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression), rights of marginalized people, children, and women. The capacity-building activities involve training on ways to prevent or stop violence against LGBTIQ, training on the use of visual arts and story-telling to relay their messages to the public, and also training on use of photographs for this purpose.<sup>8</sup>



Training on how to stop violence against LGBTIQ children, 14 February 2019.



Training on visual arts and story-telling method to elderly LGBTIQ from twenty provinces, Kampong Cham province, 20-23 June 2019.





Visual art training for elderly LGBTIQ and their experimental art exhibition, Phnom Penh, 12 December 2019



Twenty-four participants from sixteen provinces discussing their own stories that they would use in their drawings, audio records, and videos, Thbong Knum Province, October 2019.



Group discussion of stories that are safe to be made public through visual arts of gay and transwomen, Phnom Penh, January 2020.

CamASEAN continues to collect photos of LGBTIQ couples who have been living together many years. Some couples have been living together from ten to forty years. It aims to collect the photos of five hundred LGBTIQ couples. These LGBTIQ couples have different backgrounds including having disabilities.

### **Use of social media**

CamASEAN uses several Facebook tools in different local languages to convey messages:

- a. Facebook Live - “Disability and Pride,” “My Life My Story”<sup>9</sup> - positive stories to inspire people and the media;
- b. Facebook Messenger;
- c. Facebook Page – where videos of interviews of members of the police, monks and commune council members are uploaded. These videos have been found effective because they do not engage in blaming people and instead show how they work to support LGBTIQ. The videos provide examples of what they do (actions). They also seek “champions” of human rights and ask the public: “If they can do it, why can’t you?”

CamASEAN uses Facebook tools because they are platforms for sharing, explaining, analyzing, brainstorming, counseling, providing advisory information, knowledge, and professional experiences regarding ASEAN issues and Cambodian social issues that happened in Cambodia and the world. Every member can exercise her/his right to freedom of speech and express personal concern over social problems and legal affairs for the country's development.

### Community activities

CamASEAN holds a number of activities in the communities including the following:

a. Rainbow Life Museum - សារមន្ទីរជីវិតរតន្ត្រី

The Rainbow Life Museum Project aims to explain the history, current situations and the nature of being gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgender, intersex and queer in Cambodia. The museum exhibits art works that inform as well as entertain the visitors on the nature of being homosexual and heterosexual from ancient time till the present. These artworks compose the “Rainbow Life Exhibition,” which is part of a social movement to raise awareness of social acceptance by families and communities in Cambodia



Transman and his wife living together since 1983 in Kampong Thom Province. Photo taken in May 2019.



Lesbians with disability in Takeo living together for seventeen years. Photo taken in July 2019.



Photo exhibit of LGBTIQ with different backgrounds, Svay Rieng province, August 2019.

# VILLAGE RAINBOW LIFE EXHIBITION

Showing the real and visible life of LGBTI in city, province and village that the LGBTI is natural and existing anywhere

“*Proud to Be ME, My Life My Story, Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer and Men and Women are ALL HUMAN need the Equal Rights*”

## WHEN

May 21<sup>st</sup> — May 25<sup>th</sup> 2016  
8:00AM — 6:00PM

## WHERE

Takeo province  
Srok Prey village, Tropang Sat  
commune, Bati district

## CONTACT:

Ms. Phoeng Saophorn  
Ph. 069373662  
Email: saophorn.phoeng@gmail.com  
FB : facebook.com/RainbowLifeMuseum

Free  
Entrance

## SCHEDULE

### Opening Day

21<sup>st</sup> May  
4:30PM-7:00PM

### Coming Out Stay Home

(Sharing life of  
LGBTI couples)  
22<sup>nd</sup> May  
9:00AM-12:00PM

### LGBTI & Right to belief and religion

(sharing from monk &  
pastor)  
23<sup>rd</sup> May  
8:00AM-11:00AM

### SDGIE & Human Rights Training

24<sup>th</sup> May  
9:00AM-12:00PM

### Closing Party

25<sup>th</sup> May  
5:00PM-7:00PM

Organized by CamASEAN Youth's Future (CamASEAN)  
and Micro Rainbow International

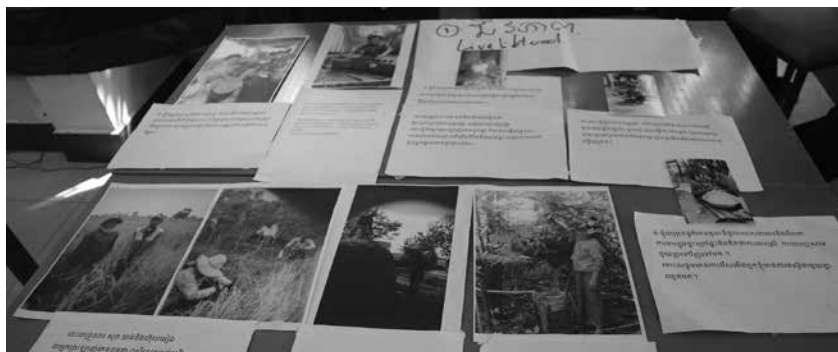




**Exhibition in the house of an elderly transgender man and his spouse, Bakan district, Pusat province, September 2019.**



**Experimental art exhibition, Phnom Penh, October 2019.**



**Photos in the experimental art exhibition.**



Testing public story telling exercise by participants, Siem Reap province, November 2019.

of LGBTIQ people with different backgrounds including farmers, teachers, sports men and women, performers, artists, NGO workers, embassy and government officials. The exhibition consists of several parts: “secret body,” library, sharing word, film room, two drawing show rooms, portrait, performance, workshop with never heard of or seen testimonies from the LGBTIQ communities in Cambodia. Stories from persons who have not been heard previously are given a voice through this exhibition. The museum is a means for story-telling about the positive stories of elderly couples. Photos of the Rainbow Life Museum are uploaded on Facebook.<sup>10</sup>

#### b. Legal and Love Counselling by Young and Old Activists<sup>11</sup>

CamASEAN has been holding workshops for LGBTIQ people and activists in the rural areas to empower them. Based on these experiences, the following have become their guide in these empowerment exercises:

1. Let them organize their community ceremony according to their religious belief (e.g., Buddhist, Muslim or Christian) and use that occasion to allow them to speak about who they are as LGBTIQ people in their community;
2. Let the local authorities along with the siblings and parents of LGBTIQ people share their perspectives on how they challenge or support their LGBTIQ members;



Community forum among LGBTIQ from thirteen provinces to celebrate the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO), Phnom Penh, 2012.



Buddhism Ceremony for transman couple during the Rainbow Life Museum exhibition in Kampong Chhnang province, March 2019.





Rainbow Life Museum exhibition that gathered neighbors and family members of LGBTIQ from different villages to listen to messages of Buddhist monks and the sharing of life stories by elderly LGBTIQ in Kampong Cham province, July 2019.



Story telling in the community by elderly LGBTIQ couples with young LGBTIQ and commune council members, Long Vek village, Kampong Tralach district, Kampong Chhnang province, December 2019.



The project is composed of Noy Sitha, a transgenderman and a talented music coach. He received gold medals from the Prime Minister, Minister of Information and Deputy Prime Minister for his work on music. Raya, transgenderman and a talented singer is known for his great rare voice. Chapei, a talented gay musician using traditional instrument is also very good in singing that people love to listen to.

CamASEAN uses art to change social attitude towards acceptance of the LGBTIQ people. Art is considered a non-discriminatory, non-judgmental and peaceful action that exists in the human being to change people's thought and philosophy toward positive social change of accepting LGBTIQ people and their families as well as community.

CamASEAN sees the need to strengthen its music band and management structure. But it does not have enough funds to buy all the needed musical instruments.

It needs to do more marketing and earn income to support the music band and make its activities sustainable. The music band has to maintain the participation of straight people as members. CamASEAN does not discriminate against straight people though some of them probably discriminate against the LGBTIQ people.

But using art in Cambodia is a big opportunity to promote the rights of LGBTIQ people since many LGBTIQ people had played significant part in the development of the arts in the country for over a thousand years. LGBTIQ people have been key actors and teachers in society.

Recognizing the popularity of playing different types of songs (pop, traditional and other modern) during weddings, anniversaries and other festivities, the CamASEAN music band plays music during those festivities whose guests may want to buy their music CDs. They may also be playing and dancing during company events, school celebrations and charity events of government offices and NGOs. Human rights promotion can be done through music and songs on human rights that many NGOs are not capable of doing.

### **Recognition Received**

CamASEAN has received several awards for the work done through the years:<sup>14</sup>

- ASEAN Grassroots People Assembly, 2012;

- Cambodian Grassroots People Assembly, 2013; and
- ASEAN People Forum/ASEAN CSO Conference, 2014.

## **Challenges and the Future**

CamASEAN faces key challenges such as frequent volunteer turn-over every two or three years which requires the training of new volunteers most of the time, and unfriendly working relationship with formally organized non-governmental organizations (NGOs). CamASEAN members have also not been allowed to visit LGBTIQ friends in prison. Lastly, CamASEAN faces the hard challenge of suffering from police harassment in the communities where it organizes events related to political rights and citizenship.

CamASEAN was organized to overcome stigma, discrimination, and all types of human rights violations and war affecting different types of people. Its current projects are civic education through social media, virtual arts activities using digital technology and social media innovation, Facebook live and rainbow life exhibition. Its final aim is political participation of people suffering from these human rights violations. CamASEAN aims to achieve this goal through training of minority and marginalized people to become elected members of a parliamentary body or assume the post of decision-makers or run for a public office.

## **Endnotes**

1 See full document of the Road Map for the ASEAN Community (2009-2015) in [www.asean.org/storage/images/ASEAN\\_RTK\\_2014/2\\_Roadmap\\_for\\_ASEAN\\_Community\\_20092015.pdf](http://www.asean.org/storage/images/ASEAN_RTK_2014/2_Roadmap_for_ASEAN_Community_20092015.pdf).

2 Full statement available at [www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/cambodia/session\\_32\\_-\\_january\\_2019/4.\\_rainbow\\_community\\_kampuchea\\_stmt.pdf](http://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/cambodia/session_32_-_january_2019/4._rainbow_community_kampuchea_stmt.pdf).

3 Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/AHRproject](https://www.facebook.com/AHRproject).

4 Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/CamASEANICT?ref=hl&ref\\_type=bookmark](https://www.facebook.com/CamASEANICT?ref=hl&ref_type=bookmark). Facebook group: [www.facebook.com/groups/camaseanict/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/camaseanict/).

5 Facebook group: [www.facebook.com/groups/1399747193606836/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/1399747193606836/)

6 Facebook group: [www.facebook.com/groups/childrenandchoicesproject/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/childrenandchoicesproject/).

7 Facebook group: [www.facebook.com/groups/rainbowcat/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/rainbowcat/).

8 For the photos visit this Facebook account, [www.facebook.com/MyVoiceMyStory/photos/](https://www.facebook.com/MyVoiceMyStory/photos/).

9 Please visit the My Voice, My Story (សិរីគុដ្ឋរឿងឌីអិល) Facebook account for more information, [www.facebook.com/MyVoiceMyStory/l](https://www.facebook.com/MyVoiceMyStory/l).

10 Visit this Facebook page for the Rainbow Life Museum: [www.facebook.com/RainbowLifeMuseum/](http://www.facebook.com/RainbowLifeMuseum/).

11 Photos about the community activities are available on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/CambodiaLGBTIQLegalCounselling/](http://www.facebook.com/CambodiaLGBTIQLegalCounselling/).

12 Visit Parents and Friends Acceptance on Facebook, [www.facebook.com/CambodiaPFLAG/](http://www.facebook.com/CambodiaPFLAG/).

13 See photos and videos on the use of music in the activities of CamASEAN on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/DontreiInthanou/](http://www.facebook.com/DontreiInthanou/) as well as YouTube: [www.youtube.com/channel/UCPFLGkUnGJI5n5IJ\\_RRh1Yw/videos?disable\\_polymer=1](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPFLGkUnGJI5n5IJ_RRh1Yw/videos?disable_polymer=1).

14 Visit [www.facebook.com/pg/AHRproject/about/?ref=page\\_internal](http://www.facebook.com/pg/AHRproject/about/?ref=page_internal).

15 Excerpt taken from Voice, <https://voice.global/stories/my-voice-my-story-a-photo-exhibition-2/>.

**This is a report of Voice entitled “My Voice, My Story – A Photo Exhibition”<sup>15</sup>**

My Voice, My Story is a unique project by CamASEAN, a small Cambodian organisation that advocates for LGBTIQ inclusion. It uses participatory photography as a tool for social change.

The project works with largely marginalised and invisible LGBTIQ people in Cambodia and since its start in late August 2017 it has already identified over 100 LGBTIQ couples mainly in rural areas to help document their stories.

Photo stories are displayed at a permanent exhibition space, people's homes or during events in various locations in Cambodia.

The innovation of this project lies in the fact that the exhibitions are organised by LGBTIQ couples themselves who then offer to train others to do the same in a different area. Thus, it becomes a “traveling” exhibition.

The other innovative element is that elderly LGBTIQ couples get trained (and then train others) on using social media from a smart phone. This includes livestreaming the exhibition talks on Facebook as well as messenger to mass announce the exhibits.

“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.”

Some couples open up their homes as an exhibition space over the course of two days offering an intimate view of their lives.

The exhibitions are accompanied by talks and also use traditional music and theatre to engage the audience in a meaningful dialogue.

Not only people's homes, but also temples are used as exhibition spaces.

The main goal of the project is to raise awareness about and acceptance of this marginalised group in Cambodia, showing mainstream society that LGBTI couples lead “normal” lives. [In t]his way they can advocate for their rights and gain better access to health and social services.

Every exhibition attracts between 100-500 people over the course of two days, including in some cases participation by local authorities. This increases acceptance at local level, which is crucial to enhancing safety at local level for LGBTIQ couples.

The visual narratives are also disseminated on social media to target wider audiences online.

It is hoped that this type of advocacy inspires other marginalised communities within the entire ASEAN region to stand up for their rights.



## *Bal Mitra Gram* (Child-Friendly Village): Promoting Child-centric Village Development

P. Nagasayee Malathy

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**I**NTERNATIONALLY ACCLAIMED child rights activist and first India-born Nobel Peace Laureate, Mr. Kailash Satyarthi, has been at the forefront of several global movements to end child slavery and exploitation since 1980. Leaving behind a career as an Electrical Engineer, he walked the untraveled path and founded *Bachpan Bachao Andolan* (Save the Childhood Movement) to rescue children and their families from the shackles of slavery and pave the way for their reintegration into mainstream society. Under his aegis, the movement till date has rescued over 90,000 children from the scourge of bondage, trafficking and exploitative labor in India. His unique intervention “Child-Friendly Villages” keeps around 75,000 children away from child labor every day. The model ensures that 50,000 children are retained in schools, and that 25,000 girls are kept away from child marriage. His unrelenting efforts of forty years to free children from exploitation contributed to the decline in the global number of child laborers from 246 million to 152 million. In 2014, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his fight against the exploitation of children and young people and their right to education. His untiring efforts continue to play a pivotal role across the globe in making the world a better place for children. He envisions a world where every child is free, safe, healthy, educated, free from all forms of exploitation and is able to realize his/her true potential.

Mr. Satyarthi founded Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation (KSCF) in 2004. Through concerted and sustained actions, KSCF demonstrated that a child-friendly society can be achieved through direct and continued grassroots-level intervention. KSCF continues to fight against all kinds of child rights violation, including child labor, child trafficking and child sexual abuse.



### Evolution of *Bal Mitra Gram*/Child-friendly Village

Mr. Satyarthi conceptualized *Bal Mitra Gram* (BMG) or Child-friendly Village (CFV) sometime in 2001. Through the BMG program, he aimed to eradicate child slavery and create a child-friendly world. Mr. Satyarthi adopted multi-pronged strategies that included such tactics as raid and rescue operations to liberate children in servitude, institutional care for rehabilitation, building consumer awareness, ethical trade practices, policy interventions and mass mobilization (physical marches, campaigns,) which have yielded long-lasting results.

The idea of BMG resulted from the experience of rescuing and safeguarding child bonded laborers for twenty years. The idea is to make children become aware of the exploitative nature of child labor, to emancipate them from any form of exploitation, build self-reliance, and kindle the desire for education so as to eliminate the curse of child labor. For this to become a reality, the active participation and cooperation of family, society and village-level local administration are essential.

The concept of BMG was first implemented in Sothana village in Papri Panchayat of Jaipur district, Rajasthan state. The intervention was subsequently expanded to other villages in Rajasthan state, which were well-known for child labor, child marriage, and reduced education rate of girls. Later, the concept of BMG was extended to other states prone to exploitation of children such as Bihar, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. Since 2001, five hundred forty BMGs have been created. Virat Nagar Block of Jaipur district is now 100 percent child labor free, and the children are attending school. The mica mining villages in Bihar and Jharkhand states are another noteworthy places of intervention where the program has rescued the children from the worst forms of child-labor mining. Over the course of the period, the BMG model has been replicated in Ghana, Nepal and Uganda through civil society partners on account of its effectiveness in changing the lives of the children.

### BMG and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

BMG supplements the efforts of countries in achieving the 2030 goal of Sustainable Development and addresses SDG-1 (No poverty), SDG-2 (Zero hunger), SDG-3 (Good health and well-being), SDG-4 (Quality educa-

tion), SDG-5 (Gender equality), SDG-6 (Clean water and sanitation), SDG-8 (Decent work and economic growth), SDG-8.7 (End modern slavery, trafficking and child labor), SDG-10 (Reducing inequalities), SDG-11 (Sustainable cities & communities) and SDG-16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions). (see Figure 1)

Figure 1



### BMG – Basic Components

BMG is a social movement geared towards creating an ecosystem in villages where the rights of children are protected. A BMG can consist of a village or a cluster of villages with about one hundred twenty to one hundred fifty households, each household having five to six members, and around two hundred to two hundred fifty children.

Each BMG adheres to the following rules:

- All child laborers are withdrawn from work;
- All children are enrolled in and attending school;
- Children's participation in democratic decision-making (children form a *Bal Panchayat* [an elected Children's Village Council]) is ensured;
- The *Bal Panchayat* is officially recognized by the *Gram Panchayat* (elected Adult Village Council) to ensure its comprehensive development;

- Vulnerable communities including women and youth, marginalized sections of society and the minorities are empowered leading to over-all village and school development.

The members and leaders of BMG have the following tasks:

1. Take action to contain social evils such as trafficking of children, early and forced marriages, violence against children;
2. Organize village meetings and ensure participation of members;
3. Raise awareness on basic human rights with a focus on sexual and reproductive health;
4. Raise concerns with local governments on development issues;
5. Establish information centers;
6. Develop alternative livelihood programs;
7. Organize legal awareness, health and hygiene drives.

Families in BMGs have awareness about the importance of education and they are capable of guiding their children's school education, made aware of government socio-economic welfare schemes, and supported in developing attitudinal and mind-set change.

Since its formation in 2001 five hundred forty villages have been converted into BMGs spread over six states (Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka).

### BMG's Theory of Change

A BMG is guided through a process of change and empowerment and becomes self-reliant in resolving issues of protection, education, health and



BMG's Theory of Change

development for all children. A BMG builds a safety net around the child, as depicted in the diagram below:

As part of the process of conversion of a village into a BMG, the following change processes are implemented in the village.

1. Strong child protection mechanism
  - Village Child Protection Committees under Integrated Child Protection Scheme are formed and strengthened.
  - Stakeholder groups of *Bal Panchayat* (women, youth and influential leaders, community members) are formed and work as a vigilant group to curb child exploitation.
  - Intensive awareness generation for attitudinal change of people is carried out on a regular basis.
2. Access to quality education
  - Annual enrolment drive, home visits, counselling of parents and communities are done so that children get enrolled in school and also attend it regularly.
  - School Management Committees (SMCs), which monitor the functioning of schools and ensure that teachers are accountable, are strengthened and their members are sensitized about their roles.



School Management Committee (SMC) training.

- School environment is enhanced through improvement in mid-day meal, drinking water, availability of functional toilets, activities, neutralizing gender and caste-based discrimination and sensitizing teachers on gender issues.
  - Libraries are established, classroom is made print-rich (texts and photos posted on the classroom walls) and facilities are created for sports activities, etc.
3. Child participation and leadership
    - Child participation is emphasized, leadership is groomed, democratic values are promoted, improvement of school education and other village-related issues are taken up with the involvement of *Gram Panchayat*.
  4. Empowering communities
    - Capacities of stakeholders are enhanced by making them aware of their rights.



Accessing to government welfare schemes.

Children are encouraged to access their rights and entitlements by writing letters, applications and holding the *panchayat* accountable.

5. Access to health and nutrition
  - The Integrated Child Development Scheme of India, being implemented for health, nutrition, and pre-school education of children up to six years, is accessed.

In BMG, steps are taken to ensure the following:

- Ensure proper functioning of the scheme for early child care;
- Cater to the requirement of immunization and nutritional needs of children and expecting women;
- Organize health awareness camps, hold activities for behavioral change about safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene practices in the community specially targeting adolescent girls and women.

## Activities

- a. Improved enrollment and attendance of children in schools
1. Annual School Enrolment Drive - This activity is clubbed with promoting awareness generation about girl-child education. A list of all newly eligible children for the first year of schooling along with out-of-school children is prepared. An awareness drive comprising children, *panchayat* members, SMC members, teachers and stakeholder groups is organized. A group of people walk through the streets of the village raising slogans and visiting all households having eligible child for enrolment or out-of-school. All such chil-



Promoting girl child education through provision of bicycles to make travel easy.



Enrollment drive campaign (School Chalo Abhiyan).

dren and their parents are taken along and the rally culminates at the school. The list of children to be enrolled is handed over to the teachers and other formalities are completed the next day.

2. Improving School Environment - To ensure retention of children's attendance, the improvement of school infrastructure and environment is done by strengthening SMCs, establishing libraries, making print-rich classrooms, conducting co-curricular activities, parents-teachers meetings, community seminars, etc.

3. Education, Village Development, Inclusion - The immense change the BMG program can bring about is explained by the example of transformation of Golgo village in Koderma. Golgo village comes under Domchach block of Koderma district in Jharkhand state. Surrounded by dense forest, hills and mica mining, the village comprise of thirty-five households with approximately seventy children. Mica mining is the only source of income for the villagers. Before the BMG intervention, parents were forced to engage their children in work due to unemployment and extreme poverty. There was not a single proper house (one that would be enough to protect them from rain, sunshine, etc.) in the village. But after BMG intervention, three proper houses with minimum standards of protection from rain and sun were constructed and sixteen are under construction through Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana [Urban] (PMAY) scheme. There was no proper road connectivity to the village and during the monsoons the connectivity was much worse. KSCF activists along with villagers held meetings with officials as well as local Members of Parliament to demand for road construction for their village.



Children conducting meetings with stakeholders (adults, women's group, youth and others).



Electricity was another major concern of the village as it had been two years since the electric pillars were installed, but electricity connections have not been provided. *Bal Panchayat* took up the issue and started following up with the officials. BMG raised this issue with government officials and in forums and thus helped Golgo BMG get electricity facility. There was no adequate drinking water facility in Golgo as the only sources of water in the village were two hand pumps and two wells. In addition, the water of hand pumps was not drinkable and the water of wells was contaminated. The villagers met with officials and resulted in repairing of hand pumps and deepening of existing pond.



Repairing handpumps by the community to ensure safe drinking water supply.

Education had no importance in the lives of people in the village, particularly for girls. There was only one primary school and the school had only two teachers, one regular and one contractual. The headmaster, who resided seven kilometers away from the village, rarely came to the school. Villagers also did not encourage their children to go to the school after passing 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Most of the children used to drop out from school and only few boys went

for the middle school at Rupandih for further study. After KSCF and BMG intervention, parents sent their children to school. Children attended school regularly and parents also started taking interest in their studies. Apart from the above, the school did not have a proper toilet, and SMC was non-functional. Due to BMG activities, the school now has electricity, has a separate toilet for boys and girls and the SMC now meets regularly. The school has also been provided with five electric fans, four water jars and benches for the students in school.

*b. Bal Panchayat (Children's Council) : Promoting Democratic Child Participation*

Children in a BMG form a *Bal Panchayat*, participate in awareness rallies and campaigns on social evils such as child marriage, alcoholism, and important issues such as health, hygiene, environment and community development. They attend school, take part in life-skills training, develop programs for extra-curricular activities, and participate in village activities. A *Bal Panchayat* is officially recognized by the *Gram Panchayat*.

Through the *Bal Panchayats*, children participate in the decision-making process in the village.



The elected representatives of National Children's Council (*Bal Panchayat*)



The elected representatives of National Children's Council (*Bal Panchayat*)



The Election Process of *Bal Panchayat*.

The *Bal Panchayat* plays a vital role in raising children's issues such as protection of every child, convincing parents and community members about ensuring child rights.

The process of forming a *Bal Panchayat* inculcates the values of democracy, participation, leadership and healthy competition among the children and development of healthy competition skills.

The case of BMG Mangala *Panchayat* (Karnataka state) illustrates this point. The primary school of BMG Mangala *Panchayat* was only till 5<sup>th</sup> standard. Beyond 5<sup>th</sup> standard, children had to travel for more than twelve kilometers to attend school. The *Bal Panchayat* decided to raise this concern at the *Gram Panchayat* meeting. They also gathered support from community members, teachers and other stakeholder groups. *Gram Panchayat* raised the issue in one of the public hearings held by Karnataka State Commission for Protection of Child Rights. The matter was taken cognizance of immediately and within a period of two months a new building for the higher primary school was constructed in BMG Mangala.

### **Results: Emerging Changemakers**

Fifteen year-old Ankita from BMG Bhilay, Ganj Basoda (Madhya Pradesh state) finished higher secondary school and wanted to pursue education to become a teacher. Owing to her parents' decision of not sending her to school, she was a drop-out. But she wanted to study. She got in touch with the local Community Social Worker and got herself enrolled in a school in her village. This is symbolic of the empowerment process the girls in her village have gone through as they are now not only voicing their opinions but vehemently shattering the set structures of the society.

Payal Jangid, thirteen years old, lives in BMG Hinsla village, Rajasthan state. In village Hinsla, all the children are free from exploitation and are enrolled in primary school. Growing up, Payal witnessed child labor and other exploitations against children around her. Through her participation in the *Bal Panchayat* as *Bal Pradhan* (President) of the village, she has not just been actively involved in helping the children but also women twice her age.

Due to the BMG program there has been a positive change in the gender roles within many households of the village and women have now started voicing their opinions.

Payal observes:

Until and unless children themselves realize that they have some rights, they won't feel unyoked. A child must have some agency which enables her/him to decide.

She has also taken out rallies and protests to engage women's groups and youth forums of her village regarding ill-practices, namely *Ghunghat*



Payal receiving the Goalkeepers Global Goals Award in New York.

*Pratha* (wearing of veil by women), child marriage and other rituals that perpetuate patriarchy.

After four years of work at her BMG in Hinsla, Payal was given the Changemaker Award at the 2019 Goalkeepers Global Goals Changemaker Awards in New York.<sup>1</sup>

Thirteen-year old Lalita Duhariya from a village in Alwar district of Rajasthan is another classic example of how determined children in BMG have led the battle against gender and caste prejudices that have bedeviled India for centuries.

Lalita leads from the front to demolish various prejudices and works towards a fairer and more egalitarian society. Since her childhood, Lalita had protested against both caste and gender discrimination practiced in her village and nearby areas. She became a member of the *Bal Panchayat* and started fighting against caste discrimination in her school. She persuaded children attending the school to share their meals with each other without bothering about caste. She persuaded her fellow school children to share meals cooked by a lower caste lady. Earlier, parents of upper caste children had ordered them not to eat those meals. But all children soon started eating together. A major victory for her came during the festival *Makar Sankranti*. She led a team of *Bal Panchayat* members and encouraged all villagers to share the festivities and the meals together. These efforts have gone a long way in reducing caste prejudice in her village. Children and villagers now do not discriminate people. They speak to each other in a group and share their

issues or future development practices. They now say “it’s our village” from “it’s our caste.”

## **Awards and Accolades**

The BMG program and its child leaders have received global recognition for their outstanding contributions to promote child rights:

- Japanese Award for Most Innovative Development Project by Global Development Network in 2010;
- Miss Razia Sultan, child leader from Meerut - first recipient of the United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education’s Youth Courage Award for Education in 2013;
- Miss Payal Jangid, child leader from a BMG in Rajasthan – received the Goalkeepers Global Goals Changemaker Award along with Honorable Prime Minister of India in 2019 for transforming her village by the elimination of child labor, child marriage and promotion of education of girls;



Neeraj Murmu winner of Diana Award 2020.

- Miss Champa Kumari, a former child laborer and child leader from BMG in Jharkhand state - received the Diana Award 2019 for Young People and was honored by Honorable Governor of Jharkhand state, Draupadi Murmu, for her work in preventing child labor in mica mining.

- Mr Neeraj Murmu, former child laborer and youth group leader in a BMG in Jharkhand state - received the Diana Award 2020 for Young People for championing the cause of education.

## **Reflections and Plans**

The concept of BMG directly addresses the multi-dimensional problems that create and maintain child labor. It attacks the root causes to ensure sustainability of the eradication of child labor. Not only does this approach aim to withdraw children from work and enhance the quality of education, but

it also aims to ensure a holistic development of Indian villages to create a child-friendly society. BMGs emphasize child participation, community mobilization, promotion of education, victim's/survivor's empowerment, gender equality and awareness on gender issues, and also facilitate the convergence and access of various government schemes, which leads to long-term sustainability of the initiatives by creating various structures at the community level through community mobilization.

The concept of BMG has received due recognition across the country and different state governments have come forward to collaborate with KSCF to replicate the model. As part of scaling up process, KSCF and the Government of Jharkhand state signed a Memorandum of Understanding for promoting Child Labor Free MICA Region in a span of five years. This is currently under execution phase. Similar opportunities exist. The key challenge is mobilizing of resources to achieve the goal.

We have many like-minded organizations, individuals and professionals who had walked along with us in difficult situations facing challenges, obstacles, etc. Today we feel very proud in looking at our changemakers leading the way forward.

## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> Sasha R., "17-year old Payal Jangid becomes first Indian to win Goalkeepers Global Goals Changemaker Award," *Her Story*, 25 September 2019, <https://yourstory.com/herstory/2019/09/gates-foundation-goalkeepers-changemaker-award-payal-jangid-india>.

## Kriti Film Club: #thoughtprovokingcinema for Social Change

Aanchal Kapur

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**I**N 1999, I along with some co-travellers in the field of gender & development and human rights activism formed a not-for-profit organization to facilitate creative thought and action in the Indian social sector. We named it “Kriti, a development praxis and communication team,” defining what we stood for in our very nomenclature, and began to work out of India’s capital city, New Delhi. The Kriti Team (as we like to call ourselves) aimed at offering capacity-building, design and communication support and knowledge resources to small and big non-profit organizations with a gender, development and human rights perspective.

We were aware of India’s documentary culture (often underground) which goes back to the freedom struggle period (1857–1947) and the days of the Emergency (1975–1977). I grew up watching black and white documentary reels that played before every Hindi (read Bollywood) film was shown on single-screen theaters across the country; as well as at Delhi’s Sapru house (at that time, a hub for children’s cinema). My parents made sure I got to see these films every Wednesday and Saturday during our summer breaks to my paternal grandparents’ home in New Delhi. Interestingly at my maternal grandparents home, I saw photos and slides of the political struggle and witnessed some live actions of workers rights’ struggles led by my trade-unionist maternal grandfather—all in a way preparing me for the years to follow.

While in college, studying political science and engaging with the autonomous women’s movement and other activism, I was exposed to issue-based documentaries that brought me closer to the real worlds of the people I committed to work with in the future. I was introduced to, at that time, the women filmmakers who started “Mediastorm” and was deeply inspired by them as a young woman and of course, as a documentary viewer. In my undergraduate and postgraduate years, I was also introduced to the work of Adoor Gopalakrishnan at my alma mater, Lady Shriram College, and his involvement with documentaries in the political climate of Kerala.



When I started working full-time in the early nineties, as a social activist and gender trainer, I began to use films for learning and capacity-building of the development workers and people I was engaging with. This need emerged as I personally found it repetitive, (sometimes) boring and challenging (due to literacy issues of communities) to continually use role plays, reading materials and discussions to enable mindset and behavioral change at the field level. One of the amazing archives that I was able to access at the time (put together through the efforts of some individual filmmakers) was CENDIT, a one-of-its kind space where documentary films could be found (but only if you knew). Little did I realize then that all this exposure would, thirty years later, have me penning down this story of my life and times with documentary films. In fact, it is important that I mention here Kailash-ji, one of the CENDIT members who has been a big back-end support (providing access to equipment on hire, editing, recording, converting footage into DVDs, etc.) to independent filmmakers in the country as well as my efforts at accessing documentary films and filmmakers over the years.

This was a decade before founding Kriti Team in 1999, when I continued to access and use documentaries for our development support work. I felt that their value and critical role as a medium for social change were not recognized, and not explored as medium for change as much as they could be. It was not easy to find documentary films in those days, not only because there was no online search mechanism but also because the few films being made were seen by a few selected audience and producers, and then found place on office shelves or drawers. Over the years, I could see that, even though more and more documentaries were being produced, they were not accessible to public audiences and were “not being seen and shown outside of (existing and emerging) film festivals.”<sup>1</sup>

These experiences led to the *initiation of the Kriti Film Club* to promote the use of documentaries for social change. Kriti is a Hindi word that means “creation.” The first screening was held in August 2000 at Alaknanda (New Delhi), on a second-hand, 24-inch TV set and the discussion went on longer than the screening duration! While it was true that the size of the screen was not always what the filmmakers wanted to show their labor of love on, the fact that we continued to screen every month non-stop without any funding or projects, kept the films and filmmakers coming. It was a beginning that is completing two decades this August 2020.

The Kriti Film Club screenings moved to a 27-inch TV in 2008 and then to a two-screen public space at the India Habitat Centre (IHC) in New Delhi in 2010. Over the years, we also organized screenings at schools, colleges and local community spaces either as educational or mobilizational activities on important days such as Women's Day, Environment Day, Hiroshima-Nagasaki Day, Peace Day, Human Rights Day, etc.

We had set ourselves quite an agenda as we wanted to screen a documentary a month and the search began. In the early 2000s, there was no "google," so it was word of mouth, e-mails, reaching out to known filmmakers, civil society organizations and tapping the few film festivals going around. The Kriti Team workplace became the Kriti Film Club's homespace. The venue was small, the equipment basic and the finances nil. What was in plenty was the passion and commitment to screen socially relevant and thought-provoking cinema. Reaching out to known filmmakers and documentaries that I had used for my trainings was the way to go initially, as also accessing organizations I got to know as producers of documentaries (several strange coincidences and stories to tell on the search too). I was quoted in an article saying:<sup>2</sup>

We have had as many as 80 people jostling for space, standing in the corridors to watch our films, and we have never stopped even if only two people turned up, because for us the consistency of our work is of utmost importance.

### **Documentary Film Screenings: Keeping it Regular and Engaging**

The Kriti Film Club has been screening documentary films at least once a month (sometimes more) since 2000. The films cover a range of issues connected with development, human rights and social attitudes/ trends. Started as an accessible, informal, neighborhood film club, we show documentary films made by amateur and professional filmmakers, young and old hands from India, South Asia and other regions of the world. It has provided a space for brainstorming and sharing on issues among the viewers, including those involved in people's movements and civil society organizations.

The whole idea of the Kriti Film Club has been to place "thought-provoking cinema" in a discussion group that will help to deepen the understanding of social, development and human rights issues among viewers and

filmmakers. It has been an attempt to create a forum where students, activists, academicians, development professionals, media professionals and friends can come together and interact, through meaningful cinema. It also helps increase access of these films to a larger audience beyond film festivals and special screenings, as it keeps copies of the films in a library and some even for sale at its workplace after the screenings. These efforts are aimed at making the Kriti Film Club a place of rendezvous and meeting new people, especially the “non-converted” (i.e., those members of the public [educated or not] who may not have the exposure and/or sensitivity towards real-life concerns of the resource-poor and marginalized citizens of India).

From 2000 until 2010, the Kriti Film Club screened documentary and socially relevant mainstream films on the third Saturday evening of every month (sometimes more than once) at its workplace in New Delhi, and since 2010 it began organizing monthly screenings at the IHC, which is an open-to-public cultural space available for a variety of visual and performing art events.



A Children's Day special screening at the Kriti Film Club homespace in New Delhi.

What has been really exciting is the open-hearted support provided by the Habitat program team over these years, in giving us the space for regular screenings and outreach of documentary film-based interactions with a diverse audience, members of IHC, policy makers, bureaucrats, retired people, teachers, media persons, artists, filmmakers, people from corporate and civil society organizations, students, academicians, etc. While it may appear that the space is not always “open” to ordinary citizens by its very location and “upper class” feel (partly a reality) to it, we have tried to make our screenings inclusive to audiences across class and community. Some of our most exciting screenings at the IHC have been with children and youth from Delhi’s slums as well as social movement activists.

As far as possible, the Kriti Film Club has always invited the filmmaker to be present at the screening so that the audience interaction is insightful and useful for all present. We believe that the filmmakers’ engagement with the audience is key to the impact that the viewership creates, and that the process also influences hopefully the filmmakers’ journey in documentary filmmaking.



Arundhati Roy at the screening of *Daughter of Nepal* at India Habitat Center.

Along with the ongoing monthly IHC screenings, the Kriti Film Club homepage was restarted in March 2018 by some volunteers, with one film screening organized every fortnight or month as much as possible. In fact, through these twenty years, almost all our screenings have continued to take



Women's Day special screening at Kriti Film Club, March 2018.



Young girls trained as filmmakers in urban slums of Delhi, at a Kriti Film Club screening of their short films, March 2018.



Kriti Film Club showing of short films by Ankur Collective, March 2018.

place only because at least one team member (Lata Chaudhary) or a volunteer has taken charge either of the logistics and/ or the publicity and facilitation of the Kriti Film Club gathering.

The Kriti Film Club continues to offer curation and screening events at schools and colleges, and on request from development organizations and people's movements, in solidarity and support for their work at the community level.

Kriti Film Club has and continues to inspire several individuals and organizations to start local neighborhood film clubs in their communities of work, institutions and cities. We believe that these small steps have contributed towards enhancing the reach of documentaries made by independent filmmakers, documentary producers and development organizations from across India and parts of the world to people and places that they had not yet gone to.

### **Curating and Going Beyond the Screenings**

While the main content of documentaries showcased by the Kriti Film Club has included issues directly affecting India's marginalized populations, larger concerns related to India's economy, environment, politics, development, education, health, women and children's rights, etc. have also been taken up by documentary filmmakers.

The Kriti Film Club has, over these two decades, gone beyond showcasing documentaries to creating a body of knowledge and action; a perspective and thought process that would impact people in their attitudes and behaviors on important social, gender, environment, development and human rights issues. Its aim has been to encourage and inspire community-based work to make its audience to realize the power of change that lies within each of them. Over the years, it began to serve as a walk-into film club and an informal screening space outside of the realm of film festivals and even as a space for students to go to watch films as research material either for content or for filmmaking interests.

The need to create a documentary culture that is open for all irrespective of gender, age, class, caste, religion, ability or occupation, has motivated us to keep at it, despite limitations of financial and human resources at hand.

Gradually, and over the years, the Kriti Film Club has been welcomed as a hub for different independent filmmakers—young and old; amateur

and accomplished; known and unknown—to screen their documentaries with our growing and interested viewers. Some of these filmmakers include Anand Patwardhan, Sanjay Kak, Amar Kanwar, Samina Mishra, Rahul Roy, Shreeprakash, Krishnendu Bose, Saba Dewan, Ajay Bhardwaj, Shikha Jhingan, Sabina Kidwai, Paromita Vohra, Aparna Sanyal, Anandana Kapur, Reena Mohan, Nirmal Chander, Sushmit Ghosh and the names have just kept adding. From having to search for a documentary to screen, the Kriti Film Club has been spoilt by a queue of requests to screen documentaries made by filmmakers across the country. One of our early connects for accessing documentaries was the Prasar Bharti Broadcasting Trust (PSBT) which had begun in early 2000s to produce independent documentaries, providing the much-needed funding to documentary filmmakers in the country to make moving images on issues and was happy to find an interested screening partner without monetization demands! For the Kriti Film Club, the availability of these documentaries was an important resource to tap too, even though the films were often more development mainstream (in the initial years especially) than human rights or struggle-oriented which was our first choice.

Post-film discussions have and continue to be core to each screening, facilitated either by the filmmaker (if present) or me and my colleagues and volunteers. The Kriti Film Club was conscious about not losing sight of its primary objective—creating space for conversations and actions on important public (and often political) issues. It has aligned the documentary curation with the parent organization's (Kriti Team) vision to unpack and document people's movements for human rights for the new generation of social workers, students and other civil society practitioners. Bringing documentaries to protest sites, college spaces, activist and civil society events has been a norm.

Over the years, the Kriti Film Club has been a witness to a lot more film screening events being organized by many other people and organizations, and there has been a mushrooming of documentary film festivals too. It has tried to retain its foundational principles to be a platform that enables the reach of documentary films. It has been reached by several starting film festivals for collaborations, recommendations and publicity including the Jeevika Livelihood Film Festival, the Dharamsala Film Festival, Vibgyor Film Festival and the Auroville Film Festival, among others. These partnerships have led me to be a member of the Jury at some festivals, the Kriti Film Club



nominating documentaries for festivals and/or organizing preview or post festival screenings. The Kriti Film Club has been open to recommending documentaries for film festivals (and has been asked for recommendations) due to its own database and camaraderie with filmmakers. We do recognize the value of documentaries entering festivals as long as we can continue to screen them and share them widely. But sometimes the wait for documentaries to finish the festival circuit gets frustrating for me, especially when I see the “issue” and “content” of the film to be topical and contextual to a time and space.



Academics and development practitioners at a recent Kriti Film Club screening (at IHC) on the lives of women in Kashmir.

Over the years, several individuals, community groups and student bodies have got in touch with the Kriti Film Club to help start similar initiatives in other parts of the country. And, as the Kriti Film Club received requests for curating film-based events by institutions and people’s movements and enabling similar initiatives across India, we also shared our experience with them and connected them to the filmmakers or co-organized screenings with them.<sup>3</sup>



Post screening discussion at a public venue on a women's rights documentary.

The Kriti Film Club now also offers documentary filmmaking workshops to community-based non-profits and corporate social responsibility actors, in order to document and showcase their local and grassroots issues and actions independently. The availability of smartphones and social media make it possible for anyone to use the new technologies for social change and the Kriti Film Club considers it crucial to build skills in this area. Documentaries can be used to educate, organize, advocate and resist, not just as viewers but also as filmmakers.

In an effort to retain and provide access to documentary films, early on, the Kriti Film Club had started to build its library and archive of these resources on the one hand; and a few years later, the distribution of documentaries for wider use by academic and social sector organizations and social movements.

The Kriti Film Club has a collection of over nine hundred documentaries in its library and distributes a larger number, in collaboration with the filmmakers. Kriti Film Club is grateful to the independent filmmakers' fraternity for sharing and screening their films in order to reach the civil society, students and general public.

Its distribution platform, Docushop, houses independently-made documentaries that tell stories of struggle, of people and places unknown; books and posters that speak the verse of protest and unveil creative imagery on complex subjects; bookmarks, postcards, badges, etc. that connect people to movements; music that strings across the core and the periphery of com-

munities and artists, popular and activist. The documentaries that cover an expanse of subjects like Caste, Communalism, Development, Displacement, Environment, Globalization, Health, Human Rights, Media, Theater, Women and more are all available here. The Docushop serves as the space for buying these films and is accessible on [www.gestures.in](http://www.gestures.in).

In 2019, the Kriti Film Club initiated in the financial capital of India, Mumbai, monthly screenings through the Kriti Team volunteers. Screenings were held in a small café space in one of the city's suburbs. It expects to create a similar documentary viewing culture in that city as it has done in Delhi.

What began and ran as a self-initiated activity now needs more human resources and therefore finances; and twenty years later, the Kriti Film Club stands at the crossroads of rethinking its strategy of being a “free screening platform” to a “donation-based screening platform” where filmmakers, producers and audiences are requested to contribute for its continuity. The *Gullaq* (ceramic piggy bank) which invited contributions by the audience during its monthly screenings at its workplace now looks to be transformed into the “Gullaq Audience and Filmmakers Fund.”

### **Celebrating Two Decades of Sharing #thoughtprovokingcinema**

In March 2020, Kriti Film Club started working on the “Kriti Film Club @20” plans with its upcoming birthday on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 2020. But the COVID-19 pandemic had other plans in store. On 21 March 2020, the Kriti Film Club decided to post daily Lockdown recommendations of films to give “our minds and hearts a change in these times...to entertain, to calm, to think and feel, to act, connect and share...”<sup>4</sup>

The documentary recommendations were aimed at connecting lockdown citizens to real lives and issues that they may not have been witness to due to their own busyness and the limited (physical) outreach of Kriti Film Club screenings. The lockdown had suddenly opened up the worldwide web as the universe to show documentaries and we did not shy away from the opportunity to do so. The curation of lockdown recommendations was made in a way that it offered 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.”

Documentary films by professionals and student filmmakers have been recommended for viewing during the lockdown times, including an Oscar

2020 entry, some unreleased films and many films that have won national awards. The documentary recommendation from the month of March 2020 (continued up to 30 June 2020) are on our blog, <https://krititeam.blogspot.com/>:

- Day 1 (21 March 2020): This one to give you calm... *Lake of Peace*;
- Day 2 (22 March 2020): These two films to connect you to the forests! *India's Healing Forest* (Public Service Broadcasting Trust) and *How Forest Heal People*;
- Day 3 (23 March 2020): This one to connect us across divides! *Had Anhad* by Shabnam Virmani;
- Day 4 (24 March 2020): This one to walk with Kabir! *Kabira Khada Bazaar Mein* by Shabnam Virmani
- Day 5 (25 March 2020): This one to follow the Kabir path! *ChaloHumara Des* by Shabnam Virmani;
- Day 6 (26 March 2020): This one to think secular! *Ajab Shaher: Kabir In America*;



**LOCKDOWN  
RECOMMENDATIONS**

**'STARRING  
SHARMILA TAGORE'**

**Directed By:**  
Umang Sabarwal

**Produced By:**  
Public Service  
Broadcasting Trust

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**DAY 102**  
**30 JUNE 2020**

## FILMMAKER SPEAKS

“

Why must we hear the story of the life of Sharmila Tagore? For me the answer to that question is the same as why we tell stories of all great artists. To find meaning & art in our own lives through their stories. To know Sharmila Tagore's journey is to have a better understanding of cinema and women in films as they exist today.

This film is more than just the story of the events of her life, it's a trip to the 60's & the 70's, a film world full of colour, glamour & rock & roll. It is also the story of a woman navigating a world dominated by men, where heroines are meant to be docile creatures that seeked no pleasure of their own. Over the course of making this film I asked myself this question many times. Well, besides all of what this note says above, here's the simple answer. Because it's a really good story!

I have been associated with Kriti Film Club since they were kind enough to screen my student film five years ago. I was happy to see it transition into a new city and now a beautiful online space where films are open for access. In the past months during the lockdown I have been able to see many films that I haven't had access to before. I am really proud to be part of the Kriti family. We need to support places and endeavours like this now more than ever before.

Let open sharing of our stories and thoughts always find a space!

**UMANG**





PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING TRUST

Kriti Film Club is an independent documentary screening initiative by the non-profit, Kriti team since August 2000.

Day 102 of online Kriti Film Club Lockdown Recommendation.

- Day 7 (27 March 2020): This one on the occasion of World Theatre Day! *Arna's Children* by Juliano Mer Khamis and Danniell Danniell;
- Day 8 (28 March 2020): This one to celebrate women's labor! *Dance with Hands Held Tight* by Krishnendu Bose and Kavita Dasgupta;
- Day 9 (29 March 2020): This one to mark the World Water Day week! *The Miracle Water Village* by Rintu Thomas and Sushmit Ghosh;
- Day 10 (30 March 2020): This one in nostalgia! *One Show Less* by Nayantara Kotian;
- Day 11 (31 March 2020): This one to celebrate "community"! *Mendha Ta Pitto* by Sudhir Aggrawal.

As of 30 June 2020, the Kriti Film Club completed one hundred two days of online documentary recommendations from our archives and some new ones too (with the help of its volunteers and in partnership with the filmmakers). Subsequently, we started "Weekend Watch" in the first week of July. With its twentieth year celebrated in August 2020, the Kriti Film Club hopes to continue bringing new and meaningful insights to diverse audiences across the world, albeit online and offline (as unlock mode becomes safe and possible).

**KRITI FILM CLUB**  
**LOCKDOWN RECOMMENDATIONS 2020**

**102 DAYS**

**116 DOCUMENTARIES SCREENED**

DEMOCRACY  
TRAVEL  
SEXUALITY  
HEALTH  
GENDER  
DEVELOPMENT  
HUMAN RIGHTS  
EMPOWERMENT  
MEDIA  
HERITAGE  
EDUCATION  
MIGRATION  
MUSIC  
FOLK THEATRE  
ENVIRONMENT  
COMMUNALISM

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i @krititeam\_org  
t @kritifilmclub  
https://krititeam.blogspot.com

Kriti Film Club is an independent documentary screening initiative by the non-profit organisation, Kriti: a development praxis and communication team, New Delhi and Mumbai. The 'Lockdown Recommendations' series by the Kriti Film Club has successfully screened 116 documentaries over a span of 102 days. Most of the documentaries recommended by us have been screened by the Kriti Film Club over the past two decades. Some others were recommended in consultation with the filmmakers and/ or producers.

If any individual/ organisation requires curation and facilitation of documentary films please get in touch with us on [space.kriti@gmail.com](mailto:space.kriti@gmail.com)



KRITI FILM CLUB PRESENTS

**WEEKEND WATCH**

**India's Official entry to the Oscars**  
**'MOTI BAGH'**  
(60 MIN/2019/HINDI, ENGLISH)  
PRODUCED BY PSBT



**National Award Winning**  
**'DREAMING Taj Mahal'**  
(51 MIN/2010/URDU, HINDI)



**Directed By:**  
**Nirmal Ghander**

**3 JULY 2020 | 6 PM ONWARDS**  
**AVAILABLE ONLY FOR 48 HOURS**

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 <https://krititeam.blogspot.com>

 [space.kriti@gmail.com](mailto:space.kriti@gmail.com)

Kriti Film Club is an independent documentary screening initiative by the non-profit, Kriti team since August 2000

## Reflections on Twenty Years of Existence

The film screenings of Kriti Film Club have had a “trickle-down effect” that translates into post-film discussions and actions afterward. As reported by Sumeet Kaur, one such incident happened after one of the screenings:<sup>5</sup>

After a screening on cows eating plastic, an audience member reached out to the filmmakers, and together they produce[d] and distribute[d] cloth bags to vendors to reduce plastic waste. The reason for such sincere responses, Kapur believes, is that they have “never tried to force an agenda down people’s throats; we are not running the film club as a project. The day we start doing that, we will probably lose whatever we have achieved.”



**KRITI FILM CLUB** #thoughtprovokingcinema

screening Documentaries for Social Change since 2000

400+ documentary films screened  
5000+ people reached  
200+ film makers reached  
800+ films in Kriti Film Club library

Caste, Communalism, Education, Development, Displacement, Environment, Globalisation, Health, Human Rights, Media, Theatre, Women and more.

Website: [www.kritifilmclub.org](http://www.kritifilmclub.org)  
Email: [kriti@kritifilmclub.org](mailto:kriti@kritifilmclub.org)  
Phone: 09448888888

"I had a wonderful experience watching the film and had privileged to be a part of such a discussion. It was inspiring. Looking forward for such efforts in the future!"  
— AN AUDIENCE MEMBER

"The reason one makes films is to be able to share them with audiences. Yours was a wonderful one. Many thanks!"  
— SURESH K. PILLAYAR



**KRITI FILM CLUB**

#thoughtprovokingcinema  
outreach  
educate  
entertain

<https://krititeam.blogspot.com>

The spontaneous response of the members of the audience is a valuable part of a Kriti Film Club film screening. The members of the audience have the freedom to express what they think about the films they watch. And if they decide to act on what inspires or affects them, then that extends the impact of the film screening to the community.

Kriti Film Club does not see itself becoming an institution but a large and inclusive space for sharing and discussing documentaries, and triggering necessary social and human rights-based change in society. It sees a lot more potential remains to be tapped in its current form. The dedication of volunteers and the support of documentary filmmakers in fulfilling the objectives of film screenings makes the Kriti Film Club work. As I shared in an interview,<sup>6</sup>

The very fact that somebody asks us for our support is how we sustain ourselves. One can't put in years of effort into something and then suddenly give up because it's not financially profitable. In a nutshell, we sustain ourselves by being mad. And I don't mean 'mad' in a sarcastic way.

I hope that we in Kriti Film Club will retain this madness and continue well into the future.

For further information, please visit the following:

**Blog:** <https://krititeam.blogspot.com/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/kriti.team/>

**Instagram:** <https://www.instagram.com/kritifilmclub> and [https://www.instagram.com/krititeam\\_org/](https://www.instagram.com/krititeam_org/)

**Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/kritifilmclub>

## **Endnotes**

1 Sumeet Kaur, "Kriti Film Club: "We Are A Development Support Group, Not A Project," DSSC, 10 January 2018, [www.dssc.co/delhi/2018/01/10/kriti-film-club-development-support-group-not-project/](http://www.dssc.co/delhi/2018/01/10/kriti-film-club-development-support-group-not-project/).

2 Kaur, *ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*

4 "KRITI FILM CLUB Lockdown recommendations: 21st - 31st March 2020," Kriti Team, <https://krititeam.blogspot.com/2020/05/kriti-film-club-lockdown.html>.

5 Kaur, *op. cit.*

6 Kaur, *ibid.*





# International Children Film Festival – Bangladesh

Children's Film Society Bangladesh

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**M**ORSHEDUL ISLAM made his filmmaking debut in 1984 while he was a student with the short film *Agami* (Time Ahead) about the war for liberation of Bangladesh. Morshedul won the Best Director award for his very first film at the 10<sup>th</sup> International Film Festival of India held in New Delhi in 1985. The film was also shown in many international film festivals.

*Agami* was the first independent short film in Bangladesh and its success contributed significantly to the establishment of an alternative film movement in the country.

He became a renowned and multi-awarded filmmaker in Bangladesh with films like *Chaka* (1993), *Dipu Number Two* (1996), *Dukhai* (1997), *Khelaghor* (2006), *Durotto* (2006), *Amar Bondhu Rashed* (2011), *Anil Bagchir Ekdin* (2015) and *Ankhi O Tar Bandhura* (2017). The films *Dipu Number Two*, *Duratwa*, *Amar Bandhu Rashed* and *Ankhi O Tar Bandhura* are all about children. He won awards for his films not only in Bangladesh but other countries as well (in addition to India, he got awards in France and Japan). He also got involved with many film societies around the world.

Morshedul attended the International Children Film Festival (ICFF) India organized by the Children's Film Society India in 2005. The international film festival in India focused mainly on films made by children, but it was organized by experienced grown-ups. He went home to Bangladesh with a wonderful idea of establishing the Children's Film Society Bangladesh (CFS). Morshedul wanted CFS to realize the idea that children could run their own activities related to filmmaking.

In a meeting held on 17 August 2006 presided over by Professor Anisuzzaman, some leading educationists, writers, cultural and film society activists of the country agreed to establish CFS. They realized the fact that film, as the most powerful medium of art of the present time, was not being properly used for the benefit of children as a strong tool of learning and entertainment.

Cfs thus aimed to make an impact on the entire film industry of Bangladesh by inspiring the upcoming generation of filmmakers and offering them a bigger platform to exercise and exhibit their talent.

Cfs was established as a non-profit, youth-led organization with a fifteen-member executive committee. At present, Dr. Muhammad Zafar Iqbal, a leading writer, educationist and social activist, is the President and Munira Morshed Munni, a leading female photojournalist, is the General Secretary of Cfs. It has an Advisory Committee headed by eminent artist Mustafa Monwar.

### **Importance of Film**

Film is a language of people that transcends boundaries and therefore a universal medium. Through film, people can express their thoughts on anything and everything and present them to the world. Cfs has always felt this urge of letting children know about this great form of art. Since the day of its establishment, Cfs has been working untiringly to introduce Bangladeshi kids to the big world of cinema.

### **International Film Festival**

Cfs organized on 10 September 2006 a three-day film session at the auditorium of Goethe-Institute Bangladesh. In 2008, Cfs started to organize a children's film festival every year, which turned Morshedul's vision into reality. This started the International Children Film Festival (ICFF).

ICFF is the biggest and also the only International Film Festival for children and young adults in Bangladesh. This event is celebrated countrywide at more than twenty-five venues in different cities. ICFF features about two hundred films of different formats that are made for and by children and young adults from more than fifty countries. It also offers film competitions and awards for children and young filmmakers.

Selected filmmakers are invited to participate in the week-long festival in Dhaka. Cfs has been using the Sufia Kamal National Public Library in Dhaka as the main venue of the film festival, though it also shows films in other venues (i.e., Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, Alliance Française de Dhaka and British Council Bangladesh).

Every year, ICFF gets huge responses from many countries like India, U.S.A., U.K., the Netherlands, Canada, Iran, Nepal, Sri-Lanka, Sweden, Egypt, Bulgaria, Thailand and Mexico. In the 12<sup>th</sup> Festival (2019), hundreds of international films from more than thirty-five countries were screened. In January 2020, the 13<sup>th</sup> ICFF filmmakers from thirty-nine countries participated.

The ICFF is composed of several sections, namely:

- Child Filmmakers' Section (Under 18);
- International Film Section: Competitive (Short) with no limit on age and country;
- International Film Section: Competitive (Feature) with no limit on age and country;
- International Film Section: Non-competitive with no limit on age and country.

It includes different film types:

- Animation Film, Animation Short Film;
- Fiction Feature Film, Fiction Short Film, Documentary Film.

The film genres can be action, thriller, biography, comedy, drama, horror, musical and sci-fi.

In addition to showing films, ICFF organizes Teen Film Workshop (TFW) that provides young filmmakers direct access to leading industry professionals who conduct in-depth discussions and activities on the different sectors of filmmaking. This workshop not only broadens the young filmmakers' view on the current situation but also encourages them to start something on their own by highlighting both industry and creativity. ICFF also aims to cultivate the leadership skills of the young people.

TFW is one of the most engaging and influential additions of ICFF for teens with ages between thirteen and nineteen. It is a yearly event where participants experience making films. Any enthusiastic teenager can know almost everything from techniques of holding a camera to making a complete screenable cinema. They come with a story and get it molded and shaped into a successful film during the program. The participants get the opportunity of using the facilities for making films and having special screening of their work during the festival. The first TFW was held at CFS office in 2012 and after a break the second TFW was held in the British Council in 2017 where a huge number of teenagers participated. Mostofa Sarowar Farooki,

one of the most proficient filmmakers in the country, came to the event that year to teach about exclusive skills in film directing. In the workshop in the following year, Giasuddin Selim taught basic and expert sound inputting along with Sound Director Ripon Nath of the famous *Aynabajji* film. Nath emphasized the necessity of accurate use of sound in making films.

In the fourth TFW held in September 2019, nine instructors participated. The program ended in January 2020. Brilliant and beautiful actress Afsana Haque Mimi discussed the most important element of “acting,” as it creates a bridge between storyteller, the director and the audience. Film critic and scholar Sadia Khalid Reeti stressed the urgency of having correct script formation in the competitive world of film. Sound Director Nahid Masud instructed about the right way of incorporation of sound efficiently. Sameer Ahmed showed the importance of the most sensitive and comprehensive element in film editing which converges all other elements as a unit. Touqir Shaik showed the teens about play of lights in a film. Genius art director Uttam Guha taught the participants about the design of set and frames. Another Director, Tanvir Ahsan, taught about production design.

ICFF is a place that can turn the young people’s desire on making films into success. During the festival, workshops led by famous film figures in the country are organized for the participants. One of the greatest directors of Bangladesh, Amitabh Reza, talked about the magic tricks in his films during his workshop in the 9<sup>th</sup> ICFF. Actor and Director Taukir Ahmed enlightened the participants about the difference of small and big screens during the 11<sup>th</sup> ICFF. Mark Bishop came twice (11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> ICFFs) and guided the young delegates about planning and teamwork in making films. Indian filmmaker Arun Gupta gave an analysis about the theory of filmmaking during the 11<sup>th</sup> ICFF. Another renowned Director, Giasuddin Selim, interacted with participants during the 12<sup>th</sup> ICFF in talking about his struggles as well as successful life journey. Nationally awarded actresses Nusrat Imroz Tisha and Jaya Ahsan, talented and famous television star Rafiath Rashid Mithila and traveler Nazmun Nahar also joined the ICFF at different times and motivated the participants. They relished the significance of the ICFF and its events.



Inauguration ceremony of the 12<sup>th</sup> ICFF, 2 March 2019.



School students arriving at the festival venue to enjoy the films, 12<sup>th</sup> ICFF, 4 March 2019.



School students arriving at the festival venue to enjoy the films, 12<sup>th</sup> ICFF, 4 March 2019.



General Secretary of Children's Film Society Bangladesh, Munira Morshed Munni, with a group of girl-child volunteers.



Renowned filmmaker Piplur Khan holding a workshop on making films, 12<sup>th</sup> ICFF, 3 March 2019.



Closing ceremony of the 12<sup>th</sup> ICFF, 8 March 2019.

## Child Rights

ICFF is always concerned about child rights and activities related to them. Its social film section addresses child rights and different social issues such as child abuse and early and forced marriage of children. The social film section aims to make the children become aware, understand and cope with these issues in a positive way. Some of the films shown under the social film section are the following:

- *Shoe* - an Iranian film by Gholamreza Salmani. This is a short film about a boy from a poor family. The film vividly portrays the struggle for survival of the family;



- *A Child Teacher* – an Indonesian film by Phadindra Budathoki. This film portrays the imaginary world of a kid as he escapes from his torturous teacher;
- *The Smoker* – a Bangladeshi film by Ragib Mohmud. This film tells in a funny way how smoking ends life.

There are also seminars held during the festival to address human rights issues. The seminars are held in and outside Dhaka with many child welfare activists responsibly conducting them to support and guide children through their journey in the society. Several topics have been undertaken such as women empowerment, equity for the minority, expressing thoughts and cultivating imagination, etc. Children participating in the seminars would sometimes raise questions such as “I am a girl, can I play football?” and “Why do we treat people differently in the first place, when we are all so humans?”

Some films shown in other sections of ICFF are also about child rights such as *Rickshaw Girl* and *I am George*, and some films made by the teenagers in the TFW are also about child rights and related issues such as *I am Shariful* and *Before the Law*.

### Assessing Impact

ICFF provides a number of benefits to children. One, they enjoy watching films. Children come to watch films with their parents holding their hands, school kids arrive using the festival’s bus or teenagers with their friends attend events. They get to know the different genres of films, get in touch with the many types of thoughts and ideas about various lifestyles. They see the courage of the kids of other countries creating beautiful cinematography with such great stories and feel inspired to make their own.

Two, they have the opportunity to compete with foreign filmmakers. Passionate young filmmakers get the chance to prove themselves in this international platform that helps them to directly interact with advanced film industries of the world. Most notably, Bangladeshi young participants never failed to amaze by winning awards in the international section. The training sessions allow them to learn about important techniques of film making from great directors, film crews and actors. This workshop is very helpful and appreciated by the young participants.

Also, by using this medium, children are telling their untold stories about education and also about their rights. Some workshops at Rajshahi addressed social problems and the participants also made films addressing those issues and showcase those films to enlighten others.

For Bangladeshi kids who cherish the ambition of contributing to the film industry, CFS and ICFF provide the perfect starting point in their life journey.

### **Golpoghor**

The seven-day annual program of the ICFF can never be enough for young filmmakers. Besides ICFF, other events and courses are organized as opportunities for learning about filmmaking and interacting with the people in the industry.

“Golpoghor” is a monthly program organized by CFS where prominent cultural personalities conduct a seminar on different topics with children and young adult film enthusiasts in Bangladesh. The first session was held on 6 September 2019 where Nuhash Humayun was the special guest. As a young generation director, Nuhash Humayun provided information about his workstyle, work ethics and goals that were helpful and easy to relate for the audience. In reply to a question, he said that he wanted to do work on good stories whether it is a telefilm or TV commercial. Spending two hours of interaction with the people with the same kind of interests, thoughts and dreams is undoubtedly a pleasing experience.

“Golpoghor” also includes topics on child rights. The children share their thoughts and stories with famous filmmakers and storytellers. They encourage each other in many ways in the process.

### **Challenges/Future Plans**

The ICFF aims to create a global platform for children and young adults all over the world who are passionate about filmmaking. It also aims to make an impact on the entire film industry of Bangladesh by inspiring the upcoming generation of filmmakers and offering them a bigger platform to exercise and exhibit their talent and also introduce them to different cultures, help them to become true leaders who can participate and change the society. Although ICFF faces many problems in terms of getting sponsorship, it is

still trying its level best to ensure the quality of the films being shown and enrich the different skills of the children.

ICFF believes that the enjoyment of the freedom of thought and expression of every child should be ensured.

# The Papua New Guinea Human Rights Film Festival

Human Rights Film Festival Committee Papua New Guinea

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**T**HE PNG HUMAN RIGHTS FILM FESTIVAL (HRFF) is organized as a forum to promote greater respect, protection and fulfillment of human rights for all as well as a forum for debate to empower the audience with the understanding that personal commitment can make a difference to end discrimination.

The HRFF is designed as a weekend of human rights films, discussion, art and music. It brings to life human rights stories. It challenges each individual to empathize with the most vulnerable and discriminated against in the society, especially victims of human rights violations, and supports justice for all people.

The films being screened present different human rights themes and are followed by panel discussions with the audience. It is an opportunity to look at the current situation in PNG and what can be done to further implement human rights in key areas.

The HRFF is supported by the government of Papua New Guinea, Community Engagement Unit - Law and Justice Sector Secretariat (LJSS), Media Council, PNG Consultative Implementation and Monitoring Council (CIMC), National Capital District Commission (NCDC), United Nations in Papua New Guinea, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), Transparency International, Penal Reform International, Papua Hahine, Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), World Vision PNG, Marist Brothers Melanesia, Baha'is Papua New Guinea, We CaRe!-PNG, European Union, Adobe Youth Producing Change-Human Rights Watch, IRIN Films and Moresby Arts Theatre.

## First HRFF

On 10–12 December 2010, the HRFF was held in Port Moresby with the slogans “Speak Up. Stop Discrimination” and “We are all born free and equal in dignity and rights,” based on Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The HRFF formally opened with a video statement by the High Commissioner of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Honorable Navi Pillay, and an OHCHR video on Human Rights Defenders.

It was held along with the celebration of Human Rights Day 2010.<sup>1</sup> The theme for Human Rights Day 2010 was on human rights defenders who act to end discrimination. Human rights defenders are defined as those who speak out against abuse and violations including discrimination, exclusion, oppression, and violence. They advocate justice and seek to protect the victims of human rights violations. They demand accountability for perpetrators and transparency in government action. In so doing, they are often putting at risk their own safety, and that of their families. Some human rights defenders are famous, but most are not. They are active in every part of the world, working alone and in groups, in local communities, in national politics and internationally.

Human Rights Day 2010 highlighted and promoted the achievements of human rights defenders and emphasized the primary role governments must play in enabling and protecting the human rights defenders. The Day was also intended to inspire a new generation of defenders to speak up and take action to end discrimination in all its forms whenever and wherever it is manifested.

Since then, the HRFF has been held annually in different parts of Papua New Guinea.

## Themes of the Film Festivals

Each annual HRFF has specific themes which reflect the pressing human rights issues in Papua New Guinea. The first HRFF had the theme about human rights defenders. Starting from 2010, the HRFF adopted a variety of themes, namely:

- 2010 – “Speak Up. Stop Discrimination”;

- 2011 - Torture Prevention; Right to Health & Ending Discrimination on the Basis of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity; Sorcery-related Killings and Impunity; Sexual Violence against Women; Rights of Persons with Disabilities; Business, Environment & Human Rights; Social Change, Elections and Human Rights; Child Rights;
- 2012 - Violence Against Women; Discrimination and Sexual Health; Housing Rights – End Forced Evictions; Business, Environment and Human Rights; Refugees, Asylum-seekers and People Smuggling; Ending Impunity for Torture and Inhuman Treatment;
- 2013 - “Gender and Identity”;
- 2014 - Business and Human Rights, The Bougainville Referendum, Sports and Human Rights, and Access to Health and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- 2015 - “Stori bilong yumi” (Our Story);
- 2016 - “Noken lus tinting long raits bilong mi” (Do not forget my rights);
- 2017 – Sorcery-related Violence, Women’s Economic Empowerment; Equality; and Church Partnership;
- 2018 - “Stand Up Today to Change Tomorrow” (Sanap Nau Lo Senisim Tumora);



West Papuan traditional dance performance, opening ceremony of 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual PNG HRFF, 2012 © Moresby Arts Theatre.



A bus load of participants arriving at the Moresby Arts Theatre, 4<sup>th</sup> PNG HRFF, 2013.



Day 1 – 5<sup>th</sup> PNG Human Rights HRFF, 2014 © the Moresby Arts Theatre

- 2019 - Gender Equality and GBV; Climate Change and Conservation; Right to Equality for Key Populations; Right to Health and Universal Health Coverage; Right to Education; Claiming Your Rights; Freedom of Expression, and Rights in the Bougainville Referendum.

## Film Selection and Screening

Films being screened at the HRFF are selected by a film selection committee composed of representatives from each partner agency of the HRFF. This committee uses a set of criteria including the following:

1. The film conveys a message about human rights in Papua New Guinea;
2. The film relays information about emerging issues around human rights in the country;
3. The film does not contain extreme violence;
4. The film promotes the human rights concept and reflects a positive image of human rights;
5. The film clearly states the type of audience that is eligible to view the film;
6. The language in the film can be easily understood by the general public.

See Annex A for the film selection form.

Each year, certain films powerfully convey the festival themes and deeply resonate with the audience. Films made in Papua New Guinea are found to be well received by audiences. There are also certain international films that members of the audience are able to identify with despite different cultural contexts and type of human rights issues presented. Some of these films are described in following paragraphs.

In the 2010 HRFF, a film directed by Iara Lee, titled *Cultures of Resistance*, was shown. This film explores how art and creativity can be ammunition in the battle for peace and justice. It presents experiences from different countries such as graffiti and rap as tools in fighting government repression (Iran), monks acting in the tradition of Gandhi taking on a dictatorship (Myanmar/Burma), musicians reaching out to slum kids and transforming guns into guitars (Brazil), and the use of photography, music, and film in raising a voice to those rarely heard (Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon).

In 2011 *The Green Wave* directed by Ali Samadi Ahadi and released in 2010 was shown under the theme of torture prevention. The film begins with scenes of the eve of the June 2009 presidential elections, when a new generation of Iranians believed that change was possible. Carried forward



by an immense surge of dissent and freedom, a tidal wave – the famous Green Revolution – sweeps across Iran, its goal being to overturn the status quo and remove the governing regime from power. Mixed with interviews, amateur video footage and other electronic media products, the animated film reveals the protagonists' humanity, thus adding to the emotion of the audience as they witness the painful events that dashed the hopes of the people.

A major theme in the 2012 PNG HRFF was Discrimination. The 2005 documentary film *Pursuit of Equality* directed by Geoff Callan and Mike Shaw about the struggle of same-sex couples for marriage equality in the United States was shown in line with this theme. The focus of the film is mostly on the same-sex marriages performed in San Francisco from 12 February to 11 March 2004. By issuing same-sex marriage licenses, San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom uproots the status quo, attempts to change the way the nation looks at life, love, and marriage. This film was inspiring to some and challenging to other members of the audience.

In 2013, among a number of films exploring various themes, HRFF showed an Australian film titled *Mary and Mohammad* depicting the friendship of an elderly Australian woman and an Afghan asylum seeker. The film opens with the Australian government's surprise announcement to build Tasmania's first detention center and the local community erupts with hostility. After the center opened, four women from a knitting club take beanies to the male detainees in the center and forge unexpected friendships with them. When the detention center closed after six months, some of the refugees decide to settle in Hobart. The knitters stay in contact with them and a close relationship develops between Mohammad and Mary.<sup>2</sup> *Mary and Mohammad* is directed and produced by Heather Kirkpatrick, released in the year 2013 and runs for one hour and nineteen minutes.

In the 2014 HRFF, the film *Mr. Pip* was shown. It was a 2012 New Zealand film written and directed by Andrew Adamson and based on Lloyd Jones' novel *Mister Pip*.

The film is set in 1989 as a war rages in the province of Bougainville, then known as North Solomon. The story is narrated by Matilda, a young girl who becomes transfixed by the Charles Dickens novel *Great Expectations*, which is being read at school by the only white man left on the island after the historical blockade of the Bougainville Copper Mine. Matilda finds comfort in the story of a Victorian orphan when her own world is falling apart.

The Papua New Guinea military sent to destroy the local rebels are getting closer. Matilda writes 'Pip' in the sand. This simple act leads to terrible consequences when the Redskins suspect Pip to be a rebel leader and demand he be brought before them.

With the Bougainville Referendum scheduled for 2019 and fast approaching, the PNG HRRF Committee included a theme on the Bougainville Referendum. The Referendum which was conducted in 2019 showed that 98 percent of Bougainvillians voted for independence for this historically conflicted Papua New Guinean province.

In 2015, in line with the theme "*story bilong yumi*" (Our Story), a Papua New Guinea documentary film titled *A Girl's Life*, was shown. The story follows the story of a young Motuan girl, Rhonda, in the capital city of Port Moresby as she changes her life by keeping her traditions and culture alive by participating in the Hiri Moale Festival pageant. The film looks at how Rhonda and her family live and follows the path she takes to become a *Hiri Hanenamo* (Miss Hiri Moale – the title of winner of the Hiri Moale pageant) in the Hiri Moale Festival in Port Moresby. This cultural event is a celebration of the past Motuan traditions and trade with distant neighbours.

In 2016 an international film that greatly resonated with the audience was *Sonita*, a film that tells the inspiring story of Sonita Alizadeh, an eighteen-year-old Afghan refugee in Iran. Sonita dreams of becoming a big-name rapper and thinks of Michael Jackson and Rihanna as her spiritual parents. However, her family has a very different future planned for her: as a bride she is worth \$9,000. Iranian director Rokhsareh Ghaem Maghami poignantly shifts from observer to participant altering expectations, as Sonita's story unfolds in this personal and joyful portrait. An intimate portrait of creativity and womanhood, *Sonita* powerfully echoes the HRRF 2016 theme of "*noken lus tinting long raits bilong mi*" (Do not forget my rights).

In 2017 a film titled *Tanna* made in the neighboring Pacific Island of Vanuatu was shown under the theme of women's rights and equality. *Tanna* is set in the South Pacific where Wawa, a young girl from one of the last traditional tribes, falls in love with her chief's grandson, Dain. When an inter-tribal war escalates, Wawa is unknowingly betrothed as part of a peace deal. The young lovers run away but are pursued by enemy warriors intent on killing them. They must choose between their hearts and the future of the tribe, while the villagers must wrestle with preserving their traditional culture and adapting it to the increasing outside demands for individual

freedom. *Tanna*, is based on a true story and performed by the people of Yakel in Vanuatu. This film resounded with the audience who understood the Melanesian values and traditions depicted in the film.

The theme for the 2018 HRFF was “Stand Up Today to Change Tomorrow.” In line with this theme, a Papua New Guinean film, *Aliko and Ambai*, was shown and well received widely by the audience across all the centers the festival was taken. *Aliko and Ambai* is a 2017 feature film made by the Centre for Social and Creative Media (CSCM) at the University of Goroka, Papua New Guinea. The film follows the story of two young women, Aliko and Ambai, facing the challenges of growing up in the highlands of Papua New Guinea. The challenges are significant: tribal conflict, poverty, bullying, domestic violence and forced marriage. Aliko struggles to complete her education and Ambai searches to escape her abusive home and reunite with her biological father. They navigate the many obstacles in their lives and endeavor to build brighter futures for themselves, supported by the strength of friendship.

Posts on Facebook and feedback after screenings have demonstrated that young audiences are deeply affected by this story that shows the beauty and the pain of contemporary indigenous experience in Melanesia. The film aims to inspire the current generation of young people to overcome the obstacles in their lives and persevere to reach their goals and fulfil their aspirations, to “*stand up today to change tomorrow*.”

Several themes were advocated during the 2019 film festival. One of which was gender equality and countering gender-based violence. In line with this theme a Papua New Guinean film, *Power Meri*, was shown and was well received by the audience. *Power Meri* is a 2018 film directed by Joanna Lester. The story follows PNG’s first national women’s rugby league team, the PNG Orchids, on their journey to the world cup in Australia. These trailblazers must beat not only the sporting competition, but also intense sexism, a lack of funding, and national prejudice to reach their biggest stage yet. Proud, strong, and hopeful, the pioneering women in the PNG Orchids team have overcome more challenges than most to play their much-loved national sport. But after years at grassroots level, they have just three months to transform themselves into a competitive national team. *Power Meri* takes audiences on a journey through rarely seen corners of PNG and behind the scenes of women’s sport. It follows the PNG Orchids through selection trials, arduous training with a fly-in-fly-out Australian coaching mentor, and di-

verse personal struggles as they face the world champion Australian Jillaroos and compete at the world cup. But their mission is greater than winning. In a country with appalling rates of domestic violence, sport is one of the few arenas in which PNG women can show their strength. If they can perform like men on the rugby field, can they change attitudes about the treatment and status of women back home?

See Annex B for the list of films shown in HRFF over the years.



Pre-screening at Jack Pidik Park, Port Moresby. 4<sup>th</sup> PNG HRFF, 2013.



OUR STORIES by Marie Stopes – Youth in Port Moresby Discuss relationships, sex, and growing up. Day 2 – 5<sup>th</sup> PNG HRFF, 2014 @ Moresby Arts Theatre.



Screenings at Peit were hosted in a classroom in Hapan Primary School, 4<sup>th</sup> PNG HRFF, 2015.



UN Resident Coordinator Gianluca Rampolla speaking during the 9<sup>th</sup> PNG HRFF, 2018, Moresby Arts Theatre, Port Moresby.



9<sup>th</sup> PNG HRFF, 2018 @ Moresby Arts Theatre.

Other films on a variety of human rights themes are also shown in the Film Festival.

### **Panel Discussions**

Films screenings are followed by interactive panel discussions led by experts from government, civil society, academia, United Nations (UN) agencies and international organizations. Through this format, the HRFF strengthens public engagement on critical human rights issues impacting Papua New Guinea.

In 2010, the screening of *Path to Justice* was followed by a discussion on the question “What can be done to improve conditions of detention and prevent torture in PNG?” The screening of *Stolen Generation* was followed by a discussion on the question “Human Trafficking – what can be done to prevent it in PNG?” The film screening of *Crude: The Real Price of Oil* was followed by a discussion on the question “What are the concerns in PNG and how can we protect the rights of people affected?”

In 2011, the panel discussions covered these questions:

- What has been done to prevent torture since the official mission of the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture in May 2010 and what other action is needed?
- What can be done to end discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in PNG and ensure all of us can equally enjoy fundamental human rights like the right to health?
- Concerns have been expressed about the phenomenon of sorcery related killings in PNG and the lack of protection for victims and witnesses. What is the situation? What more can be done to combat impunity for these crimes and to protect human rights defenders who are working to support victims seek justice and medical care?
- What is the situation of sexual violence in PNG and how does this impact the women, men, girls and boys of our nation?
- Fleeing persecution, conflict, disasters, climate change, seeking urban opportunities, learning, working, making a living, returning people move for many reasons. Often they are compelled to do so. What is the situation in Papua New Guinea? Are we ready for migration?

- What is the situation of persons with disabilities in Papua New Guinea? What can be done to ensure that rights of persons with disabilities are respected?
- Extractive industries can provide jobs and revenues for development; but they can also exploit environments and peoples causing irreparable damages. What's the current situation in Papua New Guinea? Is the business sector responsible enough? PNG is known worldwide for its environment, the indigenous land, and the different cultures. What sustainability can we guarantee?
- Elections give us men and women the power to choose our representatives. An open political debate, information, freedom of expression, security and same opportunities are key requirements to reduce divisions and ensure true political participation. What is the situation in Papua New Guinea?
- What is the situation of child rights in Papua New Guinea? What is your organization doing to advocate and protect child rights? What are the major challenges and can we expect more positive things to happen in future?

In 2012, the panel discussions covered these questions:

- What is being done to end violence against women in PNG? This was in relation to the mission to PNG in March 2012 of the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women who described the problem of violence against women as a “pervasive phenomenon” and urged authorities to address traditional practices that are harmful to women. The situation is equally alarming in urban and more “modern” settings;
- How do we ensure the rights of individuals at risk of HIV to equitable access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services to prevent the further transmission of the virus? Evidence indicates that structural factors including religious and traditional beliefs, the deep-rooted and pervasive stigma and discrimination against sex workers, men who have sex with men and high rates of violence against women contribute to the transmission of the HIV as well as efforts at prevention, treatment, care and support.
- The dilemma of business and human rights. In a country such as PNG where employment and development are so badly needed,

how should doors be opened to international companies and exploitation of resources while ensuring sustainable and healthy environment and indigenous values for the future generations?

- The debate around asylum seekers and refugees is often challenged by myths and misconceptions. Governments' concerns related to national security and preventing irregular migration can negatively affect these vulnerable groups putting them at risk of human rights violations. In Papua New Guinea, on-going developments related to fighting people smuggling, processing asylum seekers, but also the concerns expressed by the government for the struggle of refugees, have reinvigorated the discussion on the protection of the rights of vulnerable migrants and refugees.
- What was done since the Special Rapporteur's visit to implement his recommendations and to combat impunity for torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment?



Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Day 2 – 5<sup>th</sup> PNG HRFF, 2014 @ Moresby Arts Theatre.





5<sup>th</sup> PNG HRFF, 2014, the Moresby Arts Theatre.

In 2016, the HRFF showed films associated with the theme of Papua New Guinean Culture (past and present). The questions discussed in the Panel were concerned with the role of film, art and culture and its influence on human rights and politics in Papua New Guinea.<sup>3</sup>

The discussions dealt with the following questions:

- How have we seen Papua New Guinea's artistic culture change over time?



A member of the audience partaking in post screening discussions in Madang, 9<sup>th</sup> PNG HRFF, 2018

- Are indigenous cultural practices under threat?
- Should young people feel obliged to protect cultural traditions?
- What role can film/art/creativity/performance play in Papua New Guinea?
- What role can it play in the human rights discourse?
- Can art/ film be a form of political expression and political resistance?

## **Exhibitions**

As part of the 2010 HRFF program, photos, posters and materials on specific themes were displayed throughout the duration of the event:

- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**  
An exhibit featuring human rights by PNG children and youth illustrating the different articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- **Prevent Torture**  
The UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel and inhuman treatment or punishment visited PNG in May 2010;
- **Housing Rights are Human Rights**  
An exhibition on the right to adequate housing in PNG: the human rights standards and the reality of life in urban settlements without basic services.

In 2011, other themes were included:

- Migration is about Rights: IOM 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary picture display;
- Refugees: Drawings and pictures depicting the conditions of refugees in Papua New Guinea;
- Yumi Piksa video and photo narrative workshops.

There are also booths in each HRFF that provide important information to those who are inspired and affected by the films. In the 2016 HRFF, information booths at the Moresby Arts Theatre were set up by invited not-for-profit civil society organizations and other institutions to share their messages in line with the human rights theme of the festival “Noken lus ting ting long raits bilong mi” (Do not forget my rights). The following organizations were invited to open booths during the HRFF



Information stalls at the entrance to the auditorium, including the sponsor, Family Voice @ University of Goroka, 4<sup>th</sup> PNG HREF, 2013.



Children viewing information stalls at the Moresby Arts Theatre, 4<sup>th</sup> PNG HREF, 2013.

- UNICEF
- Coalition for Change
- Yumi Kirapim Senis
- Stop Sorcery Violence
- Youth Blood Drive
- Buk Bilong Pikinini - I can do this one as I met them!



Secondary School students at information stalls, day 2, 5<sup>th</sup> HRFF, 2014 @ Moresby Arts Theatre.



The Mount Sion band performing an intermission number, University of Goroka, Eastern Highlands Province, 4<sup>th</sup> PNG HRFF, 2013.

- Pink Nose
- World Bank Film Booth.

## **Other Activities**

Poster contests such as on the best illustration of the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights have been organized in the different years of the Film Festival.



University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) and then moved to Buka, in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville from 24-26 November at three different locations; the Kuri Resort (24 November), Hutjena High School (25 November), and Kenny's Hall (26 November). On the last leg of its tour, the Raun Raun Theater of Goroka, Eastern Highlands Province in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea hosted the HRRF for two days, 30 November to 1 December.

The 2015 HRRF travelled to all four regions of the country, opening in Port Moresby, and travelling on to Madang, 7-9 August, Bougainville, 11-15 August, and Goroka, 2-4 September. Dedicated committees in each location made this possible. The efforts and strong support of sponsors and committee members always make the HRRF possible.

The 2016 HRRF screened films inside the Bomana Prison, the Port Moresby Correctional Facility. Through showcasing human rights films, the HRRF creates an inclusive dialogue of empowerment, protection, and respect.

The 2018 HRRF travelled to all four regions of Papua New Guinea. In the highlands region, the HRRF was held in Goroka, Eastern Highlands Province from the 23 - 25 October at the University of Goroka, Mark Solon Auditorium. For the Momase region, the HRRF visited two locations; Madang and Morobe. In Morobe the HRRF was held at the Duncanson Hall in the University of Technology from 2 - 4 October. The panel discussions were led by University of Technology student representatives, a senior jour-



Screenings at Peit were hosted in a classroom in Hapan Primary School, 4th PNG HRRF, 2015.

nalist of the biggest media company in Papua New Guinea, and a Morobe Provincial welfare officer.

The final chapter of the 2018 HRFF was in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, visiting three locations: Buka on 3 November, Arawa on 11 November and Buin on 17 November.

2019 Film Festival

With the support of the HRFF patron, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Davis Steven, MP, the HRFF celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2019 with the theme of “Stand with me for rights in PNG,” adapted from the global theme on the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The 2019 HRFF was attended by approximately ten thousand people and traveled to five provinces in PNG from 27 September to 3 December 2019 across the locations below, traveling to Lae and Alotau for the first time, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Film Screening Schedule and Venues

27-29 September	2-4 October	17-20 October	23-25 October	1 – 3 November
Madang, Madang Divine Word University	Lae, Morobe PNG University of Technology	Port Moresby, NCD Moresby Arts Theatre	Goroka, EHP University of Goroka	Alotau, MBP Kenu & Kundu Festival Grounds

In Port Moresby, panel discussions were moderated by FM100 broadcaster, Cullighan Tanda, and broadcasted on FM100 Community Corner Talkback Show, extending the HRFF’s reach to the station’s two and half million listeners nationwide, with live updates posted on Facebook. Films screenings were followed by interactive panel discussions.

Films

The HRFF continued to promote PNG films which continued to resonate strongly with the festival audience and generate interactive discussions. Twenty out of thirty of the feature and short length films in the festival program were made in PNG and featured over twelve provinces, including dialogue in Tok Pisin or local dialects (*tok ples*). The films were selected

by the HRRF committee, through an open call for submissions, and were reviewed by the PNG Censorship Bureau.

### **Location Summaries**

#### **Madang, Madang Province: 27-29 September 2019, Divine Word University**

The HRRF returned to Madang for the fifth time, hosted at the Divine Word University SVD Memorial Auditorium, and opened to a packed audience for a screening of the widely popular film, *Power Meri*, which documents the journey of the first PNG National Women's Rugby League team in the 2017 Women's Rugby League World Cup. The screening was attended by PNG Orchids player, Jacobeth Wake, who also participated in a Q&A session post-screening with the audience. On the second day of the HRRF in Madang, student-led local civil society organizations hosted information stalls on disability rights and climate change, and engaged the audience in activities, including a disabilities hashtag challenge. The Madang festival included discussions on gender equality, climate change, freedom of expression, and child rights led by lecturers and students at Divine Word University, including a student film on "BYOB: Bring Your Own Bilum" initiative.

#### **Lae, Morobe: 2 – 4 October 2019, PNG University of Technology**

With the support of the Public Relations Office of the PNG University of Technology (UniTech), the HRRF was hosted in Lae at the PNG University of Technology Duncanson Hall on the evenings of 2 - 4 October 2019. The HRRF in Lae was opened by UniTech Pro Vice Chancellor, Orea Renagi, and a keynote speech from Scott Waide, EMTV News chief based in Lae. The Lae HRRF featured the following topics: equality, environment and climate change, and gender-based violence through films and panel discussions led by UniTech lecturers and student representatives and involved active engagement from the audience.

#### **Port Moresby, NCD: 17-20 October 2019, Moresby Arts Theatre**

The HRRF in Port Moresby engaged over two thousand people and was opened by the HRRF patron for the second consecutive year, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Justice and Attorney General,



Honorable Davis Steven, MP. In his keynote address, the Deputy Prime Minister reiterated the government's support for the HRFF as an annual event. The opening night in Port Moresby also featured the launch of the film, *Unheard Voices* on maternal and child health in Papua New Guinea, by the National Department of Health and the World Health Organization. The HRFF engaged four hundred students across ten schools and youth groups, through a youth-focused session on climate change and environment on day two of the festival. Information stalls on organizations working on human rights were also set-up in the foyer of the venue. The Port Moresby HRFF for the first time debuted a performing arts piece on domestic violence, choreographed by Vanessa Tamburi, and performed by two local dancers, Meriba Igara and Kwalahu Nou. The Port Moresby HRFF also featured the festival's first flashmob performance, which was performed by the SASA! Advocates following the session on "Claiming your rights!" The SASA! Advocates performed the song "This is my dream," which won the 2017 UNWomen song contest on ending violence against women in PNG. The Port Moresby chapter of the HRFF engaged volunteers from Equal Playing Field, and Gini Goada provided free transportation to the event.

### **Goroka, Eastern Highlands Province: 23-25 October 2019, University of Goroka**

Attended by almost two thousand people over three nights, the Goroka chapter of the HRFF was opened by the Deputy Chief of Mission of the Delegation of the European Union, Rudie Filon, as the lead sponsor for the Goroka chapter of the festival for the second year in a row. As part of the film *No Moa* on ending violence against women and girls in Papua New Guinea, the Goroka chapter hosted a live performance of the song by the same name, by locally renowned local female artist, Mereani Masani, and Australian indigenous female artist, Emily Wurramurra, as part of a collaboration with the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Goroka chapter featured films and discussions on gender equality, cultural and land rights, environment and climate change, and the right to education and health.

## **Alotau, Milne Bay: 1 -3 November 2019, National Kenu and Kundu Festival Grounds**

With the support of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Justice and Attorney General, the HRFF traveled to Alotau for the first time as an integrated component of the 17<sup>th</sup> National Kenu and Kundu Festival. The festival was opened by the Milne Bay Provincial Administrator, Ashan Numa, and was supported by the 2019 National Kenu and Kundu Festival committee, and the Milne Bay Tourism Bureau, with funding support from the World Health Organization. The screenings were held at the National Kenu and Kundu Festival grounds in an open-air theater. By partnering with the Kenu and Kundu Festival, the HRFF was able to engage thousands of people from across Milne Bay, as well as tourists who traveled into Alotau to attend the National Kenu and Kundu Festival. Over two nights, the Alotau HRFF profiled films and discussions on the “Rights to Health,” and “Environment and Climate Change.” This included a local film made in the Bwanabwana islands of Milne Bay on “Gwala,” a traditional form of conservation practiced in Milne Bay made by Eco Custodian Advocates Limited, a local conservation non-governmental organization based in Alotau.

### **Media coverage**

The 2019 HRFF received a considerable amount of coverage from both national daily newspapers (*Post-Courier* and *The National*) a regional monthly magazine publication (*Stella Magazine*), several local radio stations and one international radio station (Radio New Zealand).<sup>4</sup>

### **Audience Reflections**

There were two interesting highlights of the 2017 HRFF; the Goroka Human Rights Art Competition and interviews with the audience. These are some of the reflections of members of the audience:

I'm just blessed to come here. I was not aware of the festival. I didn't even see, I was on Facebook but maybe because I didn't join all this so I won't know. I'm just blessed following my sister this afternoon and seeing that *Tanna* movie promote that cultural background and coming to this more or less seeing all

this big missing in the other segment of this. It's a reality to me and then my comment was on this, like many a time I don't read newspapers on this or see this advertisement, I'm just blessed to come here to see and to know and I believe when I go out from here, I will start promoting what's happening especially from our cultural perspective. Like I was thinking bride price is a good thing but then like coming and hearing others are sharing their ideas on their cultural background than what I see is that we have to understand, every person has to understand. We try to be knowledgeable and then we move from that error to this new age of error and begin to understand and begin to be knowledgeable and we move from there to know and act to help assist one and other. Everything must begin within ourselves so we will have a better community. It's team work for a better future, we have to work in avenues that can be knowledgeable like this film festival and then we can work together to help areas like in Madang like we have the natural disaster in Manam Island.

- Magdaline Missionyaki

I think it's a good thing for creating awareness on human rights. We need to see what's happening in order for us to believe and react. Our people need to understand some of the activities that governments of the world, giant companies are doing in the name of getting money, but it's really destroying the lives of ordinary people but I wish that it's open outside where many more people could watch and just watching this latest one where many more people were affected, I wish that our people in the villages could see this videos. We have to see it, understand it and act upon it.

- Freida Kana

Many people don't know their rights. I part take through picking up and dropping off the participants and came to know little of human rights. I usually do awareness to mothers and youths in my role as a bus offside (bus crew). So when I see this program on the human rights film festival, I am more than happy because this was what I was doing in my daily job as a bus offside.

- Bus crew of Meri Safe Bus

These kinds of programs will help us. I'm very happy to see the human rights film festival and encourage the youths to be

involved in such activities to gain more insight of issues within our communities.

- Driver Robin Israel (Meri Safe Bus)

The film festival is a very good opportunity for us to enhance educating the younger generation and through films. It is one of those mediums that people can relate to in terms of visual and listening and its really appropriate for young people to be involved in this whole learning and information dissemination process.

- Tamalis Akus (UNDP)

Human right is a very important issue. Coming to this event is very encouraging to exercise your rights. I feel it will be more important to include such film programs in the education curriculum where a child and individual will know their rights at an early age. The panels encourage us to speak our minds or air our views.

-Salome Waira

These movies addressed the current issues we are facing. People do not know their rights gender wise, and it goes all the way to the levels of how we live in the society.

- Grace Goro

During the 2019 Film Festival, several members of the audience expressed their reflections:

That's the second time where I've attended an actual *Power Meri* screening, and, here the audience was very lively. Watching the documentary with them and how they reacted was very good and motivational; that there's other people out there supporting the women.

- Jacobeth Wake, Madang

This is the kind of change we want to see, more empowerment of women in our societies and communities. We just cannot take that mentality where we see men as the superior. We

gotta do away with that mentality and see that women can be equal contributors, if given a chance & opportunity.

- Emmanuel Eralia, Madang

My film, *One too many students*, was a classroom project and then when it played throughout the country during the 2018 festival, it really empowered me, to prepare some more because I really want to show my work every time there's a film festival. It was really nice to see people discussing my film on education, which is the foundation for people in PNG.

- George Joe, Madang

I really liked *Power Meri* because in PNG, rugby league is one of the more male dominated sports, so for women to play rugby league and represent our country in other countries, for me when I watch it, I feel more empowered.

- Nickita Kawage, Lae

I've seen a lot of violence against women and it starts right down at our own level. To prevent these things, we should start now. While we're still young, we should practice non-violence in our relationships.

- Samantha Tomokita, Lae

The film that I liked was *Kagalalo* about the Kaineke project from South Bougainville. This film helped me to know the traditional conservation methods that people back in the village used to preserve their forests for the future generations, which I will be impacted by as well. In Bougainville, land is life.

- Betty, Lae

Where my mum comes from in Lae, they're trying to bring the pipeline from Wafi-Golpu down and put the tailings and waste into the ocean. After watching *Vala North* it gave me a good perspective on how I can approach that.

- Willie, Lae

When we know our rights we can help others, promote gender equality. Womenfolk can support each other and empower each other.”

- Simon Sobaim, Madang

“Gender equality is part of human rights and I strongly believe that women should stand up for their rights, and I was really happy when we filmed *Power Meri* and had a discussion on that.”

- Pamela Barara, Madang

## Recommendations and Reflections

The PNG Human Rights Film Festival continues to actively engage thousands of members of the public across the country, who have shown strong interest and demand to participate in public discourse on critical human rights issues impacting the country at the national and local levels. Public concern on gender equality and gender-based violence, right to health and education, environment and conservation, and access to justice continue to be raised across audiences in all locations the festival travels to, with the public expressing interest to take action to contribute to addressing ongoing human rights issues of concern. Through the theme, “Stand with me for rights in PNG,” the 2019 PNG Human Rights Film Festival engaged technical experts from the public, private, academic, and development sectors, at the national and local levels, to analyze the current context, and highlight opportunities for public engagement and activism. The continued support from HRFF patron, the Deputy Prime Minister, highlights the unique nature of the HRFF to give voice to the marginalized and provide a critical platform for discourse, in a context with limited public access to information.

Local films in particular continue to resonate strongly across audiences, generations, and backgrounds, who continue to show interest in human rights films made in PNG told from a nuanced local perspective, as visible through the impact of popular PNG films, *Power Meri*, *Splinters*, *Uprooted*, *I’m Moshanty*, *Do you love me?*, *Vala North*, *The Last Frontier*, and *A New Dawn Break*. This demonstrates a critical need to continue to promote PNG filmmakers and filmmaking in PNG. There con-

tinues to be an interest for a human rights film competition component to the festival, however a dedicated local entity with expertise would be required to effectively run this event, which could partner with the film festival. There is room to explore expanding the HRFF to a human rights arts festival to capture other forms of expression and advocacy on human rights, including performing and visual arts, with dance, song, and spoken word complimenting the festival.

The increasing demand for the HRFF to be held in more locations and reach wider parts of the public, particularly schools, youth, and at the community level led to the inclusion of two new locations for the HRFF circuit this year (Lae and Alotau). However, the involvement and support of local organizations at the provincial level remain crucial, and the weight of the organization and coordination of the event places a disproportionate burden on the lead entity or focal point in each provincial committee, particularly at the central level. For maximum future impact, the festival committee may explore satellite events with stronger focus and follow-up. Strategic partnerships with media, tertiary institutions, as well as cultural events, such as the National Kenu and Kundu Festival, and strategic use of social media, were critical in expanding the Festival reach and audience.

## Endnotes

1 The discussion in this section on the first Film Festival in 2010 was drawn from the festival brochure, available at [https://culturesofresistancefilms.com/files/HRFF\\_program.pdf](https://culturesofresistancefilms.com/files/HRFF_program.pdf).

2 The film review as taken from [www.kanopy.com/product/mary-meets-mohammad](http://www.kanopy.com/product/mary-meets-mohammad).

3 The invited Panelists were Dr. Andrew Moutu, Andrew Abel, Delilah Sandeka, Roseanne O'Rourke, Larry Santana, Roy Trivedy, Colin Pake, Isi Our, Alcinda Trawen, a representative from the Department of Justice and Attorney General PNG, Lester Seri, Dr. Lawrence Kalinoe, Ruth Bai, and others.

4 The following reports came out in the media:

*Post-Courier*, "Film Festival celebrates 10th anniversary," 7 May 2019,

<https://postcourier.com.pg/film-festival-celebrates-10th-anniversary/>

*The National*, "Festival into its tenth year," 2 October 2019, [www.thenational.com.pg/festival-into-its-tenth-year/](http://www.thenational.com.pg/festival-into-its-tenth-year/)

*Post-Courier*, "UOG to host Human Rights Film Fest," 23 October 2019, <https://postcourier.com.pg/uog-to-host-human-rights-film-fest/>

*Post-Courier*, "Human Rights Festival attracts hundreds in EHP," 25 October 2019, <https://postcourier.com.pg/human-rights-festival-attracts-hundreds-in-ehp/>

Post-Courier, "Music can be used as a tool for change, says Masani," 28 October 2019, <https://postcourier.com.pg/music-can-be-used-as-a-tool-for-change-says-masani/>

*Post-Courier*, "Alotau to host 10th PNG Human Rights Film Festival," 6 November 2019, <https://postcourier.com.pg/alotau-to-host-10th-png-human-rights-film-festival/>

Radio New Zealand, "Thousands attend PNG Human Rights Film Festival," 8 November 2019, [www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/402825/thousands-attend-png-human-rights-film-festival](http://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/402825/thousands-attend-png-human-rights-film-festival).



## Annex A

### Film Selection Criteria

Name of Film:

Director:

When viewing the film, ensure to take into consideration the following points; Tick the following boxes	1 Disagree	2 Maybe	3 Agree
The film conveys a message about Human Rights in Papua New Guinea.			
The film relays information about emerging issue around Human Rights in the country.			
The film does not contain extreme violence.			
The film promotes the human rights concept and reflects a positive image.			
The film clearly states the type of audience that is eligible to view the film.			
The language in the film can be easily understood by the general public.			
<b>TOTAL SCORE</b>			
<p>What human rights issues are addressed in this film?</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 48%;"> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Rights in the digital age</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Business &amp; human rights, human trafficking</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Freedom of expression and media</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Environment &amp; Climate Change</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other _____</p> </div> <div style="width: 48%;"> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Child rights</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Women's rights</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Rights in humanitarian disasters</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Right to health &amp; education</p> </div> </div> <p>Comments for consideration:</p>    			
Would you recommend this film to be included the PNG Human Rights Film Festival?		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	

## Annex B

### Films Shown in the HRFF - 2010-2019

#### Films shown in 2010 HRFF:

- Once Were Warriors (1994), Lee Tamahori
- Leila (2007), sixteen youth filmmakers of Camera-etc. from Burkina Faso
- Mozambique (2008), Alcides Soares. Alcides.
- Just a Normal Day (2008), Fiona Whelan, Samantha Williams, and Arran Walker
- See, listen, speak: ngarrindjeri's being heard (nukkan.kungun.yunnan) (2009), Edie Carter, and others
- Who is Little Red Riding Hood? (2008), Eva Ciuk.
- Trech's Nest (2009), IOM Cambodia.
- Crude: The Real Price of Oil (2009), Joe Berlinger
- Standing Tall (2010)
- Slum Survivors (2007).
- Stolen Generation, IOM

#### Papua New Guinean Films in 2010 HRFF:

- The One Minutes Jr (2009), UNICEF/Sandberg Institute/The One Minutes Foundation.

#### Films shown in 2011 HRFF:

- Tu Mai Takatapui (2008), Robyn Paterson
- Path to Justice (2004), Penal Reform International
- The Greatest Silence: Rape in the Congo (2007), Lisa F. Jackson
- The Pacific Solution (2005), James Frankham
- The Pacific School of Medicine - Cuban health cooperation in Asia-Pacific (2009), Tim Anderson
- Our Generation (2011), Sinen Saban & Damien Curtis
- Kamambo (Butterfly) (2010), Victoria Goodyear

#### Papua New Guinean Films in 2011 HRFF

- Killing the witches – Papua New Guinea (2005), Journeymen Pictures Ltd.
- The Voice of Change (2011), Niugini Film Ltd PNG
- Yumi Piksa: Stories from the Papua New Guinea Highlands. (2009), Yumi Piksa Workshop

- Gold's Costly Dividend. The Porgera Joint Venture (2011), Brent Storton
- Tanim (2002), James Frankham & the Faraway team

#### Films Shown in 2012 HRFF:

- The Girl effect: The clock is ticking (2010), CARE
- Celebrating Achievements (2006), UNIFEM.
- The Lady (2011), Luc Besson
- A Path to Dignity: The Power of Human Rights Education (2012), HREA, OHCHR and Soka Gakkai
- Dear Mandela (2011), Dara Kell & Christopher Nizz
- Mining The Last Frontier (2012), Al Jazeera
- Strange Birds in Paradise: A West Papuan Story (2009), Charlie Hill-Smith
- Emergency Shelter (2010), He Yang

#### Papua New Guinean Films in 2012 HRFF

- Eli Na Pita, PNG National Department of Health, Papua New Guinea
- Why Me – Survivors Stories (2012), Raka Gamini
- Safe Cities – Port Moresby (2012), UN Women
- Komuniti Tok Piksa, series on HIV/AIDS (2012), National Aids Council PNG
- Mama Betty
- Wanem Rot Nau? (Which Way Now?)
- Paul's Big Heart
- One More Chance
- Canning Paradise (2012), Olivier Pollet
- Laukautim Pasin Tumbuna: Safeguard our Cultural Heritage (2011), John Faunt

#### Films shown in 2013 HRFF:

- Schindler's List (1993), Steven Spielberg
- Sophie's Choice (1982), Alan J. Pakula
- The Pianist (2002), Roman Polanski
- Arna's Children (2003), Juliano Mer Khamis and Dannie Dannie
- Moolaadé (2005), Ousmane Sembene

- Burma VJ (2008), Anders Ostergaard
- Hotel Rwanda (2004) Terry George
- Dead Man Walking (1995) by Tim Robbins
- Road to Guantanamo (2005), Michael Winterbottom
- Standard Operating Procedure (2008), Errol Morris
- Iraq in Fragments (2006), James Longley
- Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea (2012)
- Pray the Devil Back to Hell (2008), Gini Reticker
- Call Me Kuchu (2012), Katherine Fairfax Wright, Malika Zouhali-Worrall

#### Films shown in 2014 HRFF:

- The Orator (2011), Tusi Tamasese. Sali
- Next Goal Wins (2014), Stevie Jamieson & Mike Brett

#### Papua New Guinean Films shown in 2014 HRFF

- Never Give Up (2014), Ruth Ketau
- Lapan (2014), Renagi Taukarai
- Guavas and bananas: Living Gay in PNG (2014) by Vlad Sokhin and Roman Kalyakin
- Save Meri Skulim Meri (2014), Joys Eggins
- Betelnut Bisnis (2005), Chris Owen.
- Meri Markham (2014), Klini Barry.
- When We Were Hela (2014), Olivier Pollet
- Humanitarian Resettlement in PNG (2014), Julius Miller
- Voice of Change (2014), Liane Munau

#### Films shown in 2015 HRFF:

- The Road Home (2015), Dominic Brown
- The First Grader (2010), Justin Chadwick

#### Papua New Guinean Films in 2015 HRFF

- Singaut Bilong Pikinini (The Children's calls) (2015), Kasimir Burgess
- Senisim Pasin (2015), Tribal Foundation
- Naomi (2015), Centre for Creative & Social Media – University of Goroka, Papua New Guinea
- Harim Mi: Stori blo bagarap, stori blo kamapim gutpla (Hear Me: Stories that hurt, Stories that heal) (2015), thi360
- I'm Proud of Who I AM: Sexuality Gender Identity and the Law in PNG (2014), Vlad Sokhin & UNAIDS

- Taxi Boys: One Bag Too Heavy (2013), Fidelis Sope
- A Girl's Life (2008), Stephen Rae
- Uprooted (2011), Scott Waide
- Profit and Loss (2010), Christopher McLeod

#### Films shown in 2016 HRFF:

- Keepers of the Game (2016), Judd Ehrlich
- At Home in the World (2015), Andreas Koefoed
- A River Changes Course (2013), Kalyanee Mam
- River of Eden (2014), Pete McBride

#### Papua New Guinean Films in 2016 HRFF

- Ilekken (1978), Dennis O'Rourke
- Sting Coins, AusAid/ UNDP
- Mi Sanap Strong (I Stand Strong) (2015), Yumi Kirapim Senis, Ausaid & UNDP
- Closing the Gap, Yumi Kirapim Senis, AusAid & UNDP
- Countering Sorcery and Witchcraft-Related Violence (2016), Stop Sorcery
- Positive Strokes, Yumi Kirapim Senis
- Our Life, Our Future, Our Country; SDG's: Leaving no one behind, UNDP

#### Films shown in 2017 HRFF:

- Chasing Asylum (2016), Eva Orner
- Tickling Giants (2016), Sara Taksler
- The Sons of Tennessee Williams (2011), Tim Wolff

#### Papua New Guinean Films in 2017 HRFF

- Driving the Change (2017), Marco Venditti
- Manam – 12 Years Later (2017), Maria Sagrista and Philip Gibb
- NKW Fresh: A Fresh Approach for PNG Farmers (2017), Sarah Wiles
- From Spears to Semi-Automatics: The Human Cost of Tribal Conflict in PNG (2017), ICRC-PNG
- River Villages Adapting to Climate Change (2017), LairdTran Studio & Lucas Kou

#### Films shown in 2018 HRFF:

- Step (2017), Amanda Lipitz
- Wan Dei
- Ai Wei Wei: Never Sorry
- The Black Pen
- Anote's Ark
- Silas

<p><b>Papua New Guinea Films in 2018 HRFF</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One Too Many Students (2017), Divine Ward University</li> <li>• My Mother's Blood</li> <li>• Koriva</li> <li>• Bougainville: Long Han Bilong Yumi</li> <li>• Paul's Story</li> <li>• Gwala Rising</li> <li>• Aliko and Ambai (2017), CSCM – University of Goroka</li> <li>• PNG Life Care</li> <li>• Maria</li> <li>• I'm Moshanty. Do you love me?</li> <li>• The Opposition. Everybody's business</li> <li>• Young &amp; Positive. A series of short films – Full of Life, I gat Hailivin I Stap, I create My Future</li> <li>• Mobail Goroka (2018), Jackie Kauli</li> </ul>	<p><b>Films shown in 2019 HRFF:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leitis in Waiting (2018), Dean Hamer</li> <li>• Vai (2019), Nicole Whippy, 'Ofa-Ki-Levuka Guttenbeil-Likiliki, Matasila Freshwater, Amberley Jo Aumua, Miria George, Marina Alofagia McCartney, Dianna Fueamana, and Becs Arahanga</li> <li>• 2040 (2019), Damon Gameau</li> <li>• SASA! (2013), Chanda Chevannes</li> <li>• Papua New Guinean Films in 2019 HRFF</li> <li>• The Last Frontier (2017), Pacific Network on Globalisation</li> <li>• Vala North (2019), Stephanie Gordon/UNDP</li> <li>• Kagalo (2019), Kainake Project</li> <li>• Champions Tell Their Stories (2019)</li> </ul>
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# Addressing Caste Discrimination Through Non-formal Education: Experiences of Navsarjan Trust

Martin Macwan

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**N**AVSARJAN is a grassroots organization in India dedicated to ensuring human rights for all by eliminating discrimination based on caste and the untouchability practices. It also campaigns for equality of status and opportunities for all regardless of caste, class or gender, and for the rule of law to prevail.

It is currently one of the largest grassroots organizations in Gujarat state, actively doing work in more than three thousand villages as well as major cities. A field staff of about forty women and men — most of whom come from the communities in which they work — keep Navsarjan in tune with the needs of the people.

## The Golana Tragedy

The Dalit community in Golana village (Anand district, Gujarat state) called Vankars (traditionally, weavers) established an agricultural cooperative society that supported their livelihood. In 1973, the government granted thirty-three acres of agricultural land to the cooperative under one of the land reform laws called the “Agricultural Land Ceiling Act.” But the members of the cooperative were too afraid to claim the land knowing how the previous landowner, an upper caste family, would violently oppose it. In 1985, the cooperative finally decided to claim the land and proceeded to take the possession of the same.

Later, Dalit members of the community demanded land from the government for their housing needs. The government granted this demand and allocated a piece of land. The land was illegally occupied by feudal community members. However, the Dalits took possession of the land and built huts on it.

On 25 January 1986, upon the instigation of the previous landowner, feudal caste members, a group of much lower caste (Valmikis) started to

destroy the huts. The cooperative members tried to stop them and fighting ensued. The Valmiki called for help from the previous land owner, and a big group of the upper caste attacked them at a bus station while they were boarding a hired truck to go to the police station to lodge a complaint on the attack. The group of upper caste seriously wounded several Vankars. A little later, an armed group of the upper caste attacked the Dalit locality once more.<sup>1</sup> Four activists working for the Dalits were gunned down on the spot, eighteen others were badly wounded, and many houses were set on fire or damaged.

Thirteen long years of legal battle ensued, and finally resulted in life imprisonment of eleven of the murderers.

Though the loss of the community leaders was unbearable, the knowledge gained during this phase in securing social and legal justice was immense. It reinforced the resolve of the Dalit community to pursue the struggle and strengthen the movement, and helped define all future programs for the oppressed, leading to the establishment of Navsarjan.

Three basic lessons were learned from the Golana tragedy:

- Violence against Dalits is a systemic phenomenon. It can only be countered through a broad-based organization and movement;
- The most crucial requirement in a movement is leadership, which must be stable as well as sensitive to its community. Such leadership best arises when it grows from within the community;
- The war against injustice is more psychological than physical. There is therefore a need for mass awareness programs on a continuous basis, side-by-side with action-oriented programs;
- The struggle for justice to be effective must follow a constitutional approach, as the injustice against the Dalits is against the law.

### **Establishing Navsarjan**

Navsarjan was established in December 1988 in Gujarat. Its primary focus was the Dalits—which largely includes people previously known as “untouchables”—the most exploited class in the Indian society. As time passed, Navsarjan gained respect that caused other communities and castes to approach it for legal assistance.

It has roots in the 1970s when a group of professors, dissatisfied with the fact that there was disconnect between the realities in society and what was

taught in educational institutions, resigned to set up a Behavioral Science Center to initiate well thought-out pedagogical work on rural development. They laid emphasis on educating the masses through non-formal education. The Center decided to match the educational programs with community owned income-generating programs. This was how the agricultural cooperatives were set up in the villages, one of them being in village Golana. I joined one of these educational institutions as a student in 1977 and later as faculty member on completion of my university course in 1980. These cooperatives made a powerful impact in the region because they were able to empower Dalits. They were the masters of their own employment in these cooperatives who could negotiate with the local landlords and dominant caste farmers on their wage. At that time when the law mandated farmers to pay Rs. 7 per day as minimum wage, the farmers were actually paid only 1 Rs. The cooperatives were able to force the payment of minimum wage.

After the Golana incident, based on learnings as mentioned earlier, I decided to set up Navsarjan Trust which could focus on systemic caste violence. Starting from five villages in 1989, within the next eight years it had spread to nearly two thousand villages of Gujarat.

Navsarjan, now solidly established in Gujarat, has built upon its foundation of fieldwork. It plays an active part in the overall Dalit movement of India and abroad. It is recognized as one of the most successful and ground-breaking Dalit organizations of India.

Navsarjan works to help Dalits and other persecuted communities to escape the net of ideological deceptions through which the system has oppressed them for centuries. Promoting self-respect and dignity in all of its activities, Navsarjan dedicates itself to a variety of programs.

It promotes the use of non-violent action to protest the Dalit situation. With this aim in view, it provides services to both Dalits and non-Dalits.

## **Programs**

Navsarjan's work is mainly focused on the following themes:

- Human rights value education;
- Women's rights;
- Eradication of manual scavenging;
- Minimum wage implementation;
- Land rights;



- Digitization of data;
- Local governance and political rights;
- Youth awareness and motivation.

Navsarjan's core work is to create awareness among the marginalized and oppressed communities in such a way that people are able to develop independent thinking about the world around them, and enable them to fight oppression and inequality without the organization's support. To this end, Navsarjan's fieldworkers are incessantly involved in mobilizing and organizing meetings and training programs. Women's rights groups, land rights groups, youth groups, village paralegals, agricultural workers' groups, etc. are formed and trained to exist independently of Navsarjan, though its support to the groups remains intact.

Navsarjan works to strengthen the movement for equality, and believes that the energy for all such movements must come from within the oppressed marginalized communities.

Navsarjan produced one of the largest census reports measuring the untouchability practices in Gujarat. The report entitled *Understanding Untouchability - A Comprehensive Study of Practices and Conditions in 1589 Villages* came out in 2010.<sup>2</sup> In 2016, the Indian government revoked the license of Navsarjan under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (2010), terming its activities as "detrimental to National interest." The crisis, causing non-availability of funds and the locking of bank accounts, affected many of



Navsarjan gathering to protest the continuing untouchability practices.

its programs and reduced the number of staff to half. The village communities have kept Navsarjan alive with community contributions.

In its more than three decades of work, which include setbacks and successes, Navsarjan has grown to be widely recognized locally, state-wide, nationally, and internationally.

### **Human Rights Value Education**

Education is a human right denied to many Dalit children. Navsarjan works to restore this right.

As an agent of social mobility, education can lead to the emancipation of the Dalit masses. Today, however, the education system perpetuates caste discrimination, reproducing discriminatory practices and effectively denying many Dalit children their basic right to education. As a result, the chance to break out of the cycle of caste-based occupations and menial labor is lost.

At school, Dalit children are frequently forbidden from sitting with non-Dalit students during mid-day meal, and from participating in school cultural programs. They are insulted with caste-based slurs by both teachers and students. Many are forced to clean the school's toilets while non-Dalit children are free to play. The government teachers themselves enforce this discrimination, often refusing to pass Dalit students and giving them less attention in class. As a result, the drop-out rate of Dalit children (especially girls) from primary school is alarmingly high.

Navsarjan's Human Rights Value Education strives to:

1. Completely eradicate discrimination in public schools;
2. Achieve a zero drop-out rate of Dalit children from primary schools;
3. Create educational opportunities for Dalit children to counter the challenges posed by the privatization of education;
4. Ensure that there is no child labor in Dalit communities;
5. Ensure that Dalit children get access to the government education scholarships to which they are entitled;
6. Sensitize teachers on issues of discrimination suffered by Dalit children;
7. Encourage personal growth;
8. Allow children to develop scientific skills and rational beliefs;

9. Empower through the values of equality and non-discrimination, both in terms of gender and otherwise;
10. Ensure that the most disadvantaged Dalit communities, such as the scavengers (Valmiki community), receive priority-based opportunities;
11. Reduce sub-caste discrimination among the Dalit communities;
12. Focus on female students, and give them priority-based opportunities; and
13. Create a replicable model of social empowerment.

Navsarjan realized the importance of education and knowledge as the most effective tools for social reengineering. Realizing that the knowledge would end systems based on caste, the caste system prohibited learning for the Dalits, the women and all marginalized sectors except for the people upheld as “pure” castes.

Hence, Navsarjan did the following:

1. It set up three primary schools, which are closed now due to lack of funds. There were more than 2,500 students graduating out of these schools;
2. It produced more than eighteen books for children around the values of equality and non-discrimination;
3. It produced articles to point out the number of caste and gender-based prejudices interweaved in the textbooks and the books available in the market for children on moral education;
4. It produced and continues to produce educational toys and learning tools for children to learn history which often the school curriculum does not cover;
5. Recently, it has produced “Constitution house,” available in almost all Indian languages. This small hand-held wooden house explains the basic provisions of the Indian Constitution, especially the fundamental rights and liberties. This material is used by many organizations across the country for spreading awareness and education in local areas.



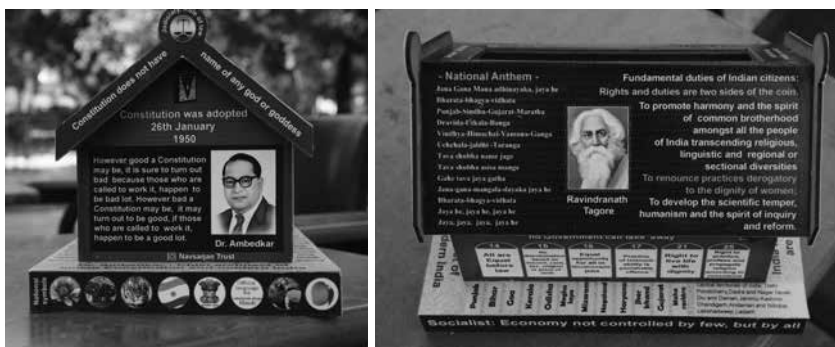
Children do experiments in the science lab in Navsarjan school.



Educational toys designed by Navsarjan.



“Constitution House”



"Constitution House"

## ***Bhimshalas***

Bhimshalas ("Bhim" from Bhimrao Ambedkar, and "shala" is the Gujarati word for school) are a key part of Navsarjan's grassroots education strategy. A Bhimshala is 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.

Activities done with children in *Bhimshalas* include:

- educational games;
- cultural programs;
- programs in which the students can share their experiences of discrimination at school;
- picnic and exposure to public places such as the police station, post office, railway station, Primary Health Center (PHC), milk cooperative, and games and sports centers.

Nearly all Bhimshalas function with Navsarjan libraries, which have a collection of about one hundred books designed to encourage literacy and maintain interest in education. These books are centered around the values of equality and non-discrimination. These libraries include educational children's books that I have written and designed to encourage Dalit and non-Dalit youth to question caste and gender discrimination.



One of the *Bhimshala* villages receives the library.



The ceremony to launch the book, *Experiencing the Truth with Dr. Ambedkar*. Other books published by Navsarjan for children are on display

Due to the *Bhimshala* program, discrimination has been drastically reduced in dozens of village schools, and Dalit children are getting extra help with their studies, receiving further encouragement to stay in school.

One of the important works done in this area by Navsarjan is the collection of data on children who were forced to clean toilets in the public schools on the basis of caste alone. A march, organized later in the city,

ended with a public hearing chaired by a retired judge of a state high court where the children gave testimonies as victims of this systemic abuse. The hearing was held at the Gandhi Ashram, the epicenter of Indian freedom movement.



Martin Macwan with teachers and children at Navsarjan school.

### Children's Programs and Camps

As the twin evils of caste- and gender-based discrimination are forced upon children at a young age, Navsarjan strives to establish a counter-conciousness and sense of unity within the minds of children to combat such discrimination.

Children's programs and camps run by Navsarjan's fieldworkers bring together all the Dalit children of one village, across sub-caste lines. In many villages, Dalits of different sub-castes do not interact frequently, and untouchability between sub-castes is often practiced. These children's programs emphasize unity and equality through cultural programs, book readings, and group discussions.



Sports competition held at Navsarjan schools.



School renovation and the plantation of the tree.



Children on the newly-constructed dome in Navsarjan school.

Educational kits have been distributed to children along with the books mentioned below and other books. The central idea of the educational program was to go beyond promoting literacy and empower children enough to be able to ask questions, something which the traditional school system discourages.



Navsarjan realized that it was important to produce books for children which focused on the challenges they face. The books, available in the market, for children do have caste and gender prejudices interweaved. Hence, apart from collecting good books published by the National Book Trust of India, I wrote a number of books. The following is the brief introduction of these books, produced by Navsarjan.



*Whose Hand is This?* is a picture book without text of various hands doing different jobs, the hands of an electrician, the carpenter, the cook, the floor cleaner, etc. Children look at the hands and guess whether the hands are those of boys or girls. The right answer is written on the last page, which is sealed. The last page has the one-line answer, “all works can be done by all, whether the boy or the girl, man or the woman.”



*Me and My Village* is a book which asks children to paint the areas of their own village in red that they have not been able to visit and those areas that they have been able to visit as green. The caste inhibitions and restrictions do emerge in the book. The book is a child's mapping of untouchability practices in a village.



*Me and My Mother* is a book about the journey of a child along with the mother, and the irreplaceable role of a mother in the life of a person.

*The Butterflies* is a book about the story of racial prejudice and the destruction it brings about.

*I am Asking: Why?* is a book of a girl-child raising a question “WHY?” to the parents on the number of roles that she alone is expected to perform. Why can my brother play and I need to work? Why the difference between me and my brother when it comes to quality of food? Why am I taught to cook, clean the floor, do domestic chores and not my brother?



*What is PROPER; What is not PROPER?* is the picture book of mother and father, brother and sister or man and woman doing different work in the house show-

ing them done traditionally (gender-based) and shown in reverse (non-traditional) situation that raise the questions: What is proper? What is not proper?



*Experiencing the Truth with Dr Ambedkar* is a complete biographical sketch of Dr. Ambedkar weaving in ninety-two events in his life in a simple narration with “Godna” paintings<sup>3</sup> and art form, created by Dalit women from Bihar. Navsarjan produced three books on Ambedkar, namely, *They are Ears of Chhote Bhim*, *Hands of Chhote Bhim* and *They are Eyes of Chhote Bhim*. They comprise a series of books on *chhote* (young, child) *bhim* (Ambedkar), which through his hands explains what the hands of a young Ambedkar do or will never do. Similarly, the books discuss what the ears of young Ambedkar hear and not hear, and what the eyes of the young *bhim* watch all the time (poverty, labor conditions, and newspapers).

*What will my hands DO and what my hands will NOT DO?* is a book on collections of life stories of people who have changed the world through their hands: Gandhi’s hands picking up a pinch of salt to challenge the British administration, Ambedkar’s hands writing the Constitution of India, Rosa Park’s hands which refuse to vacate the bus seat for the white man; Mother Teresa holding the homeless, the sick and the neglected people in her hands, etc.

*What will my feet do? What my feet will not do?* is collection of stories of people who have changed the world through their feet and the feet who were engaged in slave practices: the feet of Nelson Mandela confined in prison for thirty six years; the feet in the “million man march” of the civil rights movement; the soiled feet of the manual scavengers and the corroded feet of the salt workers in salt pan, etc.

There is a powerful story regarding the impact that Navsarjan books created in the villages that occupies my mind. A Dalit child was seen reading a book together with a non-Dalit child, sitting close and touching one another. This was reported to the father of the non-Dalit child who rushed to the school to separate his son from the Dalit boy and expressed his utter dislike for what happened. A little later, when the classes resumed, the two boys were found missing in the class. They were found in the washroom where they had locked themselves in, reading the book together!

Chhote BHIM theater competition: As a way to promote reading of the books, theater competitions were organized each year where children would



Preparation of the chhote bhim theater competition training for children organized at Dalit Shakti Kendra.

form theater groups from their village and compete. Known theater personalities came forward to voluntarily train children in theater skills. The positive impact of this program was the participation of the non-Dalit children along with Dalit children, in common theater groups. 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.

## Impact on Dalit Children

In addition to ending discriminatory practices in many schools around Gujarat and encouraging Dalit communities to value education through donations to Navsarjan's primary education work, Navsarjan's Human Rights Value Education Program has led to important changes to the children themselves:

1. Children express the fact of their discrimination: For the first time, children have begun to stand up and raise their voices in protest against the discrimination they face. They are given the opportunity for this crucial expression in *Bhimshala* activities;
2. Children question sub-caste practices: Because of caste-based socialization, the children were under the effect of a system of differential relationships based on sub-caste, even among Dalits. After being exposed to awareness programs, they interact with other children as equals, regardless of sub-caste;
3. Children combat discrimination: Dalit children are upset about caste-based discrimination, and they oppose such practices whenever they see them;
4. Children have come closer to Navsarjan's fieldworkers: Children who have been restricted by both teachers and parents—who often urge their children (especially girls) to drop out early and begin daily labor—interact with Navsarjan's activists and express their right to continue their education;
5. Children spread their awareness to their peers and siblings: Inspired by the awareness process, these children are mobilizing other children to get in touch with activists. For them, "activism" has become a buzzword;
6. Children's aspirations have risen: Children have begun to express their dreams and aspirations openly, and have raised expectations on their future.

## Youth Awareness and Motivation

Navsarjan organizes the youth to enable them to tackle some of their own issues.

The youth in Gujarat are facing a serious crisis. Those who have managed to obtain some education have found few employment opportunities in the organized sector, and are forced to work as daily wage laborers in fields or factories. They are frustrated with the lack of opportunities available to them, and with their social status in relation to the perceived glamor of the city. A powerful cynicism has resulted, leading to addiction to drugs and alcohol, and a stark increase in the suicide rate. Those who suffer most from this situation are the youth from the socially marginalized communities: the scheduled castes (Dalits), the scheduled tribes (adivasis) and the other backward castes (OBCs), to be specific. Today, the historic legacy of social exclusion based on caste has a strong influence on economic status, as well.

Navsarjan's Youth Awareness activities educate the youth on village government schemes, land laws, the *panchayat* (village council) system, addictions (to combat alcohol and tobacco) and gender issues, all of which help to lessen feelings of powerlessness and cynicism. Village Youth Forums are established and meet once or twice a month to discuss local issues, such as village infrastructure, atrocities against Dalits, and how to solve their own issues. If unemployed, students are encouraged to come to Dalit Shakti Kendra (DSK or Dalit Empowerment Center) established by Navsarjan in 1999 for vocational training and social empowerment. The result is that youth feel more engaged and empowered to take control of their lives.



Vocational training programs conducted at Dalit Shakti Kendra. Photo of participants in the training program on tailoring.



Vocational training: electrician course and its first female student.

In 1996, Navsarjan raised the question of manual scavenging practices which continued to engage several hundred thousand people to manually handle the human waste, a caste-based occupation banned under the law. To raise the national attention on the issue, Navsarjan filed a public interest litigation suit (class action suit) in the Gujarat High Court and made a film in collaboration with a media group. The film, *Lesser Human*, can be seen on the Youtube.<sup>3</sup>

The judicial intervention ensured that states adopt the law that allocates financial resources for both the relief and rehabilitation of the manual scavengers. States adopted this law one after another. However, Navsarjan felt the need to go beyond the law and allocation of state-sponsored programs for rehabilitation, though this had become a nationwide agitation. It thought important to motivate youth and create alternative vocational avenues through DSK to ensure that Dalit youth do not fall dependent on caste-based occupations.

DSK has trained more than 10,700 youth in different vocational courses, 58 percent of them being young women. The labor success rate (students' ability to engage in income earning activities both in terms of self-employ-

ment as well as being employed in work places) has been over 82.5 percent. DSK is now an independent organization from Navsarjan.

## Challenges

The implementation of the programs of Navsarjan faces a number of challenges.

There are certain sub-castes among the Dalits that are not ready to have their girls educated. Hence, continuous education in these sub-castes is still required.

The privatization of education has reduced the quality of the public education. And while the quality of education in private schools remains a question mark, private schools have been able to take away a great deal of income from the poor families. The law providing for free enrollment of poor children in private schools has remained poorly implemented and not without many obstacles.

Due to non-availability of employment in one's own village, both in Dalit and Tribal communities, migration in search of work is a reality today. School going children often travel along with parents and could not attend school.

Rising unemployment and cultural changes have made it difficult for volunteers to sustain their spirit.

## Endnotes

1 For more information on the Golana tragedy, read Martin Macwan, "Tales From An Autography: The Violent Cost of Struggle for Equality," *Journal of Social Inclusion Studies*, available at [www.dalitstudies.org.in/uploads/article/Journal%2001/Tales%20From%20an%20Autography.pdf](http://www.dalitstudies.org.in/uploads/article/Journal%2001/Tales%20From%20an%20Autography.pdf).

2 Co-authored with Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice & Human Rights. For the full report visit: [www.researchgate.net/publication/46476924\\_Understanding\\_Untouchability\\_A\\_Comrehensive\\_Study\\_of\\_Practices\\_and\\_conditions\\_in\\_1589\\_villages](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/46476924_Understanding_Untouchability_A_Comrehensive_Study_of_Practices_and_conditions_in_1589_villages).

3 *Lesser Humans* is available on this YouTube link: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=OyHWBCadTQc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OyHWBCadTQc).

# King's Academy's Jordan Model Parliament\*

Shaden Al Salman and Muna Al-Alul

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**I**N 2013, on the sidelines of the annual Model United Nations (MUN) conference held at King's Academy in Madaba-Manja, Jordan, nineteen students gathered to discuss, in Arabic, hard-hitting topics in Jordanian society. This small informal gathering proved so popular that two years later a stand-alone conference was organized that gave birth to the Jordan Model Parliament (JMP). This conference used classical Arabic (*fus-ha*) as the official language and was organized by the students themselves. More than one hundred students in the inaugural JMP spent three days attending eight simulated forums. Student delegates from fifteen public and private schools divided themselves into twelve groups representing the twelve governorates in Jordan, debated selected topics, and discussed solutions to pertinent Jordanian issues.

In the second JMP held in 2016, around three hundred students from twelve public and eight private schools across the Kingdom participated. The number of interactive forums increased to twelve dealing with Human Rights, Environment, Economics, Law, National Security, Foreign Policy and Education. The Model United Nations (MUN) forum included discussions on the Arab League, Security Council and Crisis Committee in its agenda. The Arab League, Senate and Council of Ministers forums were introduced for the first time in this JMP, where students discussed various issues related to Jordan and the Arab world.

With the opening of the new Middle School at King's Academy in 2016, the JMP Secretariat proposed to invite Middle School students to the JMP. Soon afterward, some eighty-five students from Jordanian public and private schools joined forces in November 2016 at the first JMP Middle School Conference. Designed for a younger audience, the Middle School confer-

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\* This is an edited and updated version of the "King's Academy's 'Jordan Model Parliament,' *Round Square*, 31 July 2018, [www.roundsquare.org/educational-insights/kings-academy-model-parliament/](http://www.roundsquare.org/educational-insights/kings-academy-model-parliament/) and Muna Al-Alul, *Evolution of the Jordan Model Parliament, Beyond King's, Spring 2017 edition*, [https://issuu.com/kingsacademy/docs/the\\_evolution\\_of\\_the\\_jmp](https://issuu.com/kingsacademy/docs/the_evolution_of_the_jmp).



ence incorporated more interactive activities and fewer debate and writing sessions, instead focusing on teaching skills needed for the conference.

In 2017, Middle School students joined the JMP preparatory group that increased the number of members from twenty-five to one hundred twenty-five students. The JMP became the largest officially recognized co-curricular activity on campus.

JMP Secretary-General Amr Almghawish, Batch 2017, noted that “Students are interested in JMP because it is a way to apply and work towards His Majesty King Abdullah II’s vision: ‘In order to create positive change, we need to start with the youth of our country because they are the ones who will go on to become its future leaders.’”

The use of Arabic in JMP was a big draw for many students who saw the activity as an opportunity to express themselves in their own language, in an otherwise English-speaking school. “All other school conferences in Jordan are in English, so having one in Arabic makes the conference unique,” said Almghawish. “It reminds us that we need to solve our problems in our own language and embrace our identity.” “The fact that it is in Arabic, our mother tongue, helped me connect more with my community and country,” said Dina Dawood, Batch 2020, a JMP delegate who represented Irbid Governorate at the conference.

International students took the chance of immersing themselves in an activity where they can learn more about Jordan, be part of something that is stimulating change in Jordanian society and pick up some Arabic words and phrases in the process. Although not proficient enough in Arabic to become participants, they can be involved as organizers, photographers and volunteers. “Speaking strictly in Arabic during JMP helped improve my grammar and vocabulary a lot,” said student organizer Abboud Hassan, Batch 2018, who grew up in the United States. “I used to get lost talking to students from all over Jordan who sometimes had different accents. Now that I’ve had more exposure, I find it easier to understand and talk with people.”

“When international students come to a new country they want to learn about its culture, and how it works and its politics; they want to meet its people,” said Almghawish. “They get to meet people at the JMP conference they never met before because of the diversity of students taking part from across the country.”

“I joined JMP to learn about this country I’m living in for four years,” said Chinese student Zhiwei Lin, Batch 2019. “At school we are in a bubble; JMP

is our access to connect with the real Jordan and real Jordanians.” “It’s interesting to hear people arguing when they get passionate about a topic,” she added. “It gives me a sense of the strong emotions they have on these issues.”

Preparation for the 2017 JMP included training for teachers from other schools to enable them to reach out and prepare more students in their own schools. Sessions for other schools are held at King’s Academy in preparation for the JMP. In 2017, four sessions for eighty schools were organized to help spread the JMP message to the schools.

The members of the Secretariat doubled in number to cope with the workload, and over five hundred students representing eighty schools across the country converged on the King’s Academy campus to participate in nineteen forums including new ones on Technology and Communications, Arts and Culture and the Court of Justice.

“The nice thing is we get to communicate with people from different places who have different perspectives,” Dawood said. “We see their points of view and share ours, which helps to shape our arguments and create resolutions.”

In 2018, under the helm of Secretary-General Ramsey Abdulrahim, Batch 2018, the conference grew even larger in size reaching over eight hundred students from across the Kingdom and making it the biggest student-led event at King’s Academy to date. “During the 2018 conferences, our focus was to meet the high demand for JMP from both public and private schools across Jordan,” noted Abdulrahim. “This led us to create two separate conferences during the same academic year. That decision was unprecedented because it required that we double the size and efforts of our already large leadership team.”

At the conferences in the 2018-2019 academic year, research guides were introduced that allowed students to learn how to research material critically, while providing training materials that prepared students for the conference. “We aimed to create both a positive oriented learning environment and an experience that students can use to further their education after the conference,” said Abdulrahim.

## **Adaptations**

In order to give all students an equal opportunity to take part in the JMP, an English-language forum was introduced in 2018 that enabled non-Arabic





speakers to get a better understanding of Jordanian society and key local issues.

Over the past seven years, JMP has evolved from a small workshop to the biggest co-curricular activity on campus, and one of the most eagerly anticipated interscholastic events nationwide. Its success lies in its mission, which mirrors that of His Majesty King Abdullah II: to empower young leaders to drive change within and beyond their communities, to think for themselves, and to discover that the differences between us enrich our experiences and broaden our horizons.

### **Debating Topics**

Students debate subjects across a broad range of areas which they choose themselves, based on issues they have seen in the news, or situations they recognize personally. Teachers provide guidance where necessary, for example, to help the students make an issue more specific, or to recommend an issue that they might wish to consider.

The subjects of debate include human rights, the environment, economics, law, national security, foreign policy and education. Some of the hard-hitting debates that have taken place in previous years have touched on 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, the Tawjihi system<sup>1</sup> and solar energy in Jordan.

Most satisfying was when the topics discussed converged with a real political debate within the country. In 2018, the students debated Act 308, a law that allowed rapists to escape prosecution by marrying their victims and staying married for at least five years. Giving students the platform to debate this at the same time as their representatives in the real Jordanian parliament made this issue acutely real for the students. The government subsequently repealed this law and the students, having discussed the issue at length, and the associated subject on women's rights in the country, could understand the significance and impact of this important decision.

### **Organizing the JMP**

The successful organizing of the JMP can be attributed to several factors, such as the following:

**a. Organizing structure**

JMP is organized by student teams consisting of:

1. A secretary-general and three deputies, responsible for overseeing the management of the event;
2. Twenty-five presidents (student representatives from other schools). The presidents choose the topics, write the research guides distributed to all students, and help train the students;
3. An organizational team, an external affairs team, and a staff team to support the students.

The process for allocating the roles is rigorous: students apply and are interviewed, usually by the previous team's volunteers, with school officials being present to ensure objectivity.

**b. Participation**

Students from private and public schools across the country are invited to participate in the three-day event. The students are accompanied by adult delegates from the schools.

**c. Preparation**

Formal training takes place in the lead-up to the parliamentary conference over a weekend with the aim of preparing the students to talk around the issues being discussed. This ensures all the participating students understand the background of the parliament and its philosophy, so that their engagement is based on a shared vision of what JMP is trying to achieve. The training sessions also help students understand the tools and techniques they need to employ to effectively engage in the debates: the principles of running a debate, respecting alternative views, taking turns to speak, and not interfering when others share their views.

The students are then asked to write a document on the issue they are planning to discuss, in order to prepare their thoughts and consider what research they need to undertake to come armed to the debate with the information at hand.

Participating King's Academy students are able to do their research and gather information during their allocated co-curricular time or after school. The school also helps build their learnings in other ways, for example, through expert speakers and by taking them to events, such as live political campaigns.

#### d. Structure

In lieu of countries, students represent the twelve governorates in Jordan. There are also forums which mirror the different governmental agencies in Jordan: Senate Committee, Arab League, Council Ministers and Supreme Court.

### JMP Format

JMP starts at the end of the week and runs across the weekend with the general format as follows:

- **Day one:** Registration and division into discussion committees, lobbying and a guest speaker;
- **Day two:** Opening entrepreneurship speaker panel followed by two discussion sessions before lunch, and two after. The day concludes with an international dinner and dance;
- **Day three:** Student delegates come armed with the solution statements they would like to make following their discussions the previous day. Nominations are presented, and awards received, for the best committee representative. There is then a closing ceremony and final guest speaker. Guest speakers have included ministers, inventors and writers.

### Impact

JMP inspires Jordanian students to learn more about their country, lifting the lid on the real experiences of citizens — their aspirations, their challenges, and how the modern world will impact their future. As the debates are conducted primarily in Arabic, they provide an opportunity for the students to express themselves in their own language, in an otherwise English-speaking school. The participation of Syrian refugee students has also added another very powerful dimension to the discussions, giving this often-overlooked community a voice.

The event also benefits international students as by researching and debating the issues involved, they gain a deeper insight into their adopted culture. They also have the opportunity to be part of something that is stimulating change in Jordanian society and pick up some Arabic words and phrases in the process. Although not proficient enough in Arabic to participate fully

as delegates, they are involved through some additional English debating sessions, and also as organizers, photographers and volunteers.

The impact on the pupils has been considerable. They have opportunities to exercise their leadership and management skills, show their creativity and sensitivity when tackling problems, and gain an outlook on national and global issues helping them become more informed citizens in the future.

The JMP format continues to go from strength-to-strength. It is officially the largest co-curricular activity on campus and was expected to draw involvement from over four hundred students from across the country at each of the two annual conferences for the 2019-2020 academic year, before they were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The King's Academy Jordan Model Parliament has been profiled in the local news and social media and has also caught the attention of local universities that have expressed interest in participating at upcoming conferences. At least one university plans to introduce the concept on their own campus, to raise the level of active citizenship among their own student body. One of JMP's former secretary-generals, now studying at university in the US, has started a similar parliamentary initiative at his new school, helping students to better understand the Arab region.

## **Challenges**

The logistics of organizing JMP has been challenging in a number of ways including preparation, school participation and costs:

- a. Procedure and process: In order to communicate with Jordanian public schools, approval from the Ministry of Education is required. Although there was initial difficulty getting the approval of the then Minister of Education, the current Minister immediately saw the benefit of the project and enthusiastically encouraged the school to engage with the public school system;
- b. School engagement: A further consideration was the best way to get public schools to participate in JMP. There was no incentive for adult chaperones to get involved — it meant time out of their weekend — and as a result, the chaperones tended to work in shifts over this period — there was no consistent participation of staff. That was why an adult training program was adopted to provide additional value to the attending chaperones;



- c. Costs: Ensuring that cost is not be a barrier to the participation of public schools, King's Academy funds the transport of their students to the school and ensures that they are accommodated at the school.

## Advice

The success of JMP can be summed up through the following learned lessons:

- a. Empower the students: They are full of ideas and eager to implement them! Allow them to steer the ship and they will reap the benefits in terms of their leadership experience — just be there to guide them;
- b. Work collaboratively: What started with one faculty member coordinator has now become a team of four. This ensures that if one part of the puzzle is not quite right, working collaboratively you have lots of minds on the task to find a solution;
- c. Invest in the exercise: It was a big leap to transpose and adapt the format, for example, by extending the parliament opportunity to Middle School pupils. However, the results were very positive. Never shy away from the opportunity to try something new; the benefits are likely to extend even further.

## The Future

King's Academy is eager to make the Jordan Model Parliament as inclusive as possible; to that end, the opportunity was given to students with physical disabilities to participate starting in 2018. In addition, Asia A. M. Yaghi, president of the I Am a Human Society for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Jordan, was invited as a guest speaker to address the conference on local and international laws and challenges facing persons with disabilities in Jordan. The plan for future conferences is to continue inviting more students from a diverse background, range of abilities, and other nations, to participate.

# Media and Information Literacy in Cambodia

Cambodian Center for Independent Media

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**M**ANY CAMBODIANS, especially the youth, would prefer social media (Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube) rather than the traditional media (television, radio, newspaper) as the source of information on everything. In the modern Cambodian society, they can get any kind of information through their smartphones.

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.

In response to this situation, the Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM) started a project to promote Media and Information Literacy (MIL) in Cambodia. The project aims to help people gain the most crucial skills in dealing with media problems. Basically, MIL enables people to access the media, analyze the contents, create the messages, reflect on existing information and their media habits, and take action with media. As technology continuously progresses, accessing media becomes easier and faster and new media-related questions constantly come up. This is the reason why MIL is continuously evolving and a life-long learning process.

## Cambodian Center for Independent Media

The Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM) was established in 2007 as a non-governmental organization (NGO). CCIM promotes independent media, press freedom, freedom of expression, access to information and democratic governance.

CCIM adopted the following vision, mission and values as an organization:

### *VISION*

“Everybody well informed, everybody empowered”

CCIM envisions a Cambodian society where everybody is well-informed and empowered to strengthen democratic governance and respect for human rights.

CCIM believes that a well-informed Cambodian society will expect and indeed demand good governance and select leaders that will shape the society and economy in a way that will benefit the Cambodian people equitably. Independent news and information have a critical role to play in giving people the knowledge and confidence to make informed choices. CCIM is well positioned to play a key role in disseminating reliable, credible, balanced and trusted news and information via multi-media platforms. CCIM is also well-placed to promote democratic rights and responsibilities to a large national audience.

### *MISSION*

In collaboration with the Cambodian citizens and civil society organizations, CCIM will fearlessly bring the information to the people that matters to them and protect the gains.

CCIM is first and foremost an organization that strives to bring about fundamental change in Cambodian society, a society without violence and impunity and with full human rights and freedom of expression. It has a strong reputation for dealing with tough issues and not walking away from controversy. Its audience will be attracted to reporting, which is far-reaching, in-depth and intensive and always asking the tough questions.

### *VALUES*

**Equal Voice** – With an extensive and growing on-air and online media presence, CCIM is in a unique position to promote issues of concern to sections of Cambodian society without a voice, including the oppressed, the marginalized, the weak and minority groups. CCIM is highly committed to advocate for gender equality at all levels of Cambodian society and institutions. CCIM seeks to promote an inclusive society without discrimination on race, gender, disability, sexual preference or religion.

**Active Non-Violence** – CCIM openly supports the right of the Cambodian people to freely and peacefully express their opinion on issues affecting their lives, including the right to active non-violent protest and action. CCIM opposes and will expose impunity, particularly the use of violence and lethal force by government agents against those peacefully demanding rights and justice.

**Accountability** – CCIM strives to hold Cambodian public officials and decision-makers accountable for all policies, actions and financial control. Consistent with these principles, CCIM

as an organization also endeavors to be fully accountable and transparent to both its supporters and the wider community.

**Non-partisan** – CCIM is an organization without any political party affiliation. It firmly believes in the right of the people to make a democratic choice in selecting their political leaders and the policies that will be pursued.

**Trust and Integrity** – CCIM will provide news and in-depth information from reliable and multiple sources, which is accurate and fact-checked. Reporting by CCIM journalists will meet best-practice professional ethical standards.

CCIM began its operation by continuing the broadcasting of radio programs dubbed Voice of Democracy (VOD), which was started by the Cambodian Center for Human Rights in 2003 until 2007. In 2009, CCIM completely managed two radio stations in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap in collaboration with the respective broadcasting partners. Under the name of Radio Sarika FM, it broadcasted radio talk shows with call-in radio programs to hourly radio news reports. In the second half of 2016, CCIM opened another two radio frequencies broadcasting in Battambang and Banteay Meanchey provinces, and a new frequency in Phnom Penh, bringing to a total of five radio stations — approximately covering thirty districts with potential listeners of 11,038,611 individuals aged eighteen years and above (voting population per district based on National Election Committee census).

In 2011, CCIM established its own online news website named VOD Hot News ([www.vodhotnews.com](http://www.vodhotnews.com)) to engage in a new platform for its news and information as the country embraces quickly the online technology. Within three years, VOD Hot News grew significantly and attracted up to 10,000 visitors per day. Using Google Analytics, it has recorded a total of 502,000 visits and 1.3 million-page views in a six-month period in 2013.

In 2014, CCIM started a new online platform in delivering news and information – the TV news channel ([www.vodtvnews.com](http://www.vodtvnews.com)). The VOD online TV news team goes out with the VOD reporters to gather news and cover events and broadcast them on its website.

It mobilizes citizen journalists to report on issues regarding gender violence, delivery of public services, and corruption.

Aside from its radio and online news reporting, CCIM actively collaborates with the civil society in Cambodia in advocating for internet law that respects human rights. It is a member of a government initiated working group drafting the access to information law in Cambodia.

CCIM has also held the following activities:

- Organized journalists on developing a common standard of ethics for Cambodian journalists and trained them on independent journalism;
- Trained more than two hundred citizen journalists on providing information to VOD reporters;
- Organized advocacy activities on press freedom, freedom of information and freedom of expression such as the holding of an exhibit of photos and posters calling for justice for journalists who became victims of abuses in the course of performing their duties, including a VOD reporter;
- Organized a network of provincial radio stations to promote independent media. Some of these provincial radio stations are now broadcasting VOD Radio talk shows and news programs.

In August 2017, the Cambodian government ordered Radio Free Asia (RFA), Voice of America (VOA), radio programs of political opposition parties, and the VOD radio programs to stop broadcasting. Almost all radio stations broadcasting these radio programs were also ordered closed. CCIM's radio broadcasting partners also terminated their partnership with CCIM, thus Radio Sarika FM broadcasts also discontinued.

Currently, CCIM continues to produce radio programs in collaboration with partner NGOs and aired on limited airtime on selected radio stations partnering with CCIM.

### **Media Literacy for Secondary Schools and Rural Youth**

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MOEYS) of Cambodia approved the inclusion of Media Literacy in its official secondary school curriculum. The media literacy curriculum covered discussions about social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Line, Instagram, and Google+ starting in school year 2016-2017.<sup>1</sup>

"Since media messages and new communication technologies are a constant part of the daily lives of Cambodian youth, it is important for them to become aware of the challenges and opportunities involved," says Sok Tha, Director of the Department of Information Technology at the MOEYS.<sup>2</sup>

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, he added. MOEYS has recognized the growing importance of internet technology and web-based learning. That is why it is strengthening information and communication technology (ICT) in schools. Cambodian students can now develop their ICT and MIL skills, which will allow them to be at par with their peers in more developed countries.

CCIM saw the move of the MOEYS towards MIL education as a positive development towards the enjoyment of the rights to freedom of expression and access to information. Consequently, CCIM started its own MIL project in 2014. The project was in collaboration with Germany's largest media development organization, DW Akademie. Over the next three and a half years, the two organizations initiated MIL training for one hundred Cambodian youth in Svay Rieng and Kampong Cham provinces. The training activities were held during their free time; thus fun, interactive and very practical trainings were much more emphasized.

Just like in other countries in the region, most young Cambodians use social media for fun. One of them is Kong Chanphynou, a twenty-two-year old student studying at CamEd Business School. "I have used a smartphone to access Facebook for years, but I never knew exactly what MIL was until I joined CCIM in late 2014," admitted Chanphynou, who is both a trainee and facilitator of the training in her local community. Information, Chanphynou explains, is important for society, but accessing high quality information is even more important. "We need analytical skills to identify which source of news is more reliable," said Chanphynou.

Va Sodachan, while very busy attending to her job in a store, participated in a CCIM training that she found useful for her, her family and friends. Similar to Chanphynou, Sodachan, who is a graduate in accounting at Svay Rieng University, had no idea what MIL was. According to Sodachan, the training provided her skills in writing, interviewing people and taking photos using a smartphone.

Training secondary school students on MIL requires solid commitment and flexibility. Mam Vibol, the project coordinator at CCIM, views the secondary school students as smart and quick in learning new things. But training them to become facilitators is difficult because they are too busy with their studies. It is also difficult to make them agree to meet at any specific

time. “Each training [for facilitators] lasts for four consecutive days and experience tells me that it is very hard to invite them to join,” said Vibol, adding, “there are many important things listed in the [training] lessons and it is impossible to shorten the training to less than four days.”



Facilitator guiding young trainees on how to use WavePad app to record or edit a sound from their smartphone (Svay Rieng, June 2015). © CCIM/V. Mam

Equally important, not all of students in the provinces have smartphones. Vibol sees this problem as a very important educational challenge because these students need to practice in the real world what they learn in the classroom. While smartphones have become more popular, many young students are using them with limited knowledge in terms of code of ethics and technical skills.

In short, MIL training is a long-term challenge. The introduction of MIL into the official secondary school curriculum is a remarkable development, and definitely contributes to the promotion of freedom of expression and access to online information. This achievement, however, does not mean that the mission of CCIM is complete. Indeed, fulfilling this mission has just



Young female facilitator guiding trainees on how to create a YouTube account for Vlog, to help them share and express their personal experiences and opinions (Svay Rieng, October 2015). © CCIM/V. Mam



Youth club leaders in Svay Rieng province playing a topic game and guessing what a picture on the flip chart was (Svay Rieng, September 2016). © CCIM/V. Mam



begun. There are more challenges to deal with and CCIM is committed to working on them.

### **Media 101 Club<sup>3</sup>**

In 2018, CCIM started another project, again in collaboration with DW Akademie. This time, the target group consists of university students at two Phnom Penh universities, Pannasastra University of Cambodia (PUC) and University of Puthisastra (UP). Together, they established weekly MIL training sessions in the “Media 101 Club.”<sup>4</sup>

These MIL clubs are a platform for students to learn, share and discuss their media habits, explore creating media products like photos and videos, and improve their media and information literacy.

### **Needs Assessment**

Before setting up the Media 101 Club, the MIL team at CCIM in collaboration with DW Akademie assessed the needs regarding the use of the media of thirty-eight students from PUC and UP in Phnom Penh.

The assessment revealed great interest among students in knowing more about the media, especially on how to use social media responsibly, how to protect their privacy online and how to create their own media pieces.

It also showed that the students viewed Facebook as a great opportunity to engage with their peers and to access information. But they refrained from posting or sharing any political content or content related to critical social issues.

### **Training Curriculum**

The results of the needs assessment exercise became the basis for developing a training curriculum for the Media 101 Club.

The training curriculum includes eight units divided into twenty-eight sessions, as listed below:

Unit 1: Media & Media in Cambodia

Unit 2: Assessing Media Information

Unit 3: Creating Pictures

Unit 4: The Power of Pictures

Unit 5: Social Media Basics

Unit 6: Privacy, Security, Safety

Unit 7: Verification – Care What You Share

Unit 8: Video Storytelling.

Each session provides trainers and trainees with clear instructions and objectives of the training. The whole training program lasts for fourteen weeks.

### **Learning/teaching Process**

DW Akademie has trained staff from CCIM to become MIL trainers, who now offer weekly media trainings to students at the two universities in Phnom Penh.<sup>5</sup>

The training program does not use lecture as teaching method; it employs the active participatory approach, which allows students to have fun while learning. Students enjoy the various topic games with professional trainers, brainstorming, debates, developing media products, etc. In addition, they get a chance to think critically, reflect and discuss media-related topics, and create media products like photos or videos on specific topics with their smartphones. These topics connect to the students' lives, so that they become more confident in using media to share their stories and contribute to the public discussion.

The topics enable the students to analyze and describe the Cambodian media landscape, distinguish between different types of content, compare media characteristics, and examine how and why media is used. They also learn about using search engines more effectively, find out quality criteria for journalism, distinguish between the description and interpretation of a picture, learn composition rules for photography, explore photo editing apps, and produce their own videos.

Since social media plays a key role in the life of Cambodian students, it is also at the center of the curriculum of the Media 101 Clubs. Students identify the characteristics and impact of social media, distinguish between disinformation (so-called “fake news”), misinformation and malinformation. They explore the side-effects of social media like hate speech, cyberbullying, and learn how to protect their privacy and security.

### **Attracting Students**

To attract students to join Media 101 Club, booths are set up at both universities at the start of every semester. They show the training methodology and interactive and participatory approaches, such as topic games,

brainstorming, group discussion and presentation, debates, media products. These booths always attract a lot of attention. They show that students are very keen to learn about various topics such as Photography, Video, and Verification of Information on Social Media.



Media 101 Club alumni [Batch 1] at University of Puthisastra running a booth to announce and recruit new students for Batch 2 (Phnom Penh, December 2019). © CCIM/S. Hout

### Media 101 Clubs in Action

The Media 101 Clubs at both universities are unique in terms of their systematic training curriculum and training methods. There is even special training for all prospective trainers of Media 101 club. It covers the training methodology, the participatory approach, and introduces the trainers to MIL and media-related topics.

Training activities are held on weekends. Since 2019, four batches of PUC students and one batch of UP students have completed the Media 101 Club curriculum. All in all, sixty-five students (thirty-nine females) have so far participated in the training program. The Club recruits twenty students per batch of training in one term, which lasts for three to four months.

Currently, the Club is running the trainings at PUC South Campus on Sunday afternoon with twenty students, including monks, who come from different course majors.



Members of the Media 101 Club [Batch 1] at Paññāsāstra University of Cambodia successfully completed a three-month media and information literacy training (Phnom Penh, April 2019). © CCIM/Media 101 Club



The second batch of the students in the Media 101 Club at University of Puthisastra in a club orientation (Phnom Penh, January 2020). © CCIM/V. Mam



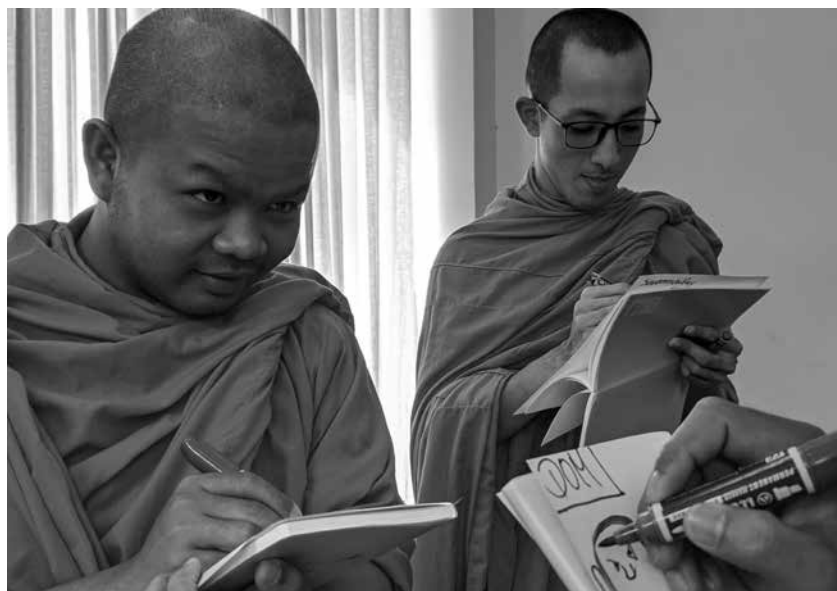
Students [Batch 2] at University of Puthisastra participating in the photography session and applying composition rules (Phnom Penh, February 2020). © CCIM/V. Mam



Students [Batch 2] at University of Puthisastra practicing how to edit pictures from their smartphone (Phnom Penh, February 2020). © CCIM/V. Mam



University of Puthisastra students [Batch 2] in the Media 101 Club playing a topic game called “Drawing Portraits” (Phnom Penh, January 2020). © CCIM/V. Mam



Students [Batch 4] at Paññāsāstra University of Cambodia playing a topic game called “Drawing Portraits” (Phnom Penh, February 2020). © CCIM/V. Mam



Female students at Harpswell Foundation participating in a training on “Verification of Information on Social Media” (Phnom Penh, December 2019). © CCIM/V. Mam

### Other Activities

On 10 May 2019, CCIM organized the MIL forum for the youth at PUC. This forum aimed to promote MIL among the youth in Cambodia, especially the students in the universities, both public and private, for them to be able to access true information and identify fake news, disinformation and hate speech in the online and social media.

Fifty-one students and visitors attended, twenty-six of them were women. The forum focused on the topic “Disinformation (fake news) and verification.”<sup>6</sup>

As time passed by, the Media 101 Clubs at both PUC and UP became even more popular. In addition to on-campus activities, the MIL team also contributed to off-campus activities. In September 2019, CCIM’s MIL team was invited to provide one-day training on security, privacy, and verification of information on social media to the Ambassador’s Youth Council in Cambodia (AYC), a youth program organized by the U.S. Embassy in Cambodia. Moreover, in October 2019, CCIM’s MIL team organized a forum on MIL at the PUC Battambang campus with the participation of more than

forty university students. In an effort to promote gender equality and equal opportunity in learning, CCIM's MIL team provided one-day training on digital security and privacy to female university students at the Harpswell Foundation in Phnom Penh in December 2019.

As expected, students were eager to learn and shared what they had experienced in using media.

The Media 101 Clubs have played critical roles not only in developing analytical and critical thinking skills, but also motivating young students to utilize their high potentials and take challenges to generate impact in society. In October 2019, three former MIL club members – Cheam Sethi, Ly Vanika, and Chhouk Chanthida - teamed up to join a short video contest co-organized by the German Embassy and the Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung in Cambodia. As a result, the video “Free Your Mind” won the 4<sup>th</sup> place in the competition.

Furthermore, Chhorn Porseng, a former Media 101 Club member at PUC, joined a short film competition on Gender Equality for Next Generation, a project organized by the CCIM with the support of the European Union (EU). As a result, the short film “Women in Journalism” produced by Chhorn won 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the competition held in June 2020.

In addition to film competitions, some club members have developed their interests in becoming professional journalists. Chhorn Sopheap and Yin Oddom (a Buddhist monk), who are former club members in Batch 2 and Batch 4 respectively, took part in Diploma Course on Media, a training program specially co-designed by CCIM and Sweden-based FOJO to train highly-motivated Cambodian students to work as professional journalists.

In addition to taking challenges at national level, some club members were provided opportunity to travel and exchange knowledge and experience in MIL skills at the regional level. In late October 2019, a group of club members were invited to join a regional conference on MIL at Rangoon, where they had opportunity to meet, discuss and share their personal experience in MIL with MIL experts, media professionals, academic researchers and students coming from Germany, Japan, Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar.

This shows the positive change in media knowledge of Cambodian youth.



## Final Thoughts

It is evidently clear that MIL project has play a crucial role in youth-oriented development. Youths are smart, creative and energetic. The participatory approaches have made the learning environment become even more friendly and highly-motivating. The Media 101 Clubs adhere to the philosophy that “There is neither right, nor wrong idea. There are ideas”. Students are encouraged to express their opinion to give and learn from feedback. The MIL skills students learned in the clubs will benefit not only their academic life at the university, but also their future careers.

Even though MIL plays a critical role in developing critical thinking skills for the students, the fact is that the scope of MIL project is relatively small. Currently, MIL project works only at two universities, while many university students in Phnom Penh and the provinces still do not have access to a proper and systematic MIL training program. Taking this challenge into consideration, CCIM and DW Akademie will continue to look for more funding and more partners to expand the MIL training program to more university students in Phnom Penh and the provinces.

## Endnotes

1 Based on report of Sek Sophal, “Media Literacy: Now in School Curriculum,” 11 December 2016, <https://ccimcambodia.org/?p=345>.

2 DW Akademie, “Media Literacy enters Cambodian classrooms,” [www.dw.com/en/media-literacy-enters-cambodian-classroom/a-35986176](http://www.dw.com/en/media-literacy-enters-cambodian-classroom/a-35986176).

3 This section draws parts of the discussion from Media and Information Literacy Network (MILEN), “Setting up a MIL training course [Cambodia],” 2 March 2020, [https://milnexpertnetwork.wordpress.com/2020/03/02/setting-up-a-miltraining-course-cambodiafbclid=IwAR1yeEWrwUnH1\\_q0q3xsAw3rLhSVYcZHEvbREyr8amBJrnSLxqLgc0qG0To](https://milnexpertnetwork.wordpress.com/2020/03/02/setting-up-a-miltraining-course-cambodiafbclid=IwAR1yeEWrwUnH1_q0q3xsAw3rLhSVYcZHEvbREyr8amBJrnSLxqLgc0qG0To).

4 Huot Salinit, “Media 101: Media and Information Literacy Club of Students in Cambodia,” CCIM, 25 October 2019, <https://ccimcambodia.org/?p=1647>.

5 DW Akademie in Cambodia, [www.dw.com/en/dw-akademie-in-cambodia/a-18496210](http://www.dw.com/en/dw-akademie-in-cambodia/a-18496210).

6 Forum on Disinformation and Verification at PUC, 10 May 2019, <https://ccimcambodia.org/?p=1524>.

# Human Rights Education: Importance and Present Context in Nepal

Ravi Prakash Vyas

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**H**UMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION is an effort to empower people with the knowledge of human rights in order to ensure their protection and promote awareness about them in accordance with the international human rights instruments. It is understood as a process of acquiring specific knowledge, skills and values in order to grasp, understand, assert and support one's rights, grounded on norms outlined in different international instruments and sustained by domestic laws.<sup>1</sup> It is one of the most important means for the realization of human rights, as provided for in several human rights international instruments.<sup>2</sup> These international instruments oblige the states to promote human rights education in their education system.

Human rights education started as an international movement to promote awareness about human rights. The World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 launched the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education to strengthen human rights education, training and public information for the promotion and achievement of stable and harmonious relations among communities and foster mutual understanding, tolerance and peace.<sup>3</sup> Following the achievements of the Decade for Human Rights Education, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the World Program for Human Rights Education in 2005. The program seeks to promote a common understanding of fundamental principles and methodologies of human rights education.<sup>4</sup> The program was structured in different phases to address the human rights education efforts on specific issues. The first phase (2005–2009) focused on human rights in the primary and secondary school systems<sup>5</sup>, the second phase (2010–2014) focused on human rights education for higher education and on human rights training programs for teachers and educators, civil servants, law enforcement officials and military personnel.<sup>6</sup> The third phase (2015–2019) focused on strengthening the implementation of the first two phases and promoting human rights

training for media personnel and journalists.<sup>7</sup> The fourth phase (2020–2024) focuses on the youth population with emphasis on the education and training in human rights and non-discrimination, equality, inclusion and respect for diversity to build inclusive and peaceful societies.<sup>8</sup>

According to the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (UNDHRET), human rights education comprises all educational, training, information, awareness-raising and learning activities aimed at promoting universal respect for and observance of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.<sup>9</sup> The main aim of human rights education is to raise awareness and understanding of the human rights standards and principles to develop a universal culture of human rights where every individual is well aware of his/her rights and responsibilities. The effective realization of human rights contributes to the prevention of human rights violation and abuse, along with the promotion of non-discrimination and equality. Human rights education encompasses:<sup>10</sup>

- a. Knowledge and skills – learning about human rights and mechanisms for their protection, as well as acquiring skills to apply them in daily life;
- b. Values, attitudes and behavior – developing values and reinforcing attitudes and behavior which uphold human rights;
- c. Action - taking action to defend and promote human rights.

Human rights education contributes to strengthening the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms by imparting knowledge and skills, and building a universal culture of human rights. It should be incorporated at all levels of education, including preschool, primary, secondary, and higher education through informal,<sup>11</sup> formal,<sup>12</sup> or non-formal<sup>13</sup> setting. It also includes, inter-alia, the vocational training and the training of trainers, teachers and state officials.<sup>14</sup> It is important that the inter-relationship in the three settings exist coherently providing knowledge and skills in a holistic approach. All three are complementary to each other and provide for the foundations of a good human rights education.<sup>15</sup> The subject of Human Rights is now established in the curriculums of various universities around the globe to ensure the enabling environment for human rights education and training.

## **Understanding the Context: Human Rights in Nepal**

Human rights are defined as fundamental, inalienable, and absolute claims, powers, privileges and immunities that inhere in persons for being born as human beings. Human rights are recognized in international laws and fundamental laws (Constitution) of the countries and are considered as the basic, inherent, and inalienable rights that all persons are entitled to. Nepal is a democratic republic country and has expressed full commitment towards the protection and promotion of human rights. The concept of human rights<sup>16</sup> was especially given focus after Nepal promulgated the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal in 1990.<sup>17</sup> Nepal has ratified several international human rights treaties/conventions. Among them, twenty-two are related to human rights, seven are related to humanitarian laws, fourteen are related to the environment, twelve are related to labor along with children, human trafficking, food and environment, and four are regional level (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation or SAARC) treaties.<sup>18</sup> There has been an effort to reciprocate the provisions of the treaties and conventions in the domestic laws and formulate the policies and action plans accordingly<sup>19</sup> either by enacting new laws or by amending the existing laws. Part 3 of the 1990 Constitution of Nepal has guaranteed the fundamental rights of the citizens and has provided the legal and structural basis for human rights. The fundamental rights in the Constitution are consistent with the human rights provisions enshrined in the international human rights instruments that Nepal is a party to. Furthermore, various laws have been enacted to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights in Nepal. However, there are problems in the implementation of laws, and the government does not seem serious towards submitting periodic reports to the human rights treaty bodies.<sup>20</sup>

The government of Nepal is committed to promoting human rights culture and mainstreaming human rights agenda to fulfil its obligations and commitments under national and international laws. The government implemented periodic National Human Rights Action Plans in collaboration with the human rights institutions and other civil society organizations to protect and promote human rights. However, reports of frequent human rights violations have been recorded.<sup>21</sup> The National Strategy to End Child Marriage by 2030 was launched in 2016; however, 37 percent of girls in Nepal marry before the age of eighteen and 10 percent by the age of fifteen making

Nepal a country with the third-highest rate of child marriage in Asia.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, poverty in Nepal is widespread and persistent. People are still deprived of essential health and educational services. The living standard of people is poor due to the vicious circle of poverty. Despite commitments to various international human rights standards and initiation of several human rights programs, human rights violations are still prevalent. The recent amendment bill for the Human Rights Commission Act tabled in the parliament limits the power of NHRC, which is a direct threat to human rights in Nepal.<sup>23</sup>

### **Role and Responsibilities of Human Rights Commission**

National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) have a significant role in promoting human rights through human rights education.<sup>24</sup> The Paris Principles, the milestone set of international standards for NHRIs, provide that one of their responsibilities is<sup>25</sup>

(g) To publicize human rights and efforts to combat all forms of discrimination, in particular racial discrimination, by increasing public awareness, especially through information and education and by making use of all press organs.

The National Human Rights Commission of Nepal (NHRC) was established as a statutory body<sup>26</sup> following the Paris Principles in 2000. The NHRC is now an independent, autonomous and constitutional body<sup>27</sup> as mandated by the Constitution of Nepal. The primary responsibility of the NHRC is to ensure the respect, protection and promotion of human rights.<sup>28</sup> It is also competent to launch inquiries and investigations into alleged human rights violations.<sup>29</sup> It can also recommend legal or departmental action against human rights violators.<sup>30</sup> The NHRC has the authority to monitor the implementation of human rights laws<sup>31</sup> and make the government accountable for the non-fulfilment of its duty to protect and promote human rights. The functions of the NHRC are accomplished through monitoring, investigation of human rights situation, promotion, advocacy, human rights education and review of the laws.<sup>32</sup> NHRC's Strategic Plan 2015-2020 has set the strengthening of human rights promotion through education, as one of its strategic objectives.<sup>33</sup> NHRC is continuously involved through different

mediums to include and change the syllabus of human rights course in the school system.<sup>34</sup>

Besides, the Constitution has also mandated the establishment of other commissions, such as National Women Commission, National Dalit Commission, National Inclusion Commission, Indigenous Nationalities Commission, Madhesi Commission, Tharu Commission, and Muslim Commission. These commissions promote and strengthen the rights of the concerned stakeholders and develop policies for advocating their rights. Likewise, to address the human rights issues, the government of Nepal has prepared the National Human Rights Action Plan. The national action plan has succeeded in increasing the awareness of human rights issues, along with making the government units more responsive to their duties and rights of the citizens. The national action plan has also contributed to making human rights education widespread.<sup>35</sup>

### **Human Rights Education in Nepal**

Education in Nepal is a fundamental right guaranteed by the Constitution.<sup>36</sup> The Constitution has recognized the right to free education from basic to secondary levels. The Act Relating to Compulsory and Free Education, 2018 has been passed by the parliament to implement the right to education guaranteed by the Constitution.<sup>37</sup> The Constitution has also considered the special requirements of children with disabilities and the economically indigent citizens. In the last decade, Nepal has made significant progress in the educational sector. According to the most recent survey, Nepal has an adult literacy rate of 65.9 percent.<sup>38</sup> The government of Nepal spends an average of Rs. 26.52 billion per annum in the education sector.<sup>39</sup> However, around 35 percent of Nepalese are still illiterate.<sup>40</sup> The government of Nepal has developed the School Sector Development Plan, which includes the development of vocational courses. The National Framework for Capacity Development, School Sector Reform Plan, School Sector Development Plan, Inclusive Education Policy for Persons with Disabilities, Basic and Primary Education Project and National Education Policy are some of the major steps taken by the government of Nepal to promote education.

Despite the efforts of the government to improve, the education sector of Nepal still has shortcomings due to the traditional basis of the educational plan. The effort to spread human rights literacy in Nepal should begin with

the reformation of the education system itself. Human rights education has been incorporated in the school and university curriculums in Nepal.<sup>41</sup> The national goals of education in Nepal include preparing citizens with ethical conduct and morals for healthy social and collective lifestyle by promoting supreme human values.<sup>42</sup> The value of human rights and sensitivity towards human rights issues is taught from the primary level in Nepal through the compulsory courses on Social Studies, Civic Education, Health, Population and Environmental Education.<sup>43</sup> Human rights education can also be traced in the curriculum of the universities in Nepal. Previously, human rights as a subject were taught only in Law degrees. However, the human rights themes and content can now be found in other strands such as Sociology, Political Science, Humanities and Arts. However, the content and delivery differ among the universities teaching human rights. While some universities are limited to general or introductory courses scoping the field of human rights, others offer various specialized courses on particular aspects of human rights.<sup>44</sup> Human rights education has been incorporated in the school and university curriculums in Nepal to ensure that proper understanding and appreciation for human rights developed in children from the very beginning. The Nepalese government had started a general law course as an optional subject in the higher secondary level from 2008.<sup>45</sup> This course introduces the students to human rights, human rights instruments, and fundamental rights. Currently, there is a separate course on law in higher secondary level where students can choose law as their field, and they can study all the law subjects. In their second year of higher secondary level, they have to study human rights as a separate subject.

In addition to the schools and universities, human rights education in Nepal has also been organized by professionals and institutions such as Nepal Police Academy, Nepal Police Human Rights Cell, National Forensic Science Laboratory, Office of Attorney General, National Judicial Academy, Nepal Armed Police Force, National Human Rights Commission, Nepal Bar Association and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Nepal. These institutions provide human rights education and training to the frontline government agencies in Nepal. Furthermore, the Ministry of Law Justice and Parliamentary Affairs has also been conducting programs in various areas to increase awareness about human rights in pursuance of the Action Plan on the Implementation of the Recommendations of Universal Periodic Review of the United Nations. The government has

also conducted specific programs in rural areas to increase awareness about human rights.<sup>46</sup>

Sec 4(e) of the National Human Rights Commission Act, 2012 requires the NHRC to recommend human rights education-oriented subject matter in the syllabuses of schools and universities. The NHRC is required to co-ordinate and collaborate with civil societies to enhance awareness of human rights.<sup>47</sup> The Strategic Plan, 2015-2020 of the NHRC has emphasized the promotion of human rights education along with awareness and information campaign about human rights. Additionally, the strategic plan has emphasized the role of NHRC in providing the officials of government bodies and security agencies, human rights activists, journalists, social mobilizers and the right-holders with human rights education and basic awareness-raising training.<sup>48</sup> The NHRC has conceived "Human rights for all, at every household" as its motto<sup>49</sup> for a long time and aims to develop human rights culture and create a human-rights friendly environment to enjoy the rights. The NHRC has supported major seminars on human rights education and worked in coordination with the government to include human rights education in the school curriculum in Nepal.

The progress in the education sector in Nepal shows that human rights education is recognized as an integral part of teaching methodology, and it has been incorporated in the curriculums of schools and universities in Nepal. However, a large section of the population is still unaware of the fundamental human rights and their principles. The lack of physical facilities and infrastructure in the schools and universities to make learning productive and joyful and the increasing rate of school dropouts are partly responsible for the lack of basic human rights education among the Nepalese people. The Constitution has guaranteed the right to equal opportunity and primary education to persons with disabilities. However, children with physical or mental disability are taught in separate schools or classrooms in various parts of Nepal. They do not receive quality and inclusive education due to the lack of physical accessibility, accessible educational materials and the lack of teachers who are trained in imparting inclusive education. The teachers have little or no exposure to human rights education contents and methodology, but over the years, there has been a change. In the Act relating to Children 2018, Nepal prohibits corporal punishment of children in all settings.<sup>50</sup> The beating of students in schools has stopped as a result of this, and



schools have internal monitoring structures, suggesting disciplinary actions against a teacher who do anything to the contrary.

The curriculum adopted for human rights education in the school system includes human rights-related contents ranging from respect to elderly, to child rights and international cooperation.<sup>51</sup> However, the other important matters relating to peace and human rights, right to privacy, war, discrimination and confronting discrimination are still missing in the course. Furthermore, the contents are not arranged logically and sequentially.<sup>52</sup>

### **Kathmandu School of Law (KSL) and Human Rights Education**

Kathmandu School of Law (KSL) is one of the leading law schools in Nepal, established in the year 2000 in affiliation with the Purbanchal University. KSL is a community-based academic institution, which has been engaged in various practical and innovative methods of learning, including exchange programs, residential schools, conferences, and workshops to impart pragmatic and community-responsive legal education in the country. It has helped in making the students well acquainted with the national and international laws in an applied sense. It has marked a paradigm shift in modern methodological teaching to generate leadership in the field of law and justice with a particular focus on working for the interest of the community.

KSL offers five-year B.A. LL.B. course, LLM programs, one-year interdisciplinary M.A. program in Human Rights and Conflict and International Humanitarian Law and Master's degree under the Asia-Pacific Human Rights and Democratization (APMA) program. KSL offers several courses that provide human rights education through its centers and departments, namely, Human Rights and Humanitarian Law Department (HRHLD), Clinical Law Department (CLD) and Human Rights and Criminal Justice Clinic (HRCJC) with an interdisciplinary approach.

International Human Rights Law is a compulsory and credited subject in KSL. The course covers the basic concept of human rights law enforcement mechanisms; relevant international instruments and institutions; cultural relativism; rights in conflict situation; and domestic implementation of international human rights law. There is a substantial topic devoted to the right to a fair trial in the criminal justice process, including the presumption of innocence, right to legal counsel, right to a fair public hearing, freedom from unlawful detention, and freedom from torture.

Primarily, students of the third-year undergraduates are taught International Human Rights Law as a compulsory subject in KSL. Additionally, the syllabus from the outset of the five-year B.A. LL.B. program incorporates the basics of International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

Other compulsory courses include human rights, such as the General Concepts of Law that deals with rights and duties, theories of punishment, juvenile justice and the administration of criminal justice. Procedural law covers procedural fairness under Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the principles of natural justice. Legislative Principles addresses fundamental rights in the law-making process. Principle of Interpretation includes presumptions against retrospectivity and the violation of international obligations. The Law of Evidence includes the examination of pieces of evidence concerning witness statements and the rights to examination and cross-examination of witnesses. Public International Law addresses personality, nationality, refugees, international criminal law, diplomatic immunity, use of force and armed conflict and also deals in intersectionally with IHL.

Constitutional Law and Constitutionalism covers fundamental rights of citizens, emergency provisions, elections and judiciary, and focuses on the comparative learning of the constitutions around the world. Advanced Jurisprudence includes the study of gender, ethnicity, human rights, equal and impartial justice and procedural fairness. Administrative Law covers the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness. International Humanitarian Law and Conflict Resolution Law includes coverage of freedom from torture and other rights. Labor Law includes close observation of employment-related rights.

In addition to these courses, subjects like Legal Research and Professional Ethics help the teaching pedagogy. It helps in marrying the principles of Human Rights Law, its development and progress throughout the years by helping assess the interface and intersectionality of Human Rights with other subjects and practical and value-based examples in real life and around the world.

KSL offers two-year LL.M programs in Human Rights and Gender Justice and Criminal Law and Justice. The LL.M in Human Rights and Gender Justice includes the comprehensive rights-based courses: Nepalese Laws on Gender and Access to Justice; Civil, Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and Thematic Mechanisms for the Enforcement of Human

Rights. The LL.M in Criminal Law and Justice, on the other hand, addresses specific human rights issues through courses such as Juvenile Justice and Fair Trial.

KSL offers one-year interdisciplinary M.A. Programs in Human Rights and Conflict and International Humanitarian Law. The MA in Human Rights provides the non-law graduates with a basic introduction to the concepts, history and theories of rights in Eastern and Western values and the major international treaties and jurisprudence, with an applied focus. The MA in Conflict and International Humanitarian Law enhances the understanding of the scholars on the contemporary issues and relevance of international humanitarian law; practical implementation of human rights norms; humanitarian assistance to conflict victims; monitoring of human rights violations; and prosecution of heinous war criminals through the International Criminal Court with an orientation to different modules of peacebuilding in the context of the increasing threat of terrorism and internal conflicts.

KSL is part of the Master's Program under APMA that is hosted by Mahidol University's Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies (IHRP) along with four partner universities<sup>53</sup> under the Global Campus of Human Rights.<sup>54</sup> The program aims to develop the capacity of people working in the Asia-Pacific region to effectively promote awareness of and encourage respect for human rights and democratic principles, both across the region and within their local communities. It is an interdisciplinary intensive one-year postgraduate degree that reflects the inseparable links between human rights, democracy, peace and development in the region.

KSL also partners with the University of Sydney in Australia in hosting "Himalayan Field School"<sup>55</sup> which is a Sydney Law School offshore unit of study. This offshore unit of study exposes students to the role and limits of law in addressing problems of socio-economic development and human rights facing a developing country like Nepal through an interactive "field school" conducted over two weeks in Nepal, utilizing innovative teaching methods. KSL and Sydney University professors teach jointly to illustrate the complexity of developmental and human rights problems confronting developing countries.

It hosts the Winter Residential School on Economic, Social and Development Rights (ESDR).<sup>56</sup> It is the longest-running flagship program of KSL for over fourteen years that provides in-depth and extensive curriculum developed by experts in various aspects of socio-economic and devel-

opment rights, good governance, business and human rights. Besides, the Human Rights and Criminal Justice Clinic, initiated by KSL, is determined to strengthen respect for human rights, promote democracy, development, social justice and communal harmony through distributive justice and preferential approach. It serves the needy people in society and provides legal aid to ensure their right to legal representation guaranteed by the Constitution. The clinic provides legal aid service to the indigent prisoners, victims of crimes, especially women, children and other marginalized groups, and victims of human rights violations. It also provides a platform for academic discussion on legal issues to students, teaching faculties and professional lawyers.

### **Educational Approach of KSL**

KSL's vision is to transform Nepalese society into a "functional democracy" by promoting the values of human rights, rule of law and good governance. KSL is trying to achieve this through its approach to legal education.

Human rights concerns are well integrated in the courses at KSL in ways that enable the students to become aware of and contribute to the protection of rights during their career as legal practitioners. The mainstreaming of human rights in the curriculums reflects a conscious policy decision by KSL to commit itself to human rights-based legal training and to position itself as a progressive, outward-looking, social justice-focused law school in the country.<sup>57</sup>

KSL's students are uniquely advantaged as the teaching methodology includes interactions at the ground and the education provided is not for becoming lawyers alone but to become better human beings who understand and relate with the country's real polity. The philosophy that lawyers are social engineers with the advantage to create a positive impact in their respective societies is unique to KSL. This philosophy is adopted in imparting education, creating an atmosphere where the theories do not remain within the confines of the campus but applicable practically starting from the enrollment into programs in KSL. Students are empowered to think as individuals of change who then work, research, and teach in villages; realizing the need for giving back to society at a very young age.

KSL provides a student-centered learning environment and encourages the students to participate in the learning process actively. It also provides

frequent group-based and individual exercises, along with the usual written assessments. The students are provided with the opportunity for extended research dissertations which allows them to specialize in particular issues. KSL adopts the clinical approach of pedagogy that focuses on engaged and experimental knowledge. Under the Clinical Legal Education, the students are involved in Street Law Program, Traffic Volunteering Program, Court Visits, Prison Visits, Sentencing System Appraisals and Prison Reforms Program, Advocacy Service and Community Outreach and Rural Advocacy Service Program, Professional Development Courses and Seminar, Community Outreach Program and Trial Advocacy Program. It assists in bridging the gap between theoretical and practical knowledge and enhancing the advocacy skill of the students.

KSL over the years has also enhanced its engagement in moot court competitions around the world as a co-curricular activity for students under the aegis of its Moot Court Department (MCD). KSL's achievements in international spheres provide a glimpse into its commitment to providing a holistic educational experience for students. It has set a record of winning Henry Dunant International Humanitarian Law Moot Court Competition, National Rounds for fifteen straight times and Regional Rounds in 2016 and 2018. The KSL team in the 2017 Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition was ranked 20th in the International Rounds. Moot courts help in understanding the realization of human rights through stimulus-based student learning providing an intrinsic understanding of international human rights law and the level of scrutiny needed when looking at its violations. The experience KSL students receive through interactions in moot court competitions provides them with new perspectives and understanding of how human rights work in other jurisdictions giving them a stimulus to compare and find pragmatic and practical solutions to human rights issues.

KSL is also involved in research and resource development activities on the impact on human rights of national and regional policies as well as legal issues associated with them. It brings in policymakers, practitioners, researchers and academia, both nationally and internationally, in undertaking the activities. Since its inception, KSL has undertaken over twenty-five action research projects with various international and national institutions under its KSL Policy and Legal Research Center (KPLRC); the most notable

partners are the European Union, EIUC, AUSAID, USAID, Danish Institute of Human Rights, The Asia Foundation, UNDP, Nepal, OHCHR, among others.<sup>58</sup>

## **Challenges**

Over the last twenty years, KSL has established itself as one of the leading institutions nationally and internationally on human rights education. The institutional overview above lays the foundations of a strong human rights education in the formal and non-formal framework at KSL. Now, this does not mean that there have been no challenges, or there are no challenges in the future. However, it is essential to recognize that it has survived through the height of political instability in the country and has maintained its position as a community institution committed to a socially responsive legal education. In my nine years of association with the institution as a student and faculty after that, what has impressed me is KSL's philosophy of social and value-based education.

KSL faces numerous challenges in providing human rights education. In a post-conflict society, human rights education has to deal with diversity and inclusivity in a practical sense. Over time, KSL has seen the increase of students from different backgrounds as a result of continuous and rigorous effort in imparting human rights education. However, inclusivity, in terms of providing access to reading materials and working materials that are friendly to differently-abled people, is still in progress. Inclusivity regarding differently-abled people is one of the challenges in providing human rights education. This lack of inclusivity is a result of the slow progress in making appropriate policy for the differently-abled people, and also by the societal structure of Nepal that excludes them.

The tremendous development in the technology sector has propelled the education sector to shape itself accordingly. While the new technology has brought a positive aspect in education where educational materials become easily accessible, it has also exposed the digital divide in society. KSL students, who come from all over Nepal, benefit from the use of new technology during working days. They avail of the technology in the college campus and its library; which is also the means for imparting human rights education to the students. However, when the campus is closed, some students cannot access the technology. KSL acknowledges that the digital

divide plays a considerable challenge in the overall dissemination of human rights education.

The other aspect of the challenge is the growing change in the teaching pedagogy itself. Sometimes, these new ways of teaching are not received well not just by the students but also by the teachers themselves. Different methods such as moot court and essay writing/research are not always accepted as co-curricular activity. They are still considered as extra-curricular activities that hinders KSL's objective of disseminating human rights education.

Another important challenge has been the limited indigenous human rights literature and over reliance on euro-centric version of human rights that 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.

The challenges faced by KSL in reaching where it stands today were enormous and the challenges it would face tomorrow in terms of sustaining the model of education it has been promoting are going to be numerous too. Apart from the challenge of surviving competition in the ever-growing field of education, KSL is living through a vital transition within the country. After promulgating the Constitution in 2015 that restructured the state system and provided political stability, Nepal opened the door to the evolution of its education system as well. It is imperative, now more than ever, that the upcoming generation realizes this history. The next generation has to have a perspective on how the law-making processes function and how everything within and out of our interlinked societies is intrinsically connected to human rights and international human rights law.

## Conclusion

There has been significant development in the human rights education initiatives in Nepal over the last decade. The human rights violations in Nepal has drawn public attention on the institutionalization of human rights in the country. The integration of human rights in the education system can support the effort to create awareness of human rights. It is essential to promote respect and responsiveness towards the protection and promotion of human rights.

The Government of Nepal has developed formal plans of action for human rights education. It has been cooperating with the human rights institutions, national and international networks of educators to develop content, standards and methodology of human rights education and learning in Nepal. Human rights education has been incorporated in the curriculums of schools and universities focusing on teaching and learning of human rights values. Despite that, the dissemination of human rights education has unfolded many issues and problems. The number of professional and qualified teachers is insufficient because of which the introduction of human rights courses at the school level has slowed down. Moreover, the risk of misinterpretation of the international human rights standards has increased due to insufficient human resources. There is a need to introduce practical and innovative approaches in teaching human rights to make the teaching and learning processes effective and efficient.

Nepal is a multicultural, multiethnic, and multilingual country. Human rights education in Nepal must be able to adapt to the dynamics of the Nepalese society. The Constitution of Nepal has guaranteed the right of citizens to get a basic education in their mother tongue. Thus, human rights education must embrace intercultural and multilingual education and must be culturally sensitive. The importance of human rights education from an early age is recognized, and therefore, human rights education is incorporated in the curriculum of all levels of education. However, human rights education is incorporated in the school curriculum only to a limited extent. The curriculum needs to be revised to make the students understand the importance of human rights, and to protect and promote human rights in all sectors.

Human rights education has also been implemented in university-level education in Nepal. KSL has integrated many compulsory and elective courses at its different programs to address human rights education. The teaching practices and methodologies are effective and contemporary. KSL envisions the transformation of the society into a functional democracy through placing value on good governance, human rights and rule of law and is dedicated to providing enlightenment to the legal profession and to fostering an accessible, fair, and reliable system of justice in the country. This has materialized with the help of research-based and community-centered teaching activities, and learning environment designed with the involvement of national and international experts. However, a lot needs to be done



in order to achieve the intended goal. KSL also needs to adapt to the new generation of students coming through an education system which, in my opinion, needs an overhaul. KSL must make students understand their social responsibility as law and human rights students. Over the years, the major challenge has been to change the unhealthy competition between students for academic excellence. This aspect of the competition is visible in almost every sector of society. KSL places bona fide interest in academic excellence; it does not subscribe to the notion of unhealthy competition.

Living within a transition, KSL takes into account the holistic and overall ability of its students. Students do not have one-dimensional identities. Thus, to acquaint them with the approach of imparting value-based education, in turn, instilling within them the value of giving back to society is essential. If the need for human rights-based education and values can be instilled in the students during the five years that they are with us, it would lead to a positive change. Human rights education is not achievable through classroom teachings. It needs to adopt a model where students are faced with practical problems and asked how they would solve those problems keeping in mind the core values of human rights.

We are also living with moments of triumph when we see our students giving back to the society as lawyers, policymakers, law enforcement officers, teachers, public services officers and more. Seeing that the recent graduates have taken up responsibilities as social engineers taking into account not just their but the society's multidimensional identities helps us realize the importance of human rights education and aspire to better it in the coming years.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *Circle of Rights: A Tool for Activism Training in the Defense of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, International Human Rights Internship Program/Forum-Asia 2000, page 444.

<sup>2</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 26 (2); International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Article 2(1) and Article 13; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 2(1); General Comment 3, adopted by Human Rights Committee, 1981, para 2.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Decade for Human Rights (1995-2004), Note by Secretary General, 2000.

4 Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), World Program for Human Rights Education (2005-ongoing) available at [www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/Pages/Programme.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/Pages/Programme.aspx), accessed on 12 June 2020.

5 OHCHR, The First Phase (2005-2009) of the World Program for Human Rights Education, available at [www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/WPHRE/FirstPhase/Pages/Firstphaseindex.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/WPHRE/FirstPhase/Pages/Firstphaseindex.aspx), accessed on 12 June 2020.

6 OHCHR, The Second Phase (2010-2014) of the World Program for Human Rights Education, available at [www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/WPHRE/SecondPhase/Pages/Secondphaseindex.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/WPHRE/SecondPhase/Pages/Secondphaseindex.aspx), accessed on 12 June 2020.

7 OHCHR, The Third Phase (2015-2019) of the World Program for Human Rights Education, available at [www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/WPHRE/ThirdPhase/Pages/ThirdPhaseIndex.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/WPHRE/ThirdPhase/Pages/ThirdPhaseIndex.aspx), accessed on 12 June 2020.

8 OHCHR, The Fourth Phase (2020-2024) of the World Program for Human Rights Education, available at [www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/WPHRE/Fourthphase/Pages/FourthPhaseIndex.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/WPHRE/Fourthphase/Pages/FourthPhaseIndex.aspx), accessed on 12 June 2020.

9 United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, 2011, Article 2(1)

10 Adne Valen-Sendstad, *Theories of Human Rights in Relation to Understandings of Human Rights Education: The Relevance to Diversity*, University of Birmingham, 2010, 17.

11 Informal education is a learning process where an individual is influenced by his surrounding environment. In this process, learning is continuous in a non-structured approach as this is a lifelong process. In the current context, social media, movies, documentaries, etc. are some of the examples of informal education. The individual acquires skills, values, and education based on the experiences from his/her surroundings.

12 Formal education is a structured education model from primary to tertiary levels of education. Formal education leads to competition among students in a structured curriculum along with a certificate recognizing the completion of the said education.

13 Non-formal education refers to an educational structure where personal and social education models are adopted to develop skills. This is outside the formal setting of education and the individual has to participate voluntarily to increase inter-personal skills. Such education should be available to all based on both individual and collaborative learning processes. Example of this would be youth clubs and societies in schools and colleges, sports clubs, etc.

14 United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, 2011, Article 3(2).

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54 The Global Campus of Human Rights is an inter-disciplinary center of excellence supported by the European Union. It strives to promote human rights and democratization through higher education, specialized training programs, research

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# Integrating Human Rights Education in Myanmar's Higher Education Institutions

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**T**HE COVID-19 CRISIS has provided an opportunity to reflect on our work to support three Myanmar universities' (Dagon University, East Yangon University and Mandalay University) law departments with their integration of human rights education. The output of these initiatives became this article describing how the Denmark – Myanmar Programme on Rule of Law and Human Rights 2016–2020 sought to support academic institutions through various interventions with the aim of strengthening human rights education integration.

The Danish Government has, since establishing an Embassy in Myanmar in 2014, had a clear objective to support the country's democratization process. This support is set in a landscape of the Myanmar government's strategic priorities to implement reforms to achieve *peace, national reconciliation, security and good governance* – with institutions adhering to the rule of law and respecting human rights.<sup>1</sup> These were included in the Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan 2018–2030. The objectives of Denmark's first Country Programme were hence designed to contribute to a peaceful and more democratic society with improved prosperity through sustainable economic growth. Under this framework the Denmark – Myanmar Programme on Rule of Law and Human Rights 2016 – 2020 (hereinafter Programme) was agreed with a budget of DKK 70 million.

The Programme supports rule of law institutions, lawyers, civil society and universities to strengthen the rule of law framework and implementation as well as increase application and respect for international human rights law and standards. One of the objectives has been pursued through strengthening the human rights education of justice sector actors and at higher legal education institutions. The Programme is being implemented by the Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR) and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) through a Joint Venture. In the Joint Venture, the DIHR<sup>2</sup> leads on providing technical assistance to the universities which

focuses on introducing and strengthening human rights education in the law departments.

The design of the human rights education component is inspired by a similar human rights education program under the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) *Good Governance and Public Administration Programme II 2012 – 2015* that supported the Ho Chi Minh City University of Law to expand and deepen its human rights research environment, teach and integrate human rights education as well as support Vietnamese Human Rights Centers in achieving academic networks for research, education and training among universities in Vietnam. This program was also successfully implemented by the DIHR.

The design of the human rights education component of the Programme in Myanmar was hence highly informed by lessons learned from Vietnam while at the same time being based on in-depth consultation with the universities' law departments and adaptation to the national context. Sections below describe the programmatic foundations of the Programme; how it learned and, based on previous interventions, how it differentiated the Programme by insisting on nationally driven interventions.

### **Human Rights Education in Myanmar**

While human rights education remains in a nascent state in Myanmar, various interventions have been made to implement and strengthen initiatives of the Myanmar law departments. This section provides a brief introduction to other development partners, including academic institutions that are working or have worked closely in support of the law departments in Myanmar and with which the Programme has also synergized interventions and support.

#### **Columbia University – Institute for the Study of Human Rights (ISHR)**

Since 2014, the Institute for the Study of Human Rights (ISHR), Columbia University with the support of Open Society Foundation (OSF) and OSF-Myanmar has worked under the “University Human Rights Education in Myanmar Project” that focuses on enhancing capacities to teach and promote human rights. The overall goal of the project is to strengthen the capacities of professors and lecturers to promote and engage in human rights education.

The first two phases of the ISHR project focused on providing introduction to international human rights law, curriculum development and teaching skills. Activities included workshops, online training, launch of and hosting of Myanmar lecturers as visiting scholars to the ISHR in the United States. This support involved twenty-five core faculty staff from Yangon and Mandalay Universities' law departments but had further outreach to two hundred twenty-five lecturers and students.<sup>3</sup> In December 2017, the ISHR collaborated with the Denmark – Myanmar Programme on Rule of Law and Human Rights to organize a Human Rights Education Seminar which included peer training on specific human rights issues, pedagogical skills including curriculum development and facilitation. This seminar also provided a platform for the academic institutions to discuss common challenges in, and best practices for, teaching human rights. A key outcome of this seminar was the establishment of the Myanmar University Human Rights Education Network which is still active through Facebook to some extent.<sup>4</sup> In March 2018, the ISHR also launched a compilation of "Human Rights Learning Activities" that was aimed at supporting human rights law lecturers teaching of international human rights law to 3<sup>rd</sup> year LLB students. Some of these were designed specifically for Myanmar's country context and assessing implementation of human rights law.<sup>5</sup>

In 2019, ISHR evolved to the third phase of the project which specifically focuses on minority rights and explores issues such as sexual orientation and gender identity rights, racial discrimination, hate speech, statelessness and citizenship, genocide and ethnic cleansing. A key aim is to enhance knowledge, values and skills that will promote increased respect for minority rights in Myanmar. Thirty professors and lecturers participate in this project, and students take part in selected aspects of the workshops and seminars. The project was projected to conclude in April 2020 but it is not known to the authors if final activities were postponed due to the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>6</sup>

### **Raoul Wallenberg Institute (RWI)**

Raoul Wallenberg Institute (RWI) started cooperation with Myanmar universities' Law Departments in 2014 focusing on human rights research and education.<sup>7</sup> The aim of the cooperation was to develop substantive human rights knowledge, research skills and regional peer networks through: a series of workshops for lecturers from all university law faculties; research



support through year-long mentorships; provision of human rights literature materials to law libraries; as well as engagement with human rights centers in the Southeast Asian region.<sup>8</sup> RWI has been using three approaches for the development of research capacity of law lecturers. The first approach is providing highly qualified and skilled law lecturers with three-month fellowships at Lund University where RWI headquarters is located.<sup>9</sup> The second approach is through support to individual applied research projects where a limited number of law lecturers together with other ASEAN regional scholars receive research methodology training and receive mentoring by RWI senior researchers for their research projects. The third approach focuses on “learning by doing” with a focus on applied research. These research projects have focused on “Civil Documentation” and been led by senior researchers from RWI with Myanmar law lecturers and students participating in data collection and analysis.<sup>10</sup>

To enhance human rights knowledge, the RWI focused thematically on business and human rights issues. Trainings were conducted as regional trainings which meant that less than five participants were invited to attend the training. Altogether forty-eight law professors and lecturers across the country attended Human Rights and Economic Globalisations carried out in Mandalay University law department.

### **Strengthening Human Rights and Peace Research and Education in Asean/Southeast Asia (SHAPE-SEA) Programme**

The SHAPE-SEA Program<sup>11</sup> organized the first workshop on Teaching Human Rights Law at the University in Yangon on 25 – 27 July 2016 jointly with Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC). The three-day workshop accepted thirty participants, including professors and lecturers of law from eighteen universities<sup>12</sup> in Myanmar. It was the largest number of Myanmar participants accepted by the SHAPE-SEA Program. The contents of the workshop covered a number of introductory human rights topics as many law lecturers attending were not specialized in human rights law.<sup>13</sup> Apart from this, every year SHAPE-SEA accepts a few law lecturers demonstrating interest in teaching human rights to attend the annual “Five-day Lecturer Workshop on Teaching Human Rights.” SHAPE-SEA has completed altogether three workshops and accepted around twenty potential human rights lecturers from Myanmar. The contents of the trainings are almost identical. The IHRP-SHAPE-SEA is a regional academic institution

which based on its vast experience recognizes the importance of learning about human rights by having access to human rights literature in mother tongue or a language that learners have good proficiency in. Hence, the Programme has translated “An Introduction to Human Rights in Southeast Asia: A Textbook for Undergraduates” to Myanmar language.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Denmark – Myanmar Programme on Rule of Law and Human Rights**

The human rights education component of the Programme is founded on human rights-based approach to development principles and is guided by the development outcome agreed for the whole program cycle. Each year, the Programme consults and engages the head of the law departments and professors on their key priorities which supports the identification of key outputs to be achieved and at the same time ensures and reinforces ownership.

The human rights education component consists of:

- Human rights education – focusing on enhancing knowledge of human rights and human rights education teaching methodologies capacity focusing on values, skills and attitudes;
- Joint research initiatives that seeks to expand and deepen knowledge of human rights as well as cultivate a vibrant research environment;
- Enhancing access to human rights knowledge through the establishment of Human Rights Resource Centers;
- Enhancing access to justice through establishment of university Legal Information Centers (LIC).

The Programme has since inception partnered with Dagon University, East Yangon University and since 2019, also Mandalay University.

### **Human Rights Education Knowledge and Capacity Development**

The lecturers from the partner universities have been furnished with the needed knowledge on human rights since early 2017 by using different approaches through year-round support activities. This has included introduction to key human rights principles and standards trainings in Myanmar language and different thematic workshops in English introducing the core human rights conventions and optional protocols to enhance understanding

of these specialized instruments and enabling lecturers to integrate these into teaching and curriculum of students. Selection of thematic priorities is agreed through in-depth consultation with the professors of the partner universities. However, only three to four thematic trainings can be completed together with the yearly introductory human rights trainings. All trainings target strengthening of human rights education teaching methodologies focusing on introduction of activities that are participant-centered, build knowledge of the human rights system, instruments and standards and promote values and attitudes to protect the rule of law and human rights of people.

As human rights are a cross-cutting issue related to other law subjects such as constitutional law, land and labor law, the Programme continuously supports and opens spaces for law faculty members to participate in thematic trainings so that other faculty members other than human rights lecturers can integrate human rights knowledge into their teaching of other law subjects. Acquiring in-depth knowledge of human rights law and its implementation in practice is also encouraged through participating in the research activities which are discussed in the next section.

Since 2019, the Programme has actively supported the Board of Legal Studies and law departments in the setting-up of a Technical Working Group (TWG) to strengthen the human rights law curriculum and syllabuses<sup>15</sup> and develop related teaching materials. Most TWG members have benefited from prior human rights education and lecturer trainings provided by the aforementioned programs.<sup>16</sup> These trainings have proven indispensable for the TWG members and enhanced their abilities to develop their own human rights law curriculum and syllabuses, as well as teaching materials.

## **Human Rights Research**

Research culture has not been cultivated, developed or supported among legal scholars in Myanmar for many decades. Not having multi-disciplinary approach or integrating social science approach in their legal research in earlier decades, some research approaches and techniques are alien to them. A lack of systematic peer-reviewed process on subjects for journal publications cannot ensure the quality of critical analysis skills of the legal research papers. There are strong criticisms on the quality of legal research and education. Moreover, research on human rights was very limited in universities

in Myanmar except for a few focusing on child and women protection which were allowed by the government because these did not apply the “rights” language. Doing research on human rights issues in Myanmar 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.

Against this backdrop, research activities were strategically chosen to strengthen the research skills of legal researchers of partner universities. Initially, the Programme envisaged undertaking joint research projects by international and national researchers but recognizing the need to first support further strengthening of research skills, the activity was slightly adapted. Law lecturers interested in human rights research received training on socio-legal research methodology, year-round mentoring on the human rights research projects done by legal researchers, technical and financial support to the collection of required data in the fields and support for the dissemination of their research results in and outside of Myanmar. The training mainly emphasized the qualitative approaches, research ethics, sampling designs, interview techniques, interpretation and analysis of documents and field data. From 2017–2019, the Programme completed five-day trainings each year.

From 2017–2019, there are altogether thirty-four researchers working on thirty projects under supervision by different international senior researchers. Seven projects are already finalized and published in local academic journals. As working papers, twelve researchers presented their research either at international or national conferences in 2018 and 2019. The scheduled mentoring, reviewing and providing feedbacks were mostly done by the international researchers together with the Programme’s research team. In early 2020, the Programme returned to its initial objective of facilitating joint research allowing for direct interaction and collaboration between international and national researchers that ensures further opportunities to strengthen human rights research in Myanmar and fosters a strong and vibrant research culture (or environment). The applied human rights research projects will be completed by December 2020.

As mentioned earlier, a key aim was to foster a peer review culture among the legal scholars to enhance the quality of their research and skills. Therefore, the human rights research working papers reading forum was organized by the Programme in 2019 with four objectives: to improve pre-



sentation skills through presentation of working papers; to improve self-editing skills; to develop the culture of peer-review process; and to increase networking with other human rights academic researchers, including those working for non-governmental organizations in Myanmar.



## **Human Rights Resource Centers (HRRC)**

Capacity-building through training and research will not be efficient unless there are enough accessible resources. Being a new subject in Myanmar, the



availability of either original or translated human rights books in the local market is still limited. Moreover, paid online resources receive limited support from the Ministry of Education. To bridge the gap, human rights resource centers were established at the central libraries of two partner universities. By setting up the human rights resource center (HRRRC) at the central libraries, the Programme ensured that the resources would not only be available to law lecturers and students but also to students, lecturers and researchers from other disciplines also interested in acquiring human rights knowledge.

The Programme has facilitated translation of selected human rights textbooks: *International Human Rights Law* by Rhona K.M. Smith in 2019, *Human Rights-Politics and Practice* edited by Michael Goodhart in 2020 and the *Human Rights Education Toolbox* by DIHR in 2020, and nine core human rights conventions and its optional protocols to minimize the lan-

guage barrier which many people encounter due to the English proficiency level among students and lecturers. Further, the translation project ensures that more resources are available as there is a real scarcity of human rights textbooks in Myanmar language. The Programme makes sure the wider accessibility of the translated books and conventions by publishing hard copies and delivering these to all the law departments across the country as well as ensuring that the HRRCs can launch e-book versions as well.<sup>17</sup> Further, in 2019, the Programme launched the mobile application titled “A Khwint A Yay” (Your Rights) ensuring that the translated human rights conventions and optional protocols would be available to the wider public. Finally, with the permission of the IHRP-SHAPE-SEA, the Programme printed copies of the Myanmar translated textbook which was made available to all law departments.<sup>18</sup>

Both English and Myanmar translated books are provided to the HRRCs. Librarians serving within the university central libraries has at the same time received introductory courses on human rights to equally obtain better knowledge and understanding of the new resources, and specialized training in managing and searching law, human rights law and human rights e-resources, as well as general library management training enabling them to provide strengthened services to students and lecturers at the universities.

### **Legal Information Centers (LICs)**

The Programme design equally included establishment of Legal Information Centers (LICs) at the partner universities. Previously, there had been very few opportunities for law students to apply their legal theory knowledge obtained from classes in practice. The composition of the current law curriculum does not effectively incorporate clinical legal education; however initiatives are facilitated in a more *ad hoc* manner by law departments, including through arrangement of moot court competitions and community legal awareness, and through support from non-governmental organizations such as BABSEACLE.<sup>19</sup> Further, not many law students in Myanmar have opportunities to have relevant student jobs or serve as interns during their studies as is common in other countries. This has many reasons, but during military rule the universities and especially legal education were isolated. Since 2015, the context seems to be changing and some law students



now have opportunities to serve as interns with law firms and organizations working to enhance the rule of law and human rights in Myanmar.

The Programme hence targeted to bridge the gap in legal education between theory and practice while at the same time supporting disadvantaged communities facing disputes, e.g., debt, land, labor, domestic violence and trafficking cases, in accessing justice through provision of legal information, support to negotiation and mediation of smaller disputes and referral to legal aid providers of more serious legal disputes and serious human rights violations that fall outside the scope of the LIC.

Through active participation in the LIC, graduates have enhanced skills to become legal professionals, and a better understanding of justice needs and gaps in the implementation of human rights law in present day Myanmar. Further, a key aim is to ensure that the law departments including law lecturers were adequately equipped with knowledge and skills to manage and run the LICs themselves.

Through training, coaching and mentoring of lecturers and students, LIC members are now working on negotiation, mediation, advocacy and how to effectively communicate legal information as well as address human rights issues arising in communities. Seventeen lecturers and ninety-seven students at Dagon and East Yangon Universities are effectively managing the two respective LICs. Effective case handling and referral are ensured through consultation with clients at the LIC but also through Facebook and Messenger which have become increasingly relevant during the COVID-19 crisis as legal information and assistance in cases have been provided online. Both LICs have set-up Facebook pages to effectively share and communicate services available as well as provide updates on activities.<sup>20</sup> The LICs have well-established contacts with community decision-making structures such as General Administration Departments (GAD), Ward Administrators and 10/100 household heads,<sup>21</sup> pro-bono legal aid providers as well as social welfare and organizations providing psycho-social services.

In August 2019, the Programme expanded to include Mandalay University Law Department, and at the time of writing the establishment of an LIC is ongoing. Seven law lecturers and twenty-eight students have received initial training and coaching, and the new LIC, the first in upper Myanmar is expected to open in August 2020 ensuring the provision of legal information services to disadvantaged communities in Mandalay and providing opportunities for students and lecturers to further gain necessary

skills that will support them in becoming legal professionals that promote access to justice, rule of law and human rights in Myanmar. In the case of Mandalay, law students had heard about and followed the activities of the LICs at East Yangon and Dagon Universities and effectively lobbied their professors to support the opening of an LIC at Mandalay University.

### **Progress, Issues and Challenges**

Throughout the implementation of the Denmark-Myanmar Programme on Rule of Law and Human Rights, the DIHR ensured that the partner Universities were central to the planning process, co-designed interventions and defined how the activities should be implemented. This has been a recipe for ensuring strong ownership, achievement of results and sustainability. While the Programme found this approach had numerous advantages, it also entailed programmatic challenges.

Such dynamic programming requires increased flexibility by all stakeholders as the fluidity demands all actors to adjust to moving parts in other components to ensure strategic alignment and maintaining/strengthening synergies. Such flexibility - by beneficiaries, partners, program staff and not least donors - requires close coordination and a high degree of trust, which needs to be built through close coordination, transparency and experience. It also adds additional work to program staff, as they need to manage these processes of communication, coordination and adjustment of agreements.

Due to the active engagement of the partner universities, the 2019 mid-term evaluation of the Denmark-Myanmar Programme on Rule of Law and Human Rights found that the university partners had almost already achieved the agreed outputs. Hence, an upscaling of the human rights education component was approved allowing the expansion to include Mandalay University Law Department as a new partner, as well as work closely in support of the Board of Legal Studies in undertaking a country-wide human rights education needs study that further led to setting-up of the TWG to review the compulsory 3<sup>rd</sup> year LL.B Human Rights Law curriculum, enhance existing lesson plans and teaching material. These program activities are presently ongoing.

Structural issues beyond the control of the Programme such as heavy teaching schedules with manual checking and marking of thousands of examination papers, lecturers led students' activities and disproportionate

students-lecturers ratio with limited classrooms directly challenge the implementation of the program activities particularly with respect to strengthening human rights research and teaching capacities. Furthermore, since 2019 almost all universities must accept distance education students. This leaves members of the faculty with double workload in teaching, preparing examination questions and marking the answer sheets manually. Due to workloads, faculty members are struggling with time for professional development, including specialized research. Universities still do not have autonomy as these still fall within the authorities of the Ministry of Education, and hence those barriers are challenges both for partners but also for the Programme to ensure sustainability of interventions.

Myanmar is not yet offering specialized human rights courses beyond the 3<sup>rd</sup> year Human Rights Law LL.B course based on the lack of availability of expertise to teach specialized areas of human rights law. However, this is gradually changing as law lecturers are acquiring specialized knowledge through applied human rights research as supported by the Programme and other organizations as described earlier.

Further, the available resources for professors to strategically plan the academic year and semesters are also challenged by the yearly transfers of professors and lecturers just before the 1<sup>st</sup> semester starts in January each year. The law departments can be faced with not having expertise in certain law subjects, but currently, the system does not allow the omission of human rights or other law subjects if there are no well-trained lecturers in the law department to teach the subject. At the same time, the system does not provide many chances for lecturers to become experts in a specific field as they are tasked with teaching three to four different subjects each semester. There is a high risk of lecturers being assigned to teach unfamiliar subjects when they move between the twenty-one law departments.

## Conclusion

The Denmark-Myanmar Programme on Rule of Law and Human Rights builds on the achievements and synergies with other programs, and complements these with strong partnerships using the human rights-based approach. The partner-led development approach has sometimes resulted in delivery of less state of the art products, but these products are designed and developed by and for university professors and lecturers. Thus, while it may

reduce the “technical” level of delivery and increase the programmatic complexity, it also significantly increases long-term sustainability and impact through outputs that the universities can claim as their own and strengthen further in the future.

## Endnotes

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2. In Myanmar, the DIHR Technical Team (consisting of six international and national advisers) receives advisory support from DIHR Headquarters Experts.

3. For further information see Institute for the Study of Human Rights (ISHR), Columbia University, <http://humanrightscolumbia.org/education/myanmar/introduction-international-law-and-human-rights>.

4. Visit Myanmar University Human Rights Education Network (MUHREN), <https://web.facebook.com/groups/930031163832040/>, accessed on 23 June 2020.

5. An example is an exercise on *International Bill of Rights (UDHR/ICCPR/ICESCR) and Your Constitution*, page 10 of the material.

6. For further information, see ISHR, <http://humanrightscolumbia.org/education/myanmar/minority-rights>, accessed on 23 June 2020.

7. For further information, see Raoul Wallenberg Institute (RWI), <https://rwi.lu.se/where-we-work/regions/asia/myanmar/>, accessed on 4 April 2020.

8. For further information see RWI, <https://rwi.lu.se/where-we-work/regions/asia/myanmar/>, accessed on 4 April 2020.

9. For further information, see RWI, <https://rwi.lu.se/2015/09/the-research-is-the-soul-of-the-university/>, accessed on 4 April 2020.

10. For further information, see RWI, <https://rwi.lu.se/2018/08/statelessness-workshop-held-myanmar/>, accessed: 4 April 2020.

11. The name of the program is Strengthening Human Rights and Peace Research and Education in ASEAN/ Southeast Asia launched in February 2015. It is a collaboration between two academic networks based in Southeast Asia: Asian University Network on Human Rights Education (AUN-HRE) and SEAHRN.

12. The Ministry of Education opened three more law departments in 2019. Thus, currently there are twenty-one law departments across Myanmar.

13. The topics provided in the workshop were (1) Status of Human Rights in Myanmar Focused on Human Rights in the Domestic System, Constitution and Courts, (2) Key Concepts of Human Rights, (3) ICCPR, (4) ICESCR, (5) Teaching of

ESCR, (6) People with Disability, (7) CEDAW, (8) CRC, and (9) Protection of Human Rights.

14. Visit SHAPESEA, <http://shapesea.com/publication/introduction-human-rights-southeast-asia-textbook-undergraduates-volume-1-2-burmese-translation/>

15. Law 3107, Human Rights Law.

16. DIHR, IHRP, ISHR and RWI respectively.

17. Further information available at Library News, East Yangon University, [https://eyu.edu.mm/library/library\\_news](https://eyu.edu.mm/library/library_news), accessed 15 June 2020.

18. SHAPE-SEA published *An Introduction to Human Rights in Southeast Asia: A Textbook for Undergraduates*, Volumes 1 and 2- Burmese Translation” in 2018.

19. BABSEACLE is working to establish university and community-based legal education programs in Myanmar, including through the introduction of Clinical Legal Education (CLE). For further information, see BABSEACLE, [www.babseacle.org/justice-initiatives/myanmar/](http://www.babseacle.org/justice-initiatives/myanmar/), accessed on 15 May 2020.

20. For further information: visit the Legal Information Centers of Dagon University and East Yangon University, <https://web.facebook.com/DULegalInformationsCenter/> and <https://web.facebook.com/EYULIC/>.

21. The 10/100 household heads are integral to the local governance system in Myanmar. It falls under the General Administration Department (GAD). The 10 household heads are elected by 100 households, hence the name 10/100. The 10/100 household heads elect the ward and village-tract administrator whose elections receive final approval by GAD. Please refer to The Ward and Village Tract Administration Law, 2012, section IV.

# Human Rights and Theater Communication in Post-war Sri Lanka

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**T**HE SRI LANKAN MINORITY TAMILS are living in an environment where their right to freedom of expression is denied. This situation was at its worst during the 2005–2015 war period. Although there was a little improvement in the situation after regime change due to the presidential election held on the 8 January 2015, the structures, practices, and attitudes left behind by the former government continued. In 2019, the political party of the former government came back to power only with majority Sinhala voters. The opportunities for free exchange of ideas remained limited. The state stringency that prevailed for more than a decade made the traditional exchange and expression of ideas normally found among the people extinct. In particular, all opportunities for gathering at the village esplanade, temples, playgrounds, and cultural events were hindered by state stringency.

Places where people congregate were subjected to surveillance. Voices critical of the state were monitored by state agents. Hence, congregating and exchanging ideas have become filled with fear. People avoid gathering together because of this situation, where everyone was suspicious of the other. In addition, people who criticized the government were threatened with violence to create an overt fear psychosis. Some people suffered this violence, such as when waste oil was thrown on houses. Fear of death began to dwell in each person as unidentified persons “move around.”

Even today, freedom of expression in Sri Lanka requires a more conducive atmosphere. The fear of monitoring by state intelligence officers or unidentified persons persists. As a result, every individual learned to live with some sort of self-censorship. This situation caused a sort of stagnation, including the environment for artistic creation.

Artistic creation needs a free environment. Because art and culture speak of social problems, people want them. An artist is expected to stir upon seeing the degraded state of the others. But several artists today have

lost their real faces. They have to learn to live by turning a “Nelsonian eye” on injustices. This is dangerous. It is something that is affecting the civilized dynamics of society. Being silent after witnessing an injustice cannot be a situation conducive to a democratic environment.

### **Active Theater Movement: Literature Review**

The main aim of theater is to tell stories of people. Since 2002, Active Theater Movement brought out stories through theater activities. “Personal narrative performance gives shape to social relations, but because such relations are multiple, polysemic [capable of having different meanings], complexly interconnected, and contradictory, it can do so only in unstable and destabilizing ways for narrator and audience ... a story of the body told through the body which makes cultural conflict concrete.” (Langellier, 1999) During the last thirty years, Northern Sri Lankan Tamil theater had presented themes based on the stories of people. When conflict and oppression seem overwhelming, drama can offer a sliver of hope, in a playful way, a pathway of incremental steps. Theater bridges the actual with the possible, letting people imagine how tensions and circumstances could be transformed.

Theater of the Oppressed is used worldwide in streets, fields, schools, churches, prisons, and wherever people gather. It was invented by Augusto Boal in the 1960s during the reign of Brazilian military dictators, who imprisoned him in 1971 and exiled him to Argentina and later to France. In Europe, Boal developed “Rainbow of Desire” to address internalized oppression, the “cops in the head” that plagued Europe’s populace, in spite of the absence of a police state. (Boal and Epstein 1990)

Boal defines oppression as a power dynamic based on monologue rather than dialogue. (Blatner 2007: 220) Through the process of participatory democracy, people reclaim their role as active, transformative agents in the world. (Freire 1970)

To prepare for this proactive physicalization of change, actors use techniques designed to liberate the body from mechanized reactions and gestures. Thus, Boal uses theatrical imagery to dialogue on issues that are both societal and psychological, expressing truths through dramatic representation rather than literal realism. According to Thompson, “Beauty’s power to disturb is crucial and has important, rarely acknowledged, political power.” (2009: 140)

Drama communication is an experiential and dynamic approach to therapy that allows participants to have an environment in which they can go over their life stories, find understanding, express themselves, and ideally attain catharsis. Underlying drama therapy is a belief that dramatic processes can help people who might need assistance with a range of mental health, cognitive and developmental disorders as well as people who are simply going through times of stress, emotional disturbance or disability (Langley, 2006). Further Langley (2006) points out that not all clients who seek drama therapy have a specific disorder or disturbance. In fact, many people simply are looking for a better understanding of themselves, their life, and their personal problems. In fact, it is a normal inclination for a person to want to assess their feelings or issues at some point in their life. Drama, due to its “metaphoric foundation,” offers a perfect creative medium for this exploration to take place (Langley, 2006). Release of deep feelings originally has a connotation of purification of the senses and the soul. The method by which the emotions of pity and terror are evoked is “mimesis”—a combination of vicarious participation and suspending of disbelief. (Jones, 2007)

Traditional theater uses mainly a fictional, presentational approach. Some drama therapy approaches involve clients putting on a play designed to express common themes in their lives; the process of preparing the performance is itself therapeutic. Langley (2006) says that healing can mean a relief or cure, a change of perspective or behavior, adaptation to disability, coming to terms with reality, or simply personal growth.

Active Theater Movement dramas are not limited to a single stage style. There can be various drama forms. When the story is performed as a performance invariably it will be in narrative form. Thus dramas are produced in a variety of drama styles. A drama performed on stage that identifies the self and social problems makes the society vigilant. The intentionality is truly what separates drama therapy from other forms of drama or theater. For instance, while theater and drama are able to be accidentally therapeutic because they increase consciousness to feelings, attitudes and issues, drama therapy purposefully uses drama and theater techniques to adjust or rework attitudes and behaviors as well as to assist in confronting and enlightening many life challenges. (Langley, 2006) While theater often is focused on a certain standard of final performance, drama therapy is much more process-oriented and so the experience of going through drama therapy is



emphasized, as that is where the therapeutic elements are most prevalent. (Langley, 2006; Bailey, 2007)

Dramas for performances can be produced based on the stories of the performers themselves. In one way, majority of the solo performances were very tragic and sentimental in expression. They reveal the problems as similar to those happening to so many people. Theater participants are able to develop a range of dramatic roles which in turn help strengthen their own life roles. Langley (2006) explains:

Clients can consider their lives, relationships and the issues around them by finding a metaphor, exploring it and then connecting their experience to reality. It also encourages a state of personal awareness which, although not necessarily healing in the strict sense of cure, is a means of working towards establishing peace of mind and/or improved functioning.

Many of the Active Theater Movement's psycho-social dramas work in solving gender issues in Tamil society. Sensitive topics such as rape, pregnancy, domestic violence, marriage, and other gender issues can be performed more intimately and without distractions through this drama. The actors do not impose their ideas and visions, but allow the audience to interpret what is relevant for themselves and what is not. Women in this way are not judged on their behavior or way of thinking. It is a way to slowly improve mentalities without imposing a way of thinking. (Barbara, 2005)

Transmitting ideas through performance is found to be a difficult task. Proposed ideas should be based on good research. They should be given in a way not conflicting with the audience. They should also suggest proper solutions as well as further comments. They should facilitate release of deep feelings that originally had a connotation of purification of the senses and the soul.

Active Theater Movement's dramas focus on matters that are forgotten from the conversation, things that people hesitate to talk about particularly matters connected with war. They dare to speak of things which are unspoken of. This is a consequence of the drama training. It is common for drama therapists, in order to fully understand the process and truly understand their own personal issues, to go through drama therapy themselves. The essence of the drama therapy approach is that the intentional use of any form of drama and/or theater can be used as a channel for change, be it for a per-

son to work through a life crisis or to facilitate a personal growth (Langley, 2006). Theater which has been described by many as a representation of life, a slice of life or imitation of life before an audience has been in existence right from the creation of man. (Wilson, Brettle and Rice, 1994)

### **Active Theater Movement in Sri Lanka**

Tamil-speaking artists in Sri Lanka are in an oppressive environment. Active Theater Movement wants to triumph over this sort of environment and create a situation conducive to freedom of expression. The members believe that reviving the art forms traditionally found among Tamils is one way of exercising freedom of expression. Considering the revival and preservation of the art of drama as important, they commenced the revival and preservation work.

The performing art of drama has an extra-ordinary capacity of attracting people. It can be said that when an artist makes flesh and blood expression of his sentiments through his body language, the lively situation created by it cannot be equaled by any media. As a result, the exchange of ideas easily occurs through it. Literary creators can cross borders and develop whatever stories, articles or poetry desired. These creations can also be shared through today's modern media. But, in the present context of Sri Lanka, exchanging ideas through the medium of drama is not an easy task. Numerous barriers have to be confronted by people who get together to conceive and deliver the creation. There is a high probability that the creation will stagnate. Thus the revival and preservation of the art of drama, which is traditionally integrated into the lifestyle of people, and the best medium to express ideas, is a Himalayan task. A lot of difficulties are encountered in finding the financial support for this. Even if the drama is produced surpassing all these barriers, there are further difficulties to address in finding a suitable place to stage the drama and, worse still, obtaining the required permission to stage the drama.

When the war was raging, dramas were produced in great number in the war zone. Sri Lankan Tamil-drama artists produced dramas on their own. Some did it on a full-time basis. It became their profession. At that time, the strong communication device of drama was utilized by the liberation Tigers for policy dissemination and recruitment of members for its fighting units. They were very successful in it. Meantime, there was a space

for theater activities in the war zone that was why dramas were produced and performed by several theater organizations.

Because of the crises created by the militarized environment that formed after the war ended, the art of drama lapsed into lethargy. The drama related participants scattered and had to seek other occupations for their livelihood. As a consequence, trained dramatists got scattered without an organization to coordinate them. As there was no possibility of integrating into a group, the specially trained drama-related personnel were deprived of their opportunities. The drama sector also lost its chance of moving towards a professional state. As for now, it seemed that a possible way is to revive it in an amateur state. Through this, it could move towards professionalism while theater could exist with vigor.

### **Research Methodology**

This research employed auto-ethnography research method and take advantage of the author's direct observation as creator, performer and trainer. Information was also obtained from participants of the drama training and the drama spectators "Auto-ethnography opens up new ways of writing about social life" and can be defined as a "self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts." (Reed-Danahay, 1997)

Theater communicating human rights issues in post-war Sri Lanka is analyzed by employing the auto-ethnography research method. Theater training process, war stories, storytelling and performances are taken into account in this research. Active Theater Movement dramas speak about post-war problem of war-affected families. They show cases of current northern Sri Lankan problems.

The dynamic and dialectical relation of the text and body emerges as a major theme in auto-ethnographic praxes. In the fieldwork, writing, and performing of auto-ethnography, text and body are redefined, their boundaries blurring dialectically. (Conquergood, 1991) Performed dramas are based on real stories from war-affected families, suffering from systematic violence. "Experience, discourse, and self-understanding, collide against larger cultural assumptions concerning race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, class, and age." (Trihn Mihn-ha, 1991)

In auto-ethnographic methods, the researcher is the epistemological and ontological nexus upon which the research process turns. The desire of

the art is that all artistic productions must help to think about social problems, and come to constructive decisions on them that should lead to action.

Drama is vested with the responsibility of capturing the metamorphic periods of change within the society for future reference and guidance in the society. How the playwright goes about documenting such issues determines how serious the people within the society would view his work. (Eagleton, 2012) The “artistic work of a playwright is a reflection of the society from which he/she emerges from.” (Wa Thiong’o, 1981) Auto-ethnographers argue that self-reflexive critique upon one’s positionality as researcher inspires readers to reflect critically upon their own life experience, their constructions of self, and their interactions with others within socio-historical contexts. (Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Goodall, 1998)

## **Discussion**

People living in an environment where the freedom of expression is denied get used to it. This is particularly true in Sri Lanka when the Prevention of Terrorism Act of 1978 started to be in force.<sup>1</sup> The limitations prevailing at that time became part of the people’s routine nature who got used to an environment where they tend to think that that was their real life. Particularly because of the Army stringency in Northern Sri Lanka, the people lost their courage to express their ideas, and living under fear, living in submission, waiting, pleading, and begging for their requirements and being submissive occurred. They forgot their rights, self-imposed control over themselves and got used to living in that way.

They did not attempt or did not want to learn what their freedom is or they were pushed into a survival-based attitude of “why should we worry about other things...let us worry only about our affairs.”

The people who live in crisis get into some sort of inability and live in an escapist attitude. The artists could contribute in breaking this and eliminating it. The work for this was started by the Active Theater Movement in Sri Lanka after a long interval and around five years (2008 -2013) of silence. A project was initiated in 2013 to select one hundred youths from five villages to give them theater training and to bring their stories out. The task of transforming the youth to become socially aware through theater was undertaken through this project. They were given a chance to express their feelings, ideas, and criticisms through theater.

The youth brought out through theater activities stories of suffering of people. The stories include displacement and living without a house continuously for twenty years; resettling after two decades in their own lands, but without their kins and relatives; suffering and being unable to live on their own land; losing belongings and lives due to war; suffering poverty; land going barren; and resourceful people being removed deliberately from the community. These stories make the future a question mark, with politicians utilizing militarization as means to hoodwink the people or rob them or cause injustice to them – all in the name of the people. The youth labored to bring these stories out through ten dramas.

### **Preparation of Theater Activists**

The training of people in drama is not only skill-oriented. It involves building capacity to express thoughts and feelings. The task of preparing a hundred youth from selected villages as theater artists with social consciousness and skill took the form of a three-hundred-hour training program over thirty-six days

The training program had diverse and multidisciplinary components and covered four basic areas:

1. Building up social consciousness;
2. Imparting knowledge of human rights;
3. Developing individual personality;
4. Training on drama production.

### **Building social consciousness**

Most of the youth who took part in the training were not conscious of what was happening in the country. They were biased thinkers, and did not know their position regarding social problems and where to place themselves in relation to them. They were in a confused state as to their social responsibilities. Most of them have mob mentality.

The training encouraged them to discuss social matters to widen their social view. Different views on issues were provided and debates were held. Newspaper items were analyzed and attempts were made to find out their own view on them. Case studies were presented and debated. True stories of people who had lived through the final stages of the war were shared and lessons learned from them were debated. Poetry concerning society was

read and understood. Social dramas were read and reviewed. Sentimental dialogues between group members were encouraged.

One important discussion was on the case of gang-rape-murder of a schoolgirl in Pungudu theevu, Jaffna. While the violence involved in that case was discussed, the social protest or frenzy that arose, and how this protest was diverted later and fizzled out were discussed.

In the same way, the long drawn out problem among Tamils, the displacement, the woes of the people affected by it, and the possibilities of accountability were discussed. Ways and means of unloading the mental burden of the affected were also discussed. Drama practices were seen as a platform for motivating people with such experiences.

When exercises were done to relax the mind, the participants cried out their stories. They expressed sorrow for the kins lost in the war. They came out with all sorts of problems like poverty caused by the war, losing lands, loss of education, etc. Some described how their family disintegrated by the addiction of their fathers to drugs.

Relaxation of mind and unloading the mental burdens and through it subsiding the mental stress are made possible during theater training. This helped them to become aware of social problems. When practices were undertaken to concentrate and focus, many said that they were unable to focus their mind. They said that stories of their past and events were embedded in their minds and were hindering their concentration on the activities. Discussion started at this point on several matters including their tribulations that caused the social situation, how to eliminate the issues in the future, how to use the art of drama in this regard.

T. Kajalaksan, who took part in the training made this remark:

Before the Drama Training, if there was a problem in society or at home, we would not take any action over it. But after the practices, a question arose inside me as to why I did not interfere in this problem.

This young man who had just completed his school education confirmed that the training had imparted social responsibility in him. Similarly, several other participants realized their role in society during the training.

S. Kalaraj, a journalism student at the university, expressed his opinion:

When one takes part in a Drama Training several thoughts will occur to him. During the Training, we were able to think of

many things, like the problems found in the society, the solutions to them and the trend of action of the people.

During the drama training, one's thoughts are stimulated. One does not just listen to some advice. At every moment during the training, the participants are active and try and learn several things.

The following are important announcements in the training:

- Participants can do anything they like;
- There is no wrong or right action;
- You should act as if all that you are doing are correct.

When participants are encouraged to act freely, they find out something about themselves and the environment related to them. They learn about innovative things, like a spark. Several new things reach them, and they have the chance to get new imagery. They get the chance to impose things that happened to them on something else. They make metaphorical description of what they have seen and heard. This becomes the foundation for the drama production.

### **Providing basic knowledge on human rights**

The desire of the Active Theater Movement is that all artistic productions must help people think about social problems, come to constructive decisions on the problems and lead them to action. For this, artistic production should be made in a way that can present logical arguments. The production should have a proper mix of feelings and knowledge. Situations causing people's thinking on causality of things and logical argument should be increased. For this, it is essential that knowledge of law, order, and rights be imparted.

Because of the necessity of educating the participants in matters related to law and order, human rights, women's rights, and child rights, the assistance of experts in different sectors and people who have knowledge in them was obtained (especially in relation gender-related matters, strengths and weaknesses of women, the discretion that should be present in social dynamics, among others). The training provided participants with this knowledge.

The relationship between fiction and realism is being discerned by artists through this. At the same time, the ways and means of going from making art to taking action, along with the possible action dynamics, are

thought of. In particular, there are opportunities for thinking about “stage reality” and “real-life reality.”

The training provided opportunities for identifying social problems. A woman participant in the training learned about the sort of authority that a husband could exercise on his wife and its limits. This part of the training helped the participants to understand “stage reality” and “real-life reality.”

A. Jana, a teacher who underwent the training, observed:

As a person who does not get engaged in anything alone, I was unable to express things conceived in my mind at several places. The freedom of expression experienced during drama pieces of the training, group activities and games took me to a stage where I could express my ideas all by myself and I could put into operation several things playing the leading role in doing so.

Her attitude about the abilities of women changed at the end of the training and she was enlightened on the fact that if the woman was daring enough she could achieve several things.

Likewise, they acquired a critical view of the way children are treated at home as well as in school and understood the new path that they should take. They found out what rights were violated. They also learned “logical knowledge” of what to speak, where to speak, and how to speak appropriately for particular situations. J. Jeyaruban, who took part in the training, opined that, in an environment where humility, pleading for help, subservience, remaining silent, and submission, which were consequences of war, were the norm, awareness about rights would pave the way for clear thinking.

The knowledge of rights determines the limits of the expression of ideas. It also gives discretion. This knowledge changes one’s view of society.

### **Developing individual personality**

As far as drama is concerned, human body and personality are its capital. The basis of the Drama Training is the proper development of this concept. The training aims to develop an actor who will rule the stage with good communication skills. The training was divided into three sections for this purpose:

- Release of mental stress and developing personality;
- Releasing tightness of the body and creating relaxation in the body;



- Training on acting (training of new skills).

1. *Exercises for release of mental stress*

The body could be operated at will only if the mind is relaxed. Training is given for the relaxation of the mind. Since the participants are people affected by war, “displacement” affected them very much. They were found to be people with their hearts hardened by several problems such as poverty, being uprooted from their lands, life without land, separation of families, scattering of kins, loss of life, loss of materials, loss of education, guilty conscience of being unable to safeguard lives and properties, addiction to alcohol resulting in poverty, and breakup of families resulting from the above.

Sugirtha, a teacher by profession who participated in the training, opined:

I was five years old when we got displaced from Myliddy due to military operation. We came and stayed in a camp. Evening school was held for us. We were excluded because we were refugees. My father had no employment. We had no money to buy food. We were displaced seventeen times after that. I can remember putting up huts every time and staying in them. We were displaced to Vanni in 1995. We could not find any place to stay there. We cleared the jungle and stayed there. Father went in search of employment. We lost contact with him. Mother stayed with us (children) alone. We did not have anything to eat. There was a tamarind tree on our way to school. We plucked some young tamarind fruit, pounded them and ate them. Mother did some odd jobs and sustained us. Father was told very often that we should return home. We came to Jaffna from Vanni. We started working. We often asked our father whether we could buy some land and live on it, as we could never return to Myliddy. He always replied that if we wanted a land of our own, that should be in our native place. We should not stay anywhere else. To date, we could not go to our native village. Father had died. We always carry the guilty conscience, about father dying without his wishes fulfilled and we would be unable to do anything about it. I heard about this training and came here to get relieved from this grief in the heart.

There were several participants like Sugirtha. They were given training on theater games, development of the five senses, building up confidence,

reaching a consensus, working as a team, and developing relationship within a group. A. Jena, a young girl who took part in the training after losing one of her eyes in an accident due to alcoholism of her father, expressed the following view:

Coming out from something is a task that is not possible to everybody. But because of several types of activities in this Drama Training we were able to focus our mind, bring something out from within us, transform ourselves into some character and then bring us out of it. Before the training, they all seemed highly impossible tasks. But we were able to do them very easily after undergoing several training activities continuously. I should come out of the problems that would crop up not only on stage but also in our practical life.

Her opinion shows that these drama trainings release the mind and help to decide on the future target. Group activities were encouraged during the training; while some training activities meant to develop their leadership qualities were also given. They gained self-confidence through these activities.

All participants were made to act as groups and provided opportunity to interact with everyone. Every participant was encouraged to come forward to do games, act and sing.

Pavitha, a teacher who participated in the training, explained that the Drama Training helps an individual to reveal in a good way the roles he/ she play in his/her life. She expressed the following observations:

Now, I have transformed into a person who can say anything with courage in front of others. I have changed into a person who can say any matter that formed in my mind without any tension. I have learned in my own life that the Drama Training would induce several changes in the personality of an individual. I also felt the changes that occurred in myself. The truth I learned was that drama training is essential for our life.

Carefree dancing is an important training activity for “releasing the mind.” Participating in this, several people, voyaged into their past. Some cried. Some were found frenzied. Some went into trance. After dancing till they are tired, they told their stories. In their stories, they highlighted the

injustices perpetrated on them. What could be done to this? they asked. Others expressed their opinions about injustices. They consoled one another. They held their hands saying they would be helpful to others. In this way, their minds were relaxed. Thus many of them poured out their feelings hitherto imprisoned in their minds. In the field training, they unwound their minds.

A teacher-participant, P. Nageswary, observed:

As we are participating in the training we caused a change in our personality. Because of this, we could feel that an idea rising inside us on how to control feelings like shyness, fear, and anger. Group integrity, that is, a feeling of unity emerges when each one start commenting like “it will be better if you do like this,” “what you are doing is correct,” “it will be better if you do little more.” Unity and an understanding and honoring the opinions of others occur.

Her opinion reveals that building up confidence as a group is the best platform to unwind the mind.

Mental barriers had been created by the controls that prevail in the society, regarding male-female relationship. Relaxed-state training became necessary to reduce the shyness involved in the interaction between males and females, and to instill a concept that they are all equal and equally abled. Several theater games were used to encourage males and females to engage in activities together. 80 percent of the females danced for the first time. All female participants danced for the first time with males and displayed equal skill. They got the confidence doing these things. They noted later that this gave them courage to speak and act in front of others.

Another participant, Mithursan, expressed his thoughts:

Training transformed me into a man with personality. Earlier, I was afraid to speak in meetings. But I have gained a skill to speak out my opinions in front of any number of people without any fear. I have gained an ability to volunteer first and do things. I am now able to even take clear decisions in some matters and problems. I have much tolerance, stage fright is absent and I have gotten out of fear. The differentiation of males and females had vanished. A thought that all are equal came into the mind. A strong will formed in me.

This opinion confirms the observation that training changes the personality of people. All participants noted the change in their personality and told others about it. J. Kajarubans' opinion is a testimony that this could be achieved through theater training: "The first experience from our activities was that we could take the social problems of the country to the audience through our personalities."

Personality development will be beneficial to society only when it is coupled with social consciousness.

## ***2. Releasing tightness of the body and creating relaxation in the body;***

Following the training for relaxation of the mind, it is important to concentrate on the relaxation of the body. This is the training for body robustness and for the muscles. Similar to a sportsperson who keeps his body robust through training, a drama artist also must keep his body robust and flexible. That is, he should keep his body taut like a rope.

Training is essential to keep the muscles relaxed in order to bend the body at will and to take it to the desired position. Along with this, an actor should find the rhythm within him. He gets the ability to move synchronized with this rhythm, through this training.

This is made possible by physical exercises every day. Energy is supplied by these exercises. The participant can also get body strength. At the same time, he could learn the strengths and weaknesses of his body. Physical exercises are essential to moving the body beautifully on the stage. The eyes of an actor are considered as the main part of communication. The training for the eyes also develops the sharpness of the eyes. The communication through eyes is very important to attract people and make them to continue focusing on the audience.

A lot of energy is needed for an actor to express the role he has taken. With this energy, he could perform without fatigue. And only then could the actor kindle feelings in the audience. Physical exercises help find this inherent energy and preserve it.

As a result of the traditional notions in society, women are not aware of their inherent energy. These notions make them think that they will not be able to do everything that a man can do. To overcome this thinking, women should know their own bodies. Through that, they could understand this inherent energy. Physical exercises help then to understand their anatomy and

enjoy the beauty of their body. Hence, the women place faith in their bodies through theater training. The women who had received the theater training of the Active Theater Movement presented their performances with extraordinary energy. When they do solo performance, their excellent body movements stand out as evidence of this energy.

### 3. *Training on acting (training of new skills).*

Several of those who participated in the training did not have any prior experience in acting. Several participants have shy nature, hesitation, affected by social control, inferiority complex, and fear about their body. Especially, several participants retained the thought that they were not beautiful and doubt how they could act in front of so many people. Removing this inferiority complex from them and putting them on stage in front of many people was a challenging task. We had to make them act without being conscious that they are acting for this.

All of them were active. They were encouraged to participate as much as possible. Through that, they were convinced that they could do things.

A university student was hesitant at the start of the training about what he could do. But later, he came forward voluntarily and acted in several dramas. He said

I got an opportunity to mount the stage as an actor due to the training given to me several times. Through this, I was able to gain a variety of experience with regard to acting and drama. Apart from these, as an ordinary man, I was able to get several experiences needed for human life.

A small target placed before them is to dance to the beat (or *Thalam*). Whoever danced to the beat was asked to discover his body. They were asked to think about the various possibilities of using the body. This chance is not available in society or at home. Chances of attempting them are also refused, only skilled persons are encouraged. Because of this, several youths are living with the notion that they could not do it. Frustration and inferiority complex pushed them into misery.

Eliminating this and bringing a person to the state of acting a character is in fact a very difficult task. But this task was made possible through theatrical training.

J. Kajaruban opined that

The training helped us develop our personalities. It made our personality to grow. Several personalities like, how to put drama in writing, how to produce dramas were gained by us through the training. Several matters such as how to join others to act a drama, how the ideas should be presented to the audience had transformed us into actors with personalities. We have gained several experiences and had learned several personality development methods and these made us think for a moment, it made us people with personalities to a level where we didn't have to think about how to function.

Women had very backward ideas about their bodies and movement. Eliminating these ideas and releasing her body from her thinking and her control was important in this training. There is a notion that spreading the legs, jumping, crawling, distorting the mouth, laughing aloud, screaming are taboo for women. It is a hard task to demolish this notion and make women act.

As far as the man-woman relationship is concerned, a drama group needs new views and changes in thinking beyond the traditional understanding of it. Male and female acting together is important in training on acting. A lot of training had to be done for this. When a woman acts she considers several things. The thought of what will her family think if they happened to see her acting in the drama, while the drama is in progress or even afterward, confuse her. They are confused over whether or not the husband will allow this. During the training, we used metaphor for a scene of a king coming in his chariot. They made an innovative production of women standing over men and entering the stage. The scene came off beautifully. But the women asked us not to include this seen in the performance for the public.

They said the males in their families will not approve it. Contexts occurred where scenes had to be changed considering this social reality.

Breathing exercises and voice training played the roles of resources in the creation of an actor. It is usual to conduct breathing exercises and voice training after one hour of physical exercises. Voice culture is very important in acting.

As far as the Active Theater Movement is concerned, the body of the actor is everything. Hence more attention is paid on preparing the actor's

body for the performances, which need the best use of the whole body of the actor.

Solo Theater is the best procedure for the training for acting. It is the performance of a single person, a story selected by him, using his body as the capital. Here, a single person had to bring several circumstances and several characters onto the stage. This is like interacting with the stage elements after integrating his body and voice.

Those who participated in the training were asked to make a solo performance using their own story or a story they had agreed upon. Through this, they gained the skill of performing in front of several people.

Mithursan, who had just completed school education, observed:

This Drama Training course helped the occurrence of several personality changes in me. This Drama Training course was a guide to me in remaining without mental fatigue and physical fatigue. This was beneficial not only to my acting but also for my life. When I was called up, I for one moment thought whether or not the drama practice was necessary. I also thought why can't we act directly in the drama without this training? When I went through the training I did not realize its worth. But when I went on stage, I realized the fact that I could not have acted up to this level without the drama training. Training means games. Several small games made up the training. The mixture of fruits, finding the leader, identifying places and people using noises, physical exercises, meditation, musical drama, all these were very essential for a drama.

The observation of Mithursan clearly shows that training is essential for acting.

The training provides for the procedures of identifying one's energy, further developing it, and later projecting it towards the audience. An actor could keep the audience under his control with his powerful performance. He can also deliver his message in a lively way.

It is important that an actor engages in different styles of drama. Each style has a unique acting method. The training related to them will mold the actor into a person with a good personality.

In this training course, participants learn several acting methods such as acting for children's theater, traditional *koothu* acting, traditional musical drama acting, miming, realistic acting and stylized acting.

## **Performing Space**

At a time when presenting people's problems in public was next to impossible, the Active Theater Movement endeavored to perform dramas in a public space which spoke of the long-term problems of the people and the feeling they have buried deep inside their minds. The youth got the courage to do so through the Active Theater Movement. During those days, if the dramas were staged inside halls the audience would not attend the performance. Hence the youths decided to stage their dramas in places where people used to congregate. It was decided to construct the stage in empty spaces, by the side of the roads, and to perform the dramas on them. It was decided that the staging platforms and performance space should be newly created.

It was also realized that the traditional picture frame stages are not appropriate for this. They decided on a theater presentation method or style suitable for bringing out the subjected feelings and oppressive or refused stories. In this type of theater form, there was some frenzy, some fury was found and a sentimental surge arose. We had to search for a stage form that could permeate the audience. A V-shaped stage incorporating three circles was planned for this. This came to be acknowledged as a new addition to the history of Tamil theater. It was constructed with wood in a public place where people normally congregated. The Drama Festival was held for two nights in the Sangilian Park, which was earlier known as Kiddu Park. The festival was called Open Air Drama Festival.

As the stage was constructed in close proximity to the road, people traveling on the road also came into joining the audience. They later informed their friends and relatives about the festival. The second day's performances were presented with a "house full" of the audience. In the militarized environment of Northern Sri Lanka, several people were found in a state of having lost their night life. The holding of events at night was avoided. Moving around at night was considered dangerous. Hence, the task of redeeming nightlife also arose through this Drama festival.

It would be dangerous for the performers to speak about matters overtly. Because of this, instead of the speaking of ideas overtly, they had to be spoken through symbolism or use things with inherent meanings. The audience was able to understand this symbolism; while the performers were able to bring out things that were deeply hidden among the audience. This





Spectators at Theatre Festival in Chankanai, North Sri Lanka.



Music Crew at Theatre Festival, Nallur, North Sri Lanka.

created an inherent communication between the actors and the audience. It could be said that sentimental exchanges occurred in a wonderful way.

The Drama Festival was held among threats, in a militarized environment. Even when the festival was progressing, people who identified themselves as military intelligence personnel had made inquiries. This was an attempt at creating a covert fear psychosis. However, the Drama Festival was held for two days on the basis of self-discretion.

Several members of the audience in the Drama Festival watched the dramas in awe. The matters spoken in them gave them a surprise. They were wondering how these people were speaking about the problems in an environment where freedom of speech was denied. Even while watching the dramas some of them shouted at the actors on stage “you will definitely get rehabilitation.” Here, it is necessary to clarify what “rehabilitation” means. It means that people who speak against the government will be arrested by the army soldiers and detained for some period of time under the notorious Prevention of Terrorism Act. During the detention period, they are subjected to rehabilitation in way that would make them no longer act against the government. Some people who were released after rehabilitation said that sometimes they had to face torture situations during the rehabilitation period.

People watching the dramas were afraid that some of the youth who were telling their stories on stage might meet the same fate. They expressed the warning about it, in a loud voice.

There was a constant fear prevailing that the Drama Festival could be stopped at any time by the Army or the civil administration under the influence of the Army. The drama group also feared that drama events like this, where people could congregate and express ideas could be banned in the future.

The Drama Festival taught them a hope that the theater could be used as a tool to break up an oppressive environment, where freedom of expression was denied. The drama group decided to continue the festival over the years. Hence the Active Theater Movement decided that such Drama Festival should be held at least once a year.

The movement selected matters that were forgotten in conversations or hardly discussed openly; particularly matters connected with war, as the themes of their dramas and presented them to the people as performances. They dared to speak of the unspoken themes. Ten dramas were created and staged in the Drama Festival, namely, *Vedatharikal* (Hypocrites), *Venmai Ezhil* (White Beauty), *Kalarai Kavithaikal* (Epitaph), *Ehantham* (Solitude), *Thali* (Wedding Chain), *Maranachchanrithazh* (Death Certificate), *Payanankalin Valikal* (Pains of Travels), *Valikalin Vilimpil* (On the Brink of Pain), *Marunthukku Poraddam* (Struggle for Medicine), and *Thanthai Pasam* (Love of a Father).

## Dramas and their Themes

The dramas were based on the stories of the youth involved in the Drama Festival. The story of each drama as well as comments of the youth-creators are presented below.

### *Vedatharikal* (Hypocrites)

*Vedatharikal* depicts the problem prevailing in Jaffna District such as unemployment of graduates, young doing work for politicians to ensure later employment in the government, and readiness of young people to do anything to get a job.

Following is a clarification on the *Vedatharikal* by actor J.Kajaruban:

In highlighting unemployment, the main problem of youth, *Vedatharikal* made the audience laugh to exhaustion but made them think at the end. A lot of youngsters, who graduated from the universities and thought that government employment was the whole world, were not aware of the worthiness of our motherland. Several of us just forgot things like “our soil” and “our rights”. *Vedatharikal* was staged to emphasize the fact that if we preserved our soil and used it properly the solutions to the economic problems could be obtained.

Their opinions indicate that they understood the theme and meaning of the *Vedatharikal*, and consequently acted with much clarity.

*Vedatharikal* speaks about the graduates “mass-produced” by the Sri Lankan universities, who are reluctant and unable to become self-employed, who do not engage in self-thinking, and who perform “penance” behind politicians as a result.

The drama clearly explains that an “unemployed Graduate” is the consequence of the shortcomings of the higher education system.

The drama spoke of several problems like fakeness of politicians who live off empty sentimental speeches, declining recognition of the value of land due to lack of self-thinking, sorrow of being away from the life of dependence on the land, the encroachment of land by others, acceptance of the consumerist culture without any question and suffering.

Many of those who participated in the training had completed higher education. Many of them were teachers, university students, and the like.

Many were job hunting. Some worked for politicians for several days for the election campaigns. They were compelled to issue statements in support of particular politicians. They were promised several things by the politicians. In the end, they could not get anything. What was left was only disappointment. *Vedatharikal* spoke about these things. Several people who got caught in and affected by this “cyclone,” took part in the Drama Training. Their sorrows, frustrations, and anger came out as drama.

### ***Kalarai Kavithaikal (Epitaph)***

As far as the civil war of Sri Lanka is concerned, the question of missing persons is considered as the most important problem. Many families lost their kins and are in misery due to forced disappearances. This drama speaks of this. The alleged genocide and forced disappearances in Sri Lanka are spoken of as a great human misery. *Kalarai Kavithaikal* speaks of the lowly politics involved in this matter, cheating by the government, the importance of the commissions, military stringency, continued fear of death, the spineless nature of the United Nations, and other problems. All those who participated in the training had prior experience of these problems. People from their families or from the neighborhood had gone missing. They had firsthand knowledge of grief of those families. They have felt them themselves.

These youth had among themselves a desire that the missing persons should obtain justice. They grieved about their being impotent to do anything about it. The Drama Festival provided them an opening to reveal these problems. They wanted to make this problem the theme of their drama. It should be considered a great achievement that the training helped the youth who had participated in it gain the courage to demand justice for the missing persons, an important issue in the Sri Lankan politics and at the international level, in the context of restraint on speaking against the government.

### ***Muhamoodi Nadakam Eantham (Solitude)***

*Muhamoodi Nadakam Eantham* is about the misery of the aged Sri Lankans who sent their children abroad to protect their lives due to the war situation and remained isolated in the country. The drama revealed as well as argued about these aged people living in insecure situations and the social context that had not provided them safety. It helped the youth to contemplate about the deep social problems such as the reduced power of the

human resources of the country because of the migration of the younger generation outside the country and the inability of the isolated aged to cope with the situation.

### ***Venmai Ezhil* (White Beauty)**

*Venmai Ezhil* is the first drama produced in the training. The participants selected this theme with sentimentality and involvement. The story was derived from the case of a Panguduthevu school girl. In that incident, the schoolgirl was abducted in her school uniform, her hands and legs bound by her school tie and shoelaces, gang-raped and finally murdered. The incident caused much heart-rending to those who participated in developing the drama during the training.

This could not happen in a civilized society, they fumed. They developed the drama based on the concept that a civilized society should preserve the school uniform rather than desecrate it, and presented issues such as sexual violence against women, deterioration of the social structure by the war, destruction of humanism by antisocial activities and the need for a social structure needed to address these evils. They realized that it is the duty of the youth to identify the problems that cropped up in a country devastated by and recovering from war, and to think of the proper solutions to them. The training provided a favorable space for that.

### ***Thali* (Wedding Chain)**

In the Drama Training, the Solo Theater performances are regarded as very big achievements. For these performances, political problems related to society and Individuals were selected and used. The general problem in the situation of singleton was spoken of.

During the war period, the youth and students in the war zones were conscripted by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who sent them to war after undergoing military training. Many of them were killed. Parents used various techniques to safeguard their children from this misery. It was a great human misery. They went from one misery into another to save their young children without realizing the real impact of their actions.

To save their children, they got them married at very young ages. They dug bunkers and hid them for days in the bunkers, or hid them in the jungle, or hid them inside houses. But the Tigers came and found them. Boys and girls were taken away, even married couples were taken and separated.

Those who participated in the training spoke about these tribulations. They argued on them. They made them into a drama depicting the story of a woman. Having this as the core theme, they insisted that attention should be paid on the hapless women, who were carrying the Thali (wedding chain). The drama made us realize the level that the war had affected women in society and how it had exerted excessive pressures on them.

It could be said that the violations of human rights by the Army and the LTTE had never before spoken of in the same stage by the Tamils who were affected by war. It is a great achievement that this training had impartially viewed human rights violations in general.

### ***Maranach chanrithazh (Death Certificate)***

The civil war in Sri Lanka caused the worst effects on human rights as highlighted in the reports of the United Nations. Various stories had been given in evidence. The case of militants who surrendered in the field and went missing afterward remains a controversy to date.

The families of the militants had handed over their father or husband to the Army as per the army's request. But it is not known to date what hap-



SOLO performance at play 'Thali' in Nallur, North Sri Lanka.

pened to them. The Army is washing off their hands saying it had not taken them. Because of this, the women who lost their husbands are wandering here and there searching for their husbands. They went to the Army camps and detention camps. They struggled to be heard and testified before inquiry commissions. Because of this, they are confronted with threats from unidentified persons and military intelligence agents.

Unacceptable solutions are being forced on them. They are being compelled to accept death certificates for persons who had gone missing

Young wives do not want to receive death certificates for their husbands who might still be alive. This drama speaks of this problematic situation and openly subjects the importance of organizations such as the United Nations into questioning. Several problems such as the insecure situation of women living alone, unsolved cases of missing persons, rejection of opinions of people who had been affected by the war, and useless investigation commissions were talked about in this drama. A young female performer superbly performed it.

### ***Marunthukku Poraddam (Struggle for Medicine)***

*Marunthukku Poraddam* is about the conversation of two old men who live alone on how struggle against injustice can hurt ordinary people. This drama criticizes the single-faceted nature of a trade union's struggle in the medical service, an essential service. This drama expresses the problem about loss of lives in this struggle. It narrates the story of the murder of the Punkudutheevu school girl where miscreants burned tires on the road and prevented the ambulance service from reaching the school girl. This formed the theme of this drama.

### ***Valikalin Vilimpil (On the Brink of Pain)***

*Valikalin Vilimpil* is a story of a young man who went about to look for a job and returned back home. Several issues are covered in the story such as children orphaned by the war being left alone, abuses committed on them and unemployment of youth. The story deals with a young man who was swindled by recruitment agents when he went to the Middle East to work, the dangerous sea travel by small boat to Australia at great expense, the failure to earn money by working abroad, the return to his own village, the sudden changes that occurred in the village, and the resulting attitude which did not allow him to live in harmony with the people of the village.

***Payanangalin Valikal (Pains of Travels)***

All those who participated in this training had been displaced forcefully, at least five times from their native places. One of them is a twenty-two year-old school teacher, who was displaced seventeen times. He had lived in seventeen houses. Most of them were *cadjan* (with roof made of coconut leaves) sheds. His father's dream was to return to his own village and live in his own house. He died without his dream being fulfilled. He could not go to school due to poverty and the repeated displacements. Without education, he was forced to live in grip of poverty with the name "refugee" being given to him by society. Many more tribulations occurred, long and continuous displacements happened, and problems remained unsolved even to date. These are expressed in the drama with fury. The drama speaks of problems dragging too long and interest on them declining. It also suggests that the problems of the displaced should be solved.

***Thanthai Pasam (Love of a Father)***

The ethnic war of Sri Lanka disintegrated families and forced kins out into different directions. Families disintegrated while searching for their kins, after losing them in the calamity of war. The story of a father going in search of his daughter he had lost is revealed in the drama of *Thanthai Pasam*.

A young man who lived through the war and directly witnessed the misery and monstrosity of war selected this story as the theme of his solo theater.

He revealed in his drama the misery of a father who traveled with him his daughter in the war zone in his quest to save her life. But he lost his daughter in the midst of war. While searching for his lost daughter, the father lost one of his legs from a land mine liberally sown on the battlefields and remained not knowing what to do next. Several people lost their belongings, relatives, along with their life in the pitiless battlefields. These were spoken by the drama.

Pains imparted by war, disappointment in the struggle, monstrosity of the war, and the people in war zone being rendered refugees and into utter helplessness, losing all their hopes, were revealed in this drama. These youngsters had revealed their social responsibility by presenting the idea that war should not be forced on anybody.



### Audience Opinion

One thousand five hundred people participated in the two days of the Drama Festival. The President of the National Arts Council, S. Devarajah,



Oppressor image in a play at Theater Festival in Chankanai, North Sri Lanka.



Play image about poverty at Theater Festival in Nallur, North Sri Lanka.

witnessed this Drama Festival and expressed his anger on people who waste their time in front of television screens. He had expressed his opinion in the following words:



Play image about political satire in North Sri Lanka.



Scene in the play *Akantham* at Nallur, North Sri Lanka.



Tragedy scene about political dilemma, North Sri Lanka.



Scene in a play about displacement, North Sri Lanka.

A Drama should be staged several times. That is the duty of all of us. The poisonous films which had afflicted the Tamil people should be thrown away. The ruinous environs of being frozen into the TV Boxes which are the coffins in our houses must be done away with. Priority should be given to theater activities.

Prof. Daya Somasekaram of the Psycho–Medical Department of Jaffna University, after participating in the Drama Festival also insisted on the need for such activities. He observed:

It is stirring up several deep social problems and the thought streams about them. It makes us think. These ideas could be absorbed carefully and without getting confused not only by mature people but also by children. The problems, the events which had occurred to us, challenges that are confronted by youths currently, being enslaved due to the difficult life they are leading, and above all the sorrowful lives of the elders are depicted well through these dramas. The current situation is being expressed beautifully and in a way touching our hearts. It is very commendable, it urges us to think about these problems and take appropriate action with regard to them and think carefully about our future.

Similarly, the Cultural Officer of Jaffna District, K. Malini, after participating in the Drama Festival said that because of the sentiments that arose, the drama activities were necessary for the preservation of social consciousness and culture. He explained

The Active Theater Movement had provided such opportunity in an appropriate environment. The revelations of the dramas staged with dedication by a drama group were treated with such grandeur. Although opinions could be placed before people through newspapers, a drama performance is a project which merges with the heart and people become engrossed in it and makes them dedicate themselves to it. This had gained several victories. This is an excellent medium. Children should be involved in theater activities. A bright future will dawn on them. All of us should face the distresses and obstacles with a social consciousness and build a predictable good future.

P. Chithra, a bank manager recorded her opinion as follows:

At a time when we are expressing fear whether our arts are on a decline, this event is giving us much pleasure. This festival which is being held integrating all arts is a fine occurrence. The trend of the parents and children now is to exclude these arts and other activities and their thinking had changed into taking up only educational activities. I believe that we had to bring together arts, other activities and our children and we too should join them and use these thoughts to change the people.

Likewise, KrishnaKumar, who served as a Senior Register of the University of Jaffna remarked thus:

Our ancient culture is the confluence of Tamil speech, music, and drama. This drama is not connected only to acting. It is a fine feature, which in one way conditions and enhances our lifestyles. It makes us willingly entwine several things minutely. The Art of Drama had over the years developed through several forms and with several specialties. This growth is attracting people without the discrimination of young or old. When watching dramas, not only we watch the acting and dialogues but also what is implicated by them penetrating our feelings. In that way, each drama performed here expressed something that is needed in the society. This Drama Festival had made different types of people to think in different angles. In a context where mass media is considered the strongest, this Drama Festival explains the fact that the theater is a strong instrument, a means to drain the hate on mass media, especially, in demolishing the illusion created by it.

Professor Sivanathan, a university economics professor, also insists on this:

Drama is a performance. I consider this a great victory of the performance. The situation where someone creating an artwork, within a predetermined framework, and changing people as they gather together, the performers and audience alike, to participate in it is happening only now. When the continuity of the history of dramas is viewed, it is evident that it had become more and more polished, and had grown to a level that could not be described in words.

Cultural values are essential for good social dynamism. Social enthusiasts insist that a good young generation could be created only through them. For this, the necessity of artistic activities is insisted. This is what Jaffna District Children's Psycho-social Coordinator, K. Kauthaman, is insisting on the basis of his work experience. He insisted on the importance of the drama activities thus:

Dramas play a big role in developing our Artistic, Cultural and Civilizational Values. These had transformed the lifestyles of many important men. A question is being raised by media and social well-wishers as to whether the Artistic, Cultural, and Civilization Values of the Jaffna District had been ruined or afflicted by the post-war conflict. Hence, the holding of these events and people taking part in them are the biggest evidence to indicate that our Artistic and Cultural Values have not been afflicted. So far, dramas are the very best force in creating an awareness in our people's lives.

The same type of opinion was recorded by the Chairperson of the Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations, Mr. Thatparan, thus:

It is not an ordinary thing to adhere to rituals and traditions. The art of drama had gone on a decline because the youth had stayed away from Drama because it is not a profession to earn money or great honors in Tamil society. A situation exists here where a group of people studies Drama and Theater, just because there is a stream of studies offered in Drama and Theater. It is heartwarming to see such an event is held.

Karnan, a year 10 student at the Jaffna Hindu College who watched a drama, noted that the educational system in Sri Lanka was not based on self-thinking, and explained:

After the Theater Movement had come, I have been watching their dramas continuously. Every drama expresses personal opinions. In today's drama "Hypocrites", they have realistically depicted the unemployment problems faced by the students who study in Jaffna and of the trend of them being sidetracked because of it. All the dramas are good.

The art form of drama had acted with social consciousness from the Greek period to date. It always reflects society. This has always been true.

The comments recorded by drama enthusiast K.V. Krishnanantham also indicate this:

Today's theater performances expressed the need for preserving social interest and humanism and humanitarianism. They indicate the grief, affectations caused and losses we see on a daily basis. It is true that the dramas speak about the things happening in the country and domestically.

There were several people, who traveled long distances to participate in this event. One of them, Navaneethan, a Tamil teacher by profession, commented:

I have come from Vadamaradchchi to enjoy the dramas after a lapse of a very long time. I have seen today some soul searching dramas in the Tamil drama space. We are living in a period where there is a need for people-oriented dramas.



Open space performance under the tree in war affected area Puthukudiyiruppu, North Sri Lanka.



Spectators take part in the performance of a play about gender issue in war affected area, Vanni, North Sri Lanka.

## **Conclusion**

The Drama Festival had become a historical event. It created a context where the art of drama resurged, after an upsurge during the war period.

S. Nirmalan who had not seen dramas for a long time, opined:

My best wishes for the Active Theater Movement to grow more and more. I have witnessed several dramas in Vanni during the war. I liked those dramas. The Active Theater Movement had given me the opportunity of seeing good dramas after that.

Some others in the audience also expressed their feelings such as the impression of a volunteer worker, N. Kamalathas:

Your work is further needed by our society. Let us move towards a theater for change in society. Thanks for giving experiences such as pleasure, deep sympathy, scene composition, acting, music, and techniques. Let us move beyond reminding,



again and again, the impacting memories and travel in the direction of laying straight forward foundations.

The opinion of another NGO worker based in Colombo, Seela, is also important:

Thanks for a memorable event and thought provoking initiative. May the healing touch of the performing arts contribute to the healing of our communities.

This Drama Festival had kindled the thoughts of several people by pointing out the disputes in society. I think that the deep trauma and empirical images were revealed through dramas. Social reality was reflected in the drama scenes.

It is apparent that social aberrations and several types of problems could be pointed out through dramas; while self-confidence could be also gained through it at the same time.

Hope has risen that drama could drum up the minds of people who had been oppressive. When the dialogue “We want red soil ... we want our soil” was recited in *Vedatharikal* Drama, several people’s sentiments were kindled. The viewers expect the drama to say time-suitable ideas and when that is done they welcome it.

This Drama Festival provided an opportunity for people to see how theater revives humanity. Because of this, several people became very eager to join the Active Theater Movement.

The Drama Festival clearly demonstrated that drama represents a cross-section of society and a social mirror.

They also requested that Drama Festivals should be held not only in suburbs but also in the villages.

K. Wijaya Kumar expressed his concern after watching a few of the dramas:

Actually the Art of Drama is on a decline. It is a cause for happiness that this movement is working towards changing all that. Drama conditions the life of man. I enjoyed the events. All the events were excellent. They also revealed good ideas.

E. Kugathas opined that artistic activity was needed for this time. A. Sathiyamoorthy a social service worker and a bank manager expressed this opinion that can be considered a concluding remark:

Attracting people during the Festival season may be a start, this should be transformed for the needs and the changes of people, transformed into a great beacon showing light to people and should lead the people into a new path that is needed for them. It could be identified here that the Active Theater Movement has all the energy and ability for it.

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## Endnote

- 1 This law is still in force up to the present.

# Curriculum Reform, School Culture, Change: Reflections from Caste-Ridden India

Devika Mittal

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**F**OR NELSON MANDELA, education is the “most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” His assertion echoes the sentiment towards education across societies. While education is an important institution of socialization that strives to re-produce a society, it also carries a crusader image that can usher a desired change. This pertains to its potential to influence mindsets and guide action. This image and potential draw different interest groups, among which an important one is the modern nation-state.

Among the significant tasks taken up by the modern nation-states has been the formalization of education. Gellner (1983) links the need for formalization of education with the origin of nations and nationalism. He, like several others including Durkheim (1961), Green (1990), Hobsbawm (2000), Levinson (2011) and Smith (1991), delve into the role of schools and the education system to create a national identity and a “we” feeling among people irrespective of their other, and conflicting, identities.

The post-colonial, modern Indian nation-state is not an exception. On the contrary, it has been proactive in recognizing this potential of education. The Indian state, as Advani (2009) argues, has seen education as a fundamental instrument for change, progress and nation-building (Advani, 2009, 56). The various education commissions and policies governing the education system reflect this perception as they strived to spread literacy as well as to impart an education that would embed faith in the constitutional ideals and in a united national community. The latter goal entailed efforts to eradicate social exclusion and discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, gender and other social differences. This article focuses on one such educational initiative to address marginalization and inequality on the basis of caste.

Caste divides the Indian society into a large number of social groups that are based on hereditary membership and delineate specific social and

economic conduct to each group. These groups are arranged in a hierarchy (Dumont, 1999, 21). The groups are broadly categorized into the *varna* or four-fold classification system with *Brahmans*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras*. A fifth category which falls outside the caste system is that of the *Panchamas* or people of the fifth order. A notion of purity and pollution underlies this stratification and places *Brahmans* at the top of the hierarchy and *Panchamas* at the lowest who are prejudiced as being “untouchables” (Karve, 2014; Dumont, 1999). The first three castes are considered to be “upper caste” and the next two are the so-called “lower caste.” While the caste system derives legacy in the form of a divine sanction from the Hindu religious order, the notion of caste and caste-based prejudice prevails in the social practices of other religious communities in India as well (Ahmad, 1962; Dumont, 1999; Kannabiran and Kannabiran, 1991; Puri, 2003).

Caste inequality and prejudice continues to be the defining reality of contemporary India. Contrary to the assumption, it has not lost its importance in the face of the new economic forces. This is illustrated by Jodhka’s work in the corporate sector highlighting the importance of caste identity that continues even in a market based on “merit” (Jodhka, 2008). There is, however, a denial of this reality. The so-called upper caste believes that caste-based prejudice and discrimination is a practice of the past. To alter this understanding and to eradicate casteism, the National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF 2005) was drafted to re-structure textbooks published by the National Educational Research and Training Organisation (NCERT).

This study examines the effectiveness of the curriculum reform. For this, the study places the textbooks in relation to the school culture. While schools have an institutional structure consisting of a state-mandated or private curriculum and school’s objectives, values and norms, there are institutional restraints and staff and students interact, negotiate, and contest the structure, its norms and values with their own ethnic cultures and habits of mind (Giroux 1997; Kaplan and Owings 2013, 27). This interaction in the form of restraints, negotiations and contestations constitute the “school culture.”

The current study is based on an ethnographic research of a school culture in Delhi. The school will be referred to as *Azad Bharat Vidyalaya* (ABV). The study spanned over a period of ten months in 2015 and 2016 and strived to unpack the school and deliberate on the formal and informal culture of the school through the study of the curriculum, official school discourse and

its circulation through its spatial culture, school events and routines. The informal culture constituted by, as Gordon et al (2000) conceptualize, the teacher culture, student culture, peer groups was accessed through classroom observations, questionnaire, group discussions, personal interviews, informal and unstructured conversations with students and teachers.

This article begins with an introduction and a glance at the everyday life of ABV in terms of its engagement with caste. It then moves on to discuss the content of the NCERT/NCF 2005 books. Following this, the paper returns to focus on the school culture by examining the pedagogy, reflecting on teachers as the bridge between the text and students and in this situation, as part of the effort to address casteism in the society. In the subsequent section, the paper looks at the ways in which students interact with these textbooks.

### **Caste and Everyday Life at ABV**

Azad Bharat Vidyalaya (ABV) is an English-medium, co-educational school located in the southern part of Delhi. While it was founded in 1970s, the school's institutional history takes it back to the years before the independence from British rule and to Lala Lajpat Rai, a popular leader of the Indian freedom struggle. Lala Lajpat Rai had established an organization that strived to "train citizens to work for the political, social and economic advancement of the country." Post-independence, the organization continued and even furthered the objective, with founding a school as one of the methods. The school views itself as the carrier of the legacy of Lala Lajpat Rai and in its official school discourse circulated through school events and spatial culture, seeks to socialize the students to recognize each other as an "Indian," as a fellow patriot who should be entitled to equal rights.

There are everyday contestations to the school's project. In terms of community and caste make-up of the school, since ABV is located close to neighborhoods having both mixed population as well as a considerable population of Jat, Gujjar, Punjabi and Rajput communities, it draws students from diverse socio-economic communities and different caste groups. The students are also very conscious and assertive about their identity. The students have notions about the self and the "other" communities which also often guide both peer bonding and clashes.

The teachers and school non-teaching staff are well-aware of this diversity among the students. When asked about the students, they would

compare them with students of other schools and consider them to be undisciplined and uninterested and which they attributed to their background. "They come from families where there is no interest to pursue studies but only to fight," said a teacher. While it was not always clear whether they ascribed this to the class or the community background, one teacher specifically talked about the Jat and the Gujjar communities, the clash and how it also shapes the mindsets of the students. The Jat and Gujjar are stereotyped to be rustic, aggressive and conservative. They are also known to be competing communities. Their caste position is not fixed but both communities strive and even compete to be recognized as "backward castes/communities" so that they can access reservation in the education and job sector (Singh, 2011; Datta, 1999).

The teachers understand and address this diversity in different ways. As I accompany Kartik, a social science teacher, to his classroom, he says, "During B.ed (Bachelor of Education degree), we are taught how to teach in a class, how to avoid punishing students, inspire them to take interest but when we actually come to school to practice, all these teachings goes for a toss...we soon realize the difference between the ideal and reality."

There is a lot of noise emanating from the classroom but as we enter, there falls a relative silence. The teacher shouts, "Attention everyone!" and the students stand and wish "Good Afternoon sir." They then cast a look at me. The teacher introduce me as a new teacher and says, "she has come to see how you behave so be good." As I take one of the vacant seats at the back of the class, the students turn to me and ask my name. When I tell them my name, a student asks me to give out my full name. This request to know someone's full name is surprising as it is neither a common practice nor desirable as surname/family name in the Indian context is indicative of one's caste and community identity. It is, however, not considered to be extraordinary here in this school as Kartik had once shared during a conversation that some students do try to acquaint themselves with the background, caste and community identity of teachers.

As I share my full name, a student (Gaurav) shares that he also has the same surname. He further inquires where I am from and then says, "We are related. Now will you give me an additional five marks?" I reply, "No, why should I?" His friend says, "OK, not five but at least two marks?" He ignores as I refuse the request. This instance is a reflection of the everyday world of the students both in and beyond school, where it is not uncommon or un-

usual to be aware of someone's community and caste identity and to bond with them over it. On another day, as I am about to enter the school building, Gaurav calls out to me. He is with some of his friends. He introduces me to them, "She is our new teacher. She is also a Mittal (reference to my surname)." Hearing this, two of his friends smile. He informs me that while his friends are from different sections and grade levels, they all hail from the same community. He then says, "Ma'am, welcome to the Mittal *parivar* (family)." It is evident from Gaurav's assertion that he is socialized to bond over one's caste community, to consider it to be a network of loyalty and even favoritism. Caste is not just about a sense of identity here but exists in a form of exclusion and discrimination.

Beginning the class, the teacher scribbles the subject "Geography" and the topic "Climate" on the board. The teacher initiates by stating the outline of the chapter and then asks, "What is climate?" Several hands go up. The teacher points towards two male students, referring them by their surnames which as we noted previously, often gives out the caste and community of a person and in this case, it did.

None of them is able to give a satisfactory response. The teacher then tries again, "Is there a difference between weather and climate?" As there are fewer hands this time, the teacher says, "At least try. Trying is good."

The teacher scans the classroom to select a student. He then looks at one of the students who was talking with his friend and says, "What happened?" but the student does not respond so Kartik remarks, "*Hamare Jat ke 12 baj gaye hain.*" Here, while referring to him as a "Jat" (his community identity), his statement also refers to a community-based slur associated with the Sikh community that stereotypes them to be impulsive and aggressive. The students laugh on hearing this. The student who is remarked upon also laughs. Humor has a social function. Under the garb of fun or mere entertainment, humor works in a powerful way to embed popular notions. Here, through humor, students are being socialized into fixed and derogatory notions about the two communities.

The pedagogical strategy of Kartik seems to be drawing on the everyday worlds of these students where community identity is of much eminence. Kartik is trying to respond to an ethnically diverse classroom. His classes are more interactive than that of other teachers. Students are more attentive in his classes and try to participate in the discussions. He believes that the students are conscious and proud of their caste and community-based



identity and so in order to bond with them and seek conformity, he finds a solution within these contours. Through his practice, however, he himself is contributing to the casteist culture prevailing in the school.

### **Addressing Caste Discrimination through Textbooks**

The NCERT textbooks guided by the NCF 2005 engage with caste in different grade levels. In grade 6 textbook *Social and Political Life I* (SP – I), the second chapter titled “Diversity and Discrimination” 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. To illustrate, the chapter gives examples of oppressive practices in the past. The chapter reads,

Caste rules were set which did not allow the so-called ‘untouchable’ to take on work, other than what they were meant to do. For example, some groups were forced to pick garbage and remove dead animals from the village. However, they were not allowed to enter the homes of the upper castes or take water from the village well, or even temples. Their children could not sit next to children of other castes in school. (SP – I, 2006, page 19)

The chapter then goes on to trace the life and struggle of B.R. Ambedkar, an eminent anti-caste icon and a visionary of modern India. The chapter argues that the constitution of the modern, free India outlaws caste-based discrimination and guarantee equal rights, yet it also acknowledges that equality is still to be achieved (SP – I, 2006, 23).

The textbooks of grade 7 and 8 also continue the discussion on caste-based discrimination as an enduring challenge in post-independence India. The chapter I titled “Equality in Indian Democracy” of grade 7 textbook *Social and Political Life II* (SP – II) illustrates that caste remains to be an important social identity that one grows up with. It notes this to be the case for both rural and urban areas. It states,

If you live in urban India, some of you might think that people no longer believe in caste. However, just look at the matrimonials shown from a leading English newspaper, and you

will see how important the issue of caste continues to be in the minds of higher educated urban Indians. (SP - II, 2006, 7)

Similarly, the grade 8 *Social and Political Life III* (SP – III) textbook also brings together stories and experiences of Dalit exploitation, especially in terms of ritual impurity. There is also a special section on manual scavenging which points out that while it is banned, it is still practiced in different parts of the country. The textbook also introduces affirmative action in the form of the reservation system though it only talks about the reservation for the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) groups. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are the constitutional terms that refer to communities that are socially and economically disadvantaged. The Scheduled Castes includes caste communities which have been placed in the fifth category or the *panchamas* who are the most downtrodden in the caste hierarchy (Michael, 2007, 16). The textbook places affirmative action as an approach to equality, as positive discrimination. Resting it on the long history of marginalization and discrimination that prevented these communities to progress, the affirmative action in the form of the reservation is shown as a medium to ensure equality and social justice.

The grade 9 textbooks mention the reservation of Other Backward Classes (OBC). The constitutional category of other backward classes includes communities that have been socially and economically disadvantaged. While it includes communities that are listed as *shudras* or the fourth category in caste system, some communities which are listed as the so-called “upper-caste” are also there.

The grade 10 textbook titled *Democratic Politics II* (DP-II) introduces some other aspects of the caste issue, including the overlapping of caste and class. The text makes use of the statistics to make the point:

The caste groups that had access to education under the old system have done very well in acquiring modern education as well. Those groups that did not have access to education or were prohibited from acquiring it have naturally lagged behind. That is why there is a disproportionately large presence of ‘upper caste’ among the urban middle classes in our country. Caste continues to be closely linked to economic status. (DP-II, 2006, 13)

This caste-class confluence is an important aspect to discuss as it counters the argument by opponents of the reservation policy who suggest that reservation should be on class, and not on caste. Further, the chapter also discusses another aspect of the contemporary situation that of the caste-based political assertions and caste-based vote bank politics. While caste is also discussed in the curriculum of grades 11 and 12, since the school under study does not offer humanities, this study is limited to what is taught in the school.

The curriculum, as we see, strives to not just educate but to sensitize students about caste as a social evil. Besides the text, through in-text questions, photo essays and reflective activities, the curriculum designers sought to seek empathy and inspire students to stand against caste. The curriculum, however, does not produce knowledge by itself. It is imperative to understand how the text is transmitted and received. For this, we shall return back to the school under study.

### **Transacting Knowledge: Anxieties and Dilemmas of Teachers**

Kartik, a social science teacher, finds these textbooks to be critical and significant yet he also shares a dilemma. “While the books are good as they are talking about issues which are important, they also create problems as they make students become aware about their and other’s caste identity,” argues Kartik. He elaborates by sharing instances from his classroom situations wherein when students read about practices of another community or even about the discrimination meted out to a particular community, they call out to their classmates who belong to those communities and pass derogatory comments. “Look, what this says about you!” or “See they are writing about you people!” are common comments that Kartik says he hears in his classroom. So according to him, this visibility to caste through the curriculum has unintended implications. These textbooks can reproduce stereotypes and can victimize students who belong to the marginalized group. This especially holds true, he argues, for “schools like ours where students are already very assertive and opinionated about caste and community identities.” His concern reflects a pedagogical dilemma around how to teach these textbooks.

It is also important to recall the classroom observation of one of his classes wherein we had noted that to seek conformity, he also ends up reit-

erating caste and community-based notions. Kartik's dilemma reflected in his views and practice reiterates the significance of the pedagogue. The importance of the teacher has also been emphasized by Batra (2005), Mehrotra (2007), George and Madan (2009), among several others. While Mehrotra (2007) regards the NCF 2005 textbooks to be well-equipped to initiate critical thinking in students, she emphasizes on the need for teachers' training. This is also echoed by Alex M. George and Amman Madan (2009, 14) who are of the opinion that "it is not enough for teachers to possess lots of information," but they must think actively on these topics (George and Madan, 2009, 14). The teachers are required to understand the importance and to encourage the students to engage with the text. In her work, Thapan (2014) shows the importance of the same. She cites an example wherein a teacher is teaching students about secularism, but when a student questions her about the "privileged" status given to the minorities, the teacher does not clear the misconceptions of the student in an adequate manner (Thapan, 2014, 167).

With curriculum change, it is thus imperative to have teacher trainings but ones which are "not just formality," as argued by several teachers at ABV. The teachers' concerns and dilemmas that spring from both the text and classroom situation with students who are active learners need to be addressed. This idea of students being active, however, is yet to gain currency. A glance over the *Formative Assessment: Manual for Teachers* published by Central Board of School Education (CBSE) guiding teachers on teaching and assessment methods for the social science books does not view students as active and agential beings capable of rejecting the school knowledge. While the manual does stress and direct the teacher to be creative and initiate discussions, it does not devote any space to talk about the possible tensions, contradictions that these discussions may generate in diverse classrooms. So in reality, the teachers are at their own.

Further discussing these new textbooks, while Kartik holds a critical view towards these textbooks, another social science teacher, Kriti (name changed) finds the books interesting and from which she herself gets to learn a lot. She asserts,

These new books generate much discussion in class. Students have many questions and even share their own experiences. It does make the class very lively. I myself get to learn so much.

She acknowledges that students also surface many stereotypes but then, I explain, give examples, try to convince, even if on some issues [she says this for the reservation], I myself may disagree with the book. The teacher has to address these issues himself/herself.

While Kriti confirms Kartik's assertion of teachers being at their own, unlike him, she does not share a pedagogical dilemma. This difference in the views of the two teachers seems to draw from their social positionings. Kartik is from Gujar community which has engaged in the caste-based political mobilization and is classified in the Other Backward Class (OBC) community in some states. Kriti is from an upper-caste background. While both Kartik and Kriti acknowledge the challenges in the form of stereotypes that students may exhibit, Kartik is more conscious and gives the disagreements and the behavior of the student more weightage. This consciousness may have emerged from his caste experience.

The teachers, as we note, are not a homogeneous group, their social identities, motivations and intentions have a varying influence on them. These orientations affect the nature and content of their teaching processes which, in turn, may contribute to the shaping of knowledge and notions of the students. Though there is no data available for the classroom discussion by Kriti around the topic of caste and reservation policy, a teacher's disagreement with textbook knowledge can take the shape of a direct contestation or insufficient discussion that may not clarify students' doubts. Thus, besides the curriculum, the teacher's role in educating for change is of much significance.

### **Engaging with Textbooks and their Everyday Worlds: Students' Understanding of "Caste"**

As we move to understand the relationship between the text and the environment in which the former speaks, the first thing to note is that there exists a hierarchy of subjects. Neha and Preeti (names changed) of grade 7 are not fond of civics/political science. Talking about their interests, they express their passion for watching Hindi films. They, however, make it clear that they do not like "serious" or issue-based movies. When asked about caste-based discrimination, Neha remarks,

Yes in earlier times, people used to discriminate on the basis of caste. People of Scheduled castes and Scheduled tribes were badly treated.

When asked if the discrimination still persists, they both state that there is no caste-based discrimination in the contemporary society. They attribute their knowledge to the textbooks which is surprising as the textbooks of grade 6 and 7 clearly mention the persistence of caste in post-independence India.

They, however, are not alone in doing so. Table 1 is a demonstration of the evidence. Table 1 is based on a questionnaire that was circulated among grade 9 students. The data gives an insight into the student's reception of the textbooks and their understanding of caste-based inequalities.

<b>Table 1: Students' Opinion about Caste-Based Discrimination</b>		
<b>Opinion about Caste-based Discrimination</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Caste-based discrimination does not exist in contemporary society	38	44.19%
Caste-based discrimination still exists	20	23.26%
Mixed caste with religion-based discrimination	15	17.44%
Equated caste with class-based discrimination	5	5.81%
Talked about gender-based discrimination	4	4.65%
No response	4	4.65%
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>100%</b>
Source: From the Field Study		

As we note from Table 1, in the sample of eighty-six students, thirty-eight students or 44.19 percent deny the prevalence of caste-based discrimination in society. This stands in contradiction with textbook knowledge. A student writes about caste as a practice of the past and denies witnessing it in contemporary society, at least in urban cities like Delhi. Another student reiterates the notion of caste being abstract and distant reality,

Yes, there is caste-based discrimination. Earlier, there was much discrimination against Dalits, but now it has reduced. Today, it is practised mostly in villages.

In doing so, they not just contrast with the textbooks that establishes the persistence of caste-based inequalities and discrimination in contemporary urban India but also reflects the normalization of casteism which, as we had previously noted, is even prevalent in the everyday culture of their school. The students do not reflect on how their own conduct in terms of peer bonding, holding casteist notions which they express through their talks and also jokes, keeps caste-based prejudice and inequality alive.

Some students deny caste discrimination and instead talk about caste-based reservations. According to a student,

In the 19th Century, there was caste discrimination but not today in the 21st Century. There is no caste system now. Nevertheless, we have a reservation system. Why do we need it (reservation policy) now?

Some also oppose reservation by upholding the argument of “merit.” In doing so, they oppose the understanding that the textbooks offer. They do not take into account the argument offered by grade 8 textbook for affirmative action, that of being a step towards equality and social justice. While this data is from students of grade 9 who at the time of the questionnaire had interacted with chapters till grade 8, students of higher grade levels who have studied the chapters on caste that show the correlation of caste and class, also object to a caste-based reservation, seeing it as a “new form of caste system.”

Twenty students are of the opinion that there is caste discrimination in contemporary society. Some even regard it to be their everyday, lived reality. A student remarks,

Yes, there is caste discrimination in India. In the past, there is vast discrimination against Dalits, but today this has reduced. Today this has ended in some places, but in some places, discrimination still exists. Like in schools, societies (housing) or other places, if there is any person from Gujjar caste, then there is definitely discrimination. Gujjars scare other people and create difficulties for them, especially for students.

As we can see, the student is referring to his own school and his everyday reality that he/she encounters in and beyond the school. The student's

assertion as well as the disagreements with the textbook knowledge that we noted point to the significance of the overall school culture in educating for change.

## **Conclusion**

This study strived to understand education as a means of social change. By studying the challenges to a curriculum reform, the article highlights the complexities and nuances that shape educational institutions and processes of learning.

This study focused on a curriculum reform to eradicate caste-based prejudice and inequalities. Placing curriculum in the larger school environment, the article reflects on the relationship between school culture and official curriculum or textbooks.

While curriculum reform for critical textbooks is significant, it is not sufficient. This is a point that has been driven by this and other studies on schooling. Schools are lively spaces. They constitute a culture made of the interaction of official or formal structures and of the agential world of students and staff. In this culture, the official structure including the curriculum is accepted, negotiated and even subverted.

This is what we have noted in ABV where despite the formal or official culture trying to imbibe a sense of patriotism that would dilute other social differences, the students were conscious and assertive of their caste and community identity. They also maintained stereotypical and even derogatory notions about other communities. The intervention through textbooks did not seem to alter these tendencies. 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.

In view of this, the article concludes that for education to be a driver of social change, the different components and stakeholders in the process of schooling needs to be focused upon. While the curriculum reform is significant, it is far from being sufficient. For change through education, not just the curriculum but the whole school culture would require an overhaul.



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# When Human Rights Higher Education and Development Cooperation Intersect: The Outreach Work of the Global Campus of Human Rights in Timor-Leste

Adriano Remiddi

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**H**UMAN RIGHTS HIGHER EDUCATION (HRHE) is a fairly new academic discipline, undergoing a process of fast consolidation globally over the past decade. It is broadly defined by the United Nations as “all education taking place at the post-secondary level in universities or other establishments approved by the State authorities, including institutions for the training and certification of professionals such as teachers, social workers, medical and legal personnel.”<sup>1</sup> HRHE builds upon the same scopes and innovation of human rights education, including the tripartite vision of education *about*, *through* and *for* human rights, with the aims to engender *understanding* of human rights, to *include* them into the learning process itself, as well as to *empower* beneficiaries to apply them and demand their rights. To grasp the current global standing and potential of HRHE, however, it is important to cast a glance over the development milestones of human rights education in general.

In this regard, the first hint of an emerging discussion around its relevance can be traced back to a high-level preparatory dialogue for the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, when Columbia University scholar I. L. Kandel presented his reflections about the need for what he called “education for freedom,” not instrumental to indoctrinations by nationalist policy, or any form of racial separatism and superiority.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, the issue of human rights education was raised more structurally in the context of UNESCO’s Associated Schools Program in 1953, aimed at promoting the initial action for human rights education in formal education. The broader human rights education sector involving both formal and informal learning set-ups, especially in primary and secondary education, started spreading from the late seventies, typically in the most advanced Western educational systems. At the time, thanks to the advocacy work of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the international human

rights movements, the United Nations (UN) and the regional human rights institutions started including human rights concepts, norms and values within mainstream education systems,<sup>3</sup> formalizing the first request in 1974, as part of the “Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace, and Education Relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.” Subsequently, the 1978 “International Congress on the Teaching of Human Rights” discussed for the first time the introduction of human rights education as a distinct subject into official school curriculums.

The adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 gave a strong boost to human rights education, as it obliged signatory states-parties to address the need for human rights education by developing programs focused on child rights, resulting in several States proactively taking initiatives in this direction. The crucial passage for the international legitimization of human rights education, however, was the UN-backed World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, and the consequent approval of the UN Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004). This successfully paved the way for the inclusion of human rights education into official school curriculums, as a joint effort made possible by the cooperation of state and non-state parties, including educational institutions, NGOs, and experts from civil society.

In higher education, this novel discipline started developing in the early nineties, and was especially promoted by North American and Western European academic and non-academic forums, following the consistent support accorded to political and social studies and its sub-disciplines in the wake of the fall of the Iron Curtain (a similar trajectory in the field of Area Studies). This is also the moment when HRHE started entering university curriculums and stopped being categorized solely as a subject of vocational training led by the non-governmental organization (NGO) sector. The decisive step was taken in 2005 with the adoption of the multi-year “World Programme for Human Rights Education (WPHRE).”<sup>4</sup> The WPHRE’s aim was to set common standards and methodology for the development of human rights education at every level of learning, establishing international guidelines involving governments, international cooperation organizations, educators, and civil society. In its second phase (2010 to 2014), it specifically addressed HRHE, focusing on developing standards and guidelines for teachers and higher education institutions.<sup>5</sup>

This period was marked by the parallel blossoming of HRHE in the Asia-Pacific, where successful initiatives were being gradually established and consolidated with the emergence of associations like the Southeast Asian Human Rights Studies Network (SEAHRN), the genesis of which is described by Michael Hayes in the 9<sup>th</sup> volume of this publication.<sup>6</sup> This positive evolution of HRHE in the regional context, often supported by national authorities and international cooperation entities, as well as specialized human rights education non-governmental actors, can be also contextualized in the framework of the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) consolidation, including its ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (2012). The Declaration directly mentions the importance of education for human rights under the economic social and cultural rights section, with Article 31.3 asserting that “Education shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in ASEAN Member States”, reinforced by Article 39 ambitiously stating that “ASEAN Member States share a common interest in and commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms which shall be achieved through, inter alia, cooperation with one another as well as with relevant national, regional and international institutions/organisations, in accordance with the ASEAN Charter.”

The steadily growing international recognition of the discipline was mirrored by an expansion in terms of scope and approaches. Despite being initially relegated to the realm of Law schools and faculties, utilizing a predominantly legalistic approach to the subject, HRHE progressively expanded, also geographically and including the Global South, as an eclectic global and multi-disciplinary field of studies. This dynamic was clearly also prompted by the new waves of decolonization and democratization, creating more suitable socio-political conditions to satisfy the demand for it. This was crucially the case during the transition of post-socialist European countries in the nineties or, more recently, the transformations following the Arab springs in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region. In these contexts, HRHE became increasingly relevant not only for future lawyers or State administrators, but also to a wide range of students/citizens/professionals such as sociologists, political scientists, psychologists, journalists, social entrepreneurs, medical doctors, civil engineers and architects, operating in these countries both as active members of civil society and dealing with relevant international and domestic organizations.

At the same time, human rights education remains a highly ideological discipline, especially when it comes to the education of the future leaders and elites, as in academia and at the postgraduate level. This is why in emerging, fragile or contested young democratic States, free and critical HRHE may assume contentious connotations, by questioning governments or promoting values and visions that might clash with the established elites, their agendas and cultures of power. In fact, human rights education is not a value-neutral discipline and “might generate a critical stance towards authority and power, and its emphasis on advocacy can make it an uncomfortable bedfellow for the standard curriculum of schools, not to mention the generally conservative climate.”<sup>7</sup> This makes HRHE a field of studies like no other, which may encounter resistance from central or local institutions in its genesis and evolution. Furthermore, it can be argued that, given its multidisciplinary and practice-oriented nature (or ambition), it is probably one of the most, if not the most, disputed academic subjects, potentially exposed to manifold pressures even beyond the official institutions.

Equally, it is also true that in certain circumstances, such as contexts that witnessed recent successful struggles against oppression, or in post-conflict or post-colonial regions and countries, in areas that emerged from dictatorship or from other forms of violent domination, a strong societal commitment to human rights and democratization can emerge. As E. Tibbitts and W. Ferneker explain, in such societies the newly attained freedom makes the<sup>8</sup>

demands for human rights education more powerful precisely because people have experienced the consequences of denial of human rights and human dignity. Two contrasting examples of post-conflict societies in which we have observed a stronger commitment to human rights education than in some neighbouring jurisdictions are Iraqi Kurdistan and Northern Ireland.

More recently, this has been the case in Timor-Leste, the focus of this paper.

Overall, despite the inherent peculiarities of HRHE, the current developments in this field of studies and research reveal impressive progress in terms of its international recognition and legitimation at the very highest levels, building on the development of human rights education over a rela-

tively short period of time. This is an outcome and a privilege that can be hardly imagined for other narrow academic specializations, which has indeed elevated HRHE beyond its academic purpose.

### **Commonality of Driving Principles**

As we saw in the guidelines of the WPHRE and looking at few examples, the final responsibility to incorporate and develop HRHE rests with national government institutions, such as relevant ministries or agencies, and governmental bodies including Parliamentary committees and working groups. However, such ambitious and long-term work must be planned and operationalized in cooperation with an array of crucial actors ranging from the local civil society (universities, associations, unions, NGOs) to the international human rights community, both at the governmental and non-governmental levels. In fact, in its ongoing global affirmation and expansion, the successful coordination and implementation of HRHE policies and actions are increasingly propelled through manifold governmental, non-governmental and regional organizations and institutions, as well as through specialized associations and networks in the field of governance, development, aid and education. The WPHRE describes how the role of such multilateral and inclusive international cooperation is instrumental for the strengthening of national capacities for HRHE and training. Under this inclusive vision, the interplay among these spheres should aim to:<sup>9</sup>

- (a) Support governments in the elaboration, implementation and monitoring of the national strategy.
- (b) Provide support to other national actors involved, in particular national and local non-governmental organizations, professional associations, higher education institutions, national human rights institutions, and other civil society organizations.
- (c) Facilitate information sharing at all levels by identifying, collecting, and disseminating information on good practice.
- (d) Support existing networks of human rights education and training actors and promote the creation of new ones at all levels;
- (e) Support effective human rights training, in particular for educators and trainers, and the development of related materials based on good practice.



In this context, universities and university-based networks or associations play an increasingly important role in the protection and furthering of human rights. According to Tibbitts,<sup>10</sup> not only they are “protagonist in terms of academic formation and human rights education for students, as places of interdisciplinary research and academic think-tanks, as well as in the field of policy advice,” they also “hold responsibility as societal and international agent called to give different institutional answers to the challenges posed by human rights, through the outcomes of their educational and research work that includes the creation of dedicated to human rights chairs, the establishing of human rights institutes and interdisciplinary research centres or departments, as well as inaugurating specific human rights studies.” Consequently, human rights studies and research in higher education does not simply constitute another academic field, as this sector is witnessing an intensified engagement that ascribes and legitimizes universities as pillars of the international human rights architecture.<sup>11</sup>

The coordination among academic institutions or networks and international cooperation entities dealing with HRHE generally moves from shared values and goals which can fruitfully allow for one sector to be operationally instrumental to the other and vice-versa. Formal education in human rights contributes to shaping the construction for a moral, rights-based equitable society, “promoting legal literacy, but also fosters dialogue, critical analysis, and active choices about applying human rights values in daily life.”<sup>12</sup> In so doing, its ultimate role and impact exceeds the sole sphere of formal learning since, as Tibbitts states “human rights education has become an essential part of the international human rights movement, complementing the immediate goals of protecting victims and promoting international treaties, with education about human rights for the prevention of abuses and the realisation of the good society.”

An intersection of these values and goals can be clearly inferred between the academic actors dealing with human rights education and the main international and development cooperation organizations’ policies and instruments that support it. The European Union (EU) external policy and its human rights support programs constitute a telling example in this regard. Nowadays the leading entity in development cooperation with investments reaching 74.4 billion euros as of 2018,<sup>13</sup> the EU’s vision of its role in enhancing human rights as part of its international cooperation is mainstreamed in its external actions’ documents, for instance:<sup>14</sup>

The EU continued to mainstream its right-based approach to promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law, through development cooperation. In this way the EU, together with its Member States, delivers on its commitment to integrate all human rights – civil and political, as well as economic, social and cultural rights – into development cooperation. The EU commitment to the rights-based approach is renewed, and reinforced by the new European Consensus on Development, adopted in June 2017, integrating human rights, democracy in development cooperation.”

The fundamental role and responsibility of human rights promotion by entities like the EU is acknowledged by leading human rights scholars, such as University of Vienna professor and former UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Manfred Nowak:<sup>15</sup>

human rights, the rule of law, tolerance, and solidarity with the marginalized and poor groups are the most important values written down in the Treaty of the EU. The EU has an obligation posed in its internal policies, so within the member states of the EU, but also in its external policies, in its trade policies to other countries, as in its development policies, to always live up to these major values. The EU is the best one that can start in its own policies to educate children in these values, but of course also to use its development cooperation in order to spread these messages of human rights and democracy around the world, and also assist other countries in their educational policies in the field of human rights.

The EU is clearly not the only actor promulgating this set of values and scopes that drive the diffusion of human rights education internationally. They are shared and propelled also by other key agents, such as regional organizations like the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) or, as already mentioned, by the ASEAN in the Asia-Pacific. Furthermore, the process is driven by the UN system (in particular UNESCO), as well as by single States through their specialized agencies (notably Sweden and Norway). Major contributions must also be attributed to the main non-governmental development and human rights organizations such as Oxfam and Amnesty International, among others.

As will be seen later, the identified intersections and commonality of values among development cooperation and educational institutions facilitate the coordination of these two sectors in terms of HRHE development and open a space for further deepening of their relationship. Another interesting parallel poses itself in this regard – as HRHE is a relatively recent expanding field and in the process of defining standards and models, the same can be said about the development cooperation sector. The latter can be seen as an agent of international relations still in its infancy, facing an ever stronger need of definition, especially in a reshaped globalized and post-colonial world, witnessing a new multipolar order and the emergence of Global South actors. In fact, it is mostly in the early 2000s that a comprehensive and inclusive debate gained momentum around the need to systematize the operational values of this sector, culminating with the “Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation” initiative established in Busan, South Korea in 2011. This key forum set the main international standards and the “principles of effective aid and good development to which all development actors should subscribe,”<sup>16</sup> asserting the fundamental drivers of development, above all human rights and democratic ownership of development plans. The Partnership helps the major actors of international cooperation such as the EU to deliver on the principles set out in the Treaties, i.e., indivisibility of human rights, democracy, the rule of law, respect for human dignity and equality.<sup>17</sup>

Among this ever evolving constellation of local and international actors cooperating for the promotion and development of HRHE, specialized educational organizations have emerged with blended backgrounds and expertise bridging the realms of classic formal higher education (universities), national or international governmental organizations and bodies, as well as practitioners (NGOs or civil society organizations [CSOs]). Incorporating the perspectives and experiences of the latter has been indispensable to the advent of the mentioned new hybrid entities, due to the fact that their work is marked by a high degree of responsiveness to quickly evolving challenges on the field. The Global Campus of Human Rights (GC), an academic network in action, constitutes itself an example of such a growing hybridity in the approach to HRHE. Its experience demonstrates that, if well devised and implemented, the union of these new innovative HRHE professional actors with development cooperation instruments can guarantee flexible and need-oriented methods in the field. By bringing the values of co-ownership

of the process - both at local and regional levels, and ensuring horizontality in the partnering relations, such methodology positions universities as key agents in steering policy change in support of HRHE.

### **The Growth of the Global Campus of Human Rights**

The Global Campus of Human Rights is the largest global network of universities specialized in human rights (GC) education and research, especially at the post-graduate level. The GC is currently organized as a network of networks, comprising about one hundred universities all over the world, grouped in seven regional hubs, which are the home to seven Master's Programs, as the organization's main field of activity, located in Venice for Europe (headquarters), in Sarajevo/Bologna for South East Europe, in Yerevan for the Caucasus, in Pretoria for Africa, in Buenos Aires for Latin America and the Caribbean, in Beirut for the Arab world and in Bangkok for Asia-Pacific. From its inception, the GC has been supported and funded by the European Union, and is today a priority action of its International Cooperation and Development (DEVCO) policy, under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), togeth-



**Structure of the Global Campus' networks and regional hubs.**

er with the two key international human rights institutions — the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and the International Criminal Court (ICC).

The current composition of the network is, however, the result of a nearly twenty-five years of tradition and expansion of its membership. The genesis of the network represented today by the GC can be traced back to the early 1990s and the European Inter-University Centre for Human Rights and Democratization (EIUC), a center of excellence, joining European Union-based universities in cooperating for the establishment of the European Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratization (EMA). Under the guidance of eminent human rights scholars, Professor Antonio Papisca of the University of Padua among others, this association of universities grew rapidly in the post-authoritarian contexts of Central and Eastern Europe and South Africa, strongly supporting the initial impetus for the idea that human rights education could be integrated on a national scale, and within curriculums at all levels, including universities.

At the end of the nineties, visionary high-ranking EU officials such as Daniela Napoli, encouraged the dissemination of the ideals of the recently created Programme to other world regions. The African Programme in Human Rights and Democratisation (HRDA), created in 2000 under the lead of Christof Heyns and Frans Viljon, established itself as an unparalleled network for the promotion of postgraduate human rights education in all the sub-regions of Africa in a matter of a few years, for which it was awarded the UNESCO Prize for Human Rights Education in 2006. The European Regional Master's Programme in Democracy and Human Rights in South East Europe (ERMA) – also created in the year 2000, under the initiative of Zdravko Grebo and Stefano Bianchini – strongly contributing to the development and legitimation of HRHE in the war-torn post-socialist countries of the post-Yugoslav and Balkan region, with the setting up of a double degree based in Bosnia and Herzegovina, coordinated by the Universities of Sarajevo and Bologna.<sup>18</sup>

The Latin America and the Caribbean, the Caucasus, and the Asia-Pacific Programmes – established as of 2010 – have built upon the established model and the many lessons learned from the experience of the development of the first regional Programmes. The Latin American Programme (LATMA), based at the University of San Martín's (UNSAM) in Buenos Aires is centered on the main themes of the region, including indig-

enous land rights, post-conflict situations, inequality and citizen security. The Asia-Pacific Programme (APMA), coordinated by Mahidol University in Bangkok, is projected on the Southeast Asian and Pacific perspective of human rights and democratization. The Caucasus Programme (CES), based at the University of Yerevan, focuses on challenges facing democracy, conflict, political stability, and human rights protection in the complex Eastern Partnership region. Finally, the development of the Arab World Programme (2014-2015), on the other hand, took a unique and innovative turn, given that its preparation was nurtured at EMA's base in Venice together with the support of Ca' Foscari University, to be then successfully housed and coordinated by the University of Saint Joseph in Beirut, in partnership with Birzeit University (Palestine), the International University of Rabat (Morocco), and the University of Carthage (Tunisia).<sup>19</sup>



The Global Campus of Human Rights Assembly in session at the University of Pretoria, December 2018.

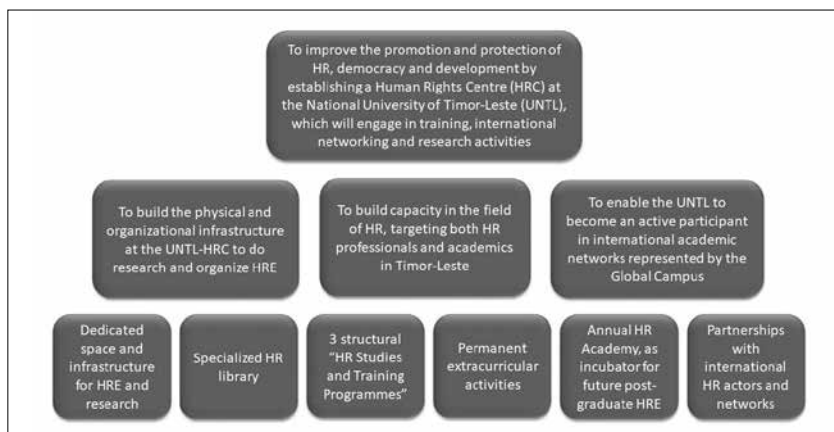
These seven Programmes were (and in most cases still are) the only postgraduate degrees in human rights in their respective regions. They offer specialized education, research and networking, operating in line with common principles of transversal and inter-disciplinary focus, experiential learning and networking, albeit with distinctive regional imprint, which is perhaps the most important lesson learned and the innovation in the development of the network. The GC, from 2018 the newly evolved legal and organizational iteration of the former EIUC, has greatly exceeded the initial EU mandate of realizing "a vision of a trans-European, interdisciplinary human rights education that would be built on the common knowledge and potential of professors and experts from the member universities, European institutions and civil society, enriched by field experience."<sup>20</sup> In fact, the GC nowadays incorporates the mission to develop HRHE both in the Global North and South through its joint activities including e-learning, high-lev-

el professional training, arts and human rights and capacity building. Its cross-regional and cross-thematic, interdisciplinary, and practice-oriented approach aims at stimulating multi-regional understanding and comparativism and fostering an increased legitimization of HRHE as an independent academic field. According to its current mission statement, the actions and the strategic plan of the GC are "based on the dissemination of universal values - including human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights - which are also core principles guiding the EU as a global player. Indeed, in our strategic plan we will work consistently with EU and UN policies."<sup>21</sup>

### **Developing HRHE at the National University of Timor-Leste**

Within the framework of its regional and cross-regional outreach initiatives, in January 2019 the GC started operating in the Republic of Timor-Leste through a new EU-funded capacity-building project aimed at mainstreaming human rights education and research at the National University of Timor-Leste (UNTL),<sup>22</sup> a need that was strategically identified by the Delegation of the European Union in Dili. At the core of the project lies the establishment of a Human Rights Centre based at the Faculty of Social Sciences, but active throughout the whole University, to become a platform for the mainstreaming of human rights education. The Centre is also envisaged to prepare the full membership of UNTL within the Global Campus Asia-Pacific regional hub, joining universities of neighboring and ASEAN countries such as Mahidol University (Thailand), Ateneo de Manila University (Philippines), Kathmandu School of Law (Nepal), Universitas Gadjah Madah (Indonesia) and University of Colombo (Sri Lanka) in 2021/22.

Having emerged from decades of brutal occupation and a bloody conflict following the independence referendum in 1999, Timor-Leste is still facing evident challenges as a young post-conflict State with limited capacities. Educational institutions were targeted during the conflict, leading to the destruction of school infrastructures, facilities and resources, and resulting in severe disruptions to the education process and outcomes. Despite numerous efforts to improve the conditions in the higher education sector undertaken by Timor-Leste, with ample assistance received from external stakeholders, numerous problems remain evident in terms of infrastructure, resources, administrative and academic capacities, as well as quality



Project Theory of Change.

and equitable access to higher education. As a young democracy with a remarkable track record of commitment to furthering human rights, which makes the country a widely recognized leading model of democratization in Southeast Asia, Timor-Leste was not yet independent when the UN Decade for Human Rights Education was launched in 1995. Despite that, recommendations advocating for the development of human rights curriculums and resources were already clearly set by the post-conflict truth and reconciliation commission (*Timor-Leste* Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation [CAVR]) in 2006, a milestone document that constitutes the basis of the GC local project:<sup>23</sup>

The Ministry of Education in the Government of Timor-Leste works with the post-CAVR institution to utilise the Final Report and other Commission materials in the development of curricula and other educational resources related to human rights, reconciliation, history, law, gender studies and other relevant disciplines.

Also thanks to the favorable socio-political preconditions encountered, the project has proven to be particularly successful from its early stages. After extensive reconstruction works, the inauguration ceremony of the premises of the new Centre took place in August 2019 as part of the official high-level State celebrations for the twentieth anniversary of the independence referendum. The opening ceremony was attended by State and diplomatic del-



egations and notable figures, the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Culture, and the Peace Nobel Laureate and former President Josè Ramos-Horta who declared that “the Human Rights Centre is a great initiative, that will first reach out to our youth so that they will understand what are the fundamental human rights that come from our own Constitution and from the treaties we have ratified (...). This is like an insurance for the rule of law, democracy and freedom.”<sup>24</sup>

Since the Centre’s inauguration, a new generation of future lecturers, researchers and managers is being forged 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 meantime, the Centre has also been growing as a lively hub for learning, discussing and engaging for most pressing local human rights causes, thanks to weekly public events involving hundreds of youngsters each semester, and thanks to several outreach activities linking to local CSOs, as well as all key national and international stakeholders, as for instance the Office of the Ombudsperson for Human Rights (Office of the Provedor for Human Rights and Justice [PDHJ]), the local network of human rights defenders (Rede Defensor Direitos Umanus [RDDU]) and the UN system in Timor-Leste.

Remarkably, the establishment of the Centre was selected by the European Union among thousands of other development cooperation projects as a success story for the *Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World 2019*.<sup>25</sup> Most importantly, on 15 July 2020 the UNTL Council of Management approved with unanimity the establishment of “Human Rights and Democratization” as a new integrated transversal discipline, mandatory in all undergraduate programs of UNTL from the academic year 2021/22. The mainstreaming of human rights education on this scale means that, in practice, each future graduate of the country’s National University will have acquired the fundamentals of human rights as part of their education. In a country where nearly half of the population is under the age of eighteen, the potential for transformative societal contribution of such an innovation is highly significant.

## **Ownership, Outputs, Impact**

In terms of project results, the aforementioned structural provision exceeded the initial expectations set by the EU, paving the way to the shaping of a policy change that is the fruit of a clear willingness by the beneficiary University, which emerged at the end of a comprehensive mapping and consultation process undertaken by the GC and involving all layers of the UNTL structure and its nine Faculties. This approach, at the implementation level, was inspired by the successful work at the GC Regional Programme for South East Europe (ERMA). Beside the post-conflict component having similarity to the Timorese context, ERMA was created as a strongly co-owned endeavor among two partnering academic institutions, the Universities of Sarajevo and Bologna – currently the only case of a joint program in the network.

The mapping and consultation with UNTL revealed a very pro-active and progressive spirit by the beneficiary, together with the recognition of the multidisciplinary nature of the human rights studies, beyond the more conservative and still widespread relegation of human rights to the sole fields of law or political studies. Moreover, it demonstrates how in Timor-Leste human rights are solidly interwoven into the national narrative, being strongly identified with its recent and successful struggle for self-determination and independence, hence strongly legitimized as a driver of development. This dynamic is particularly consistent with the recent historical trajectory of Timor-Leste and is not surprising. In fact, as argued by F. Yeban, while “human rights education in post-conflict or post-colonial countries tends to be associated with the rule of law and efforts by authorities attempting to establish their legitimacy (...) in countries that are democratic but struggling with development [human rights education] is often oriented towards the infusion of human rights principles vis-a-vis sustainable development.”<sup>26</sup> At the same time, the existence of a conducive environment for the establishment of HRHE in Timor-Leste should not be taken for granted, either in the regional perspective or beyond it, and should be instead highly regarded as one of the several positive factors encountered locally, that made the final results of this project as well as the development of human rights education very promising in general, notwithstanding the local limitations that will be discussed below.

The initiative to launch a comprehensive series of consultations with the UNTL stems from GC's profound commitment to ensuring an inclusive process so that the project is structurally developed in cooperation with the local beneficiary in a manner which would organically cater to local needs and specificities and ensure its sustainability. This collaborative process resulted in major breakthroughs which helped with a substantial broadening of the Project. The initially foreseen training program for the future human rights lecturers and researchers was thus restructured and customized to reflect jointly identified needs and potential of the beneficiary. Interestingly, the greatest breakthrough with regard to this outcome was born during the meeting with the Dean of the Faculty of Hard Sciences who suggested that the best modality for the mainstreaming of human rights into UNTL curriculums would be by introducing the topic into its transversal courses (obligatory university-wide), either as a separate course, or integrated into the existing Civic Education course. Another breakthrough came about during the meeting with the Dean of Social Sciences who suggested to extend the training to a team of selected best graduating students and alumni, who would complement the lecturers' work as teaching assistants, hence fostering a trans-generational ownership of the process.

Finally, twenty-seven beneficiaries were identified and selected to complete three customized Human Rights Studies and Training Programs for six emerging human rights defenders from local civil society, fifteen professors belonging to all nine Faculties and six graduating students and alumni from the Faculty of Social Sciences. All three programs have been designed following a triadic structure: Phase 1 - a preparatory training (aiming to ameliorate existing structural gaps threatening to negatively impact the training program results – primarily related to English language proficiency and academic skills); Phase 2 - the core educational segment; and Phase 3 - internship/fellowship.

Alongside the development of skills and expertise, and of a syllabus with its correlated teaching plan for the implementation of the new course, the production of original teaching materials constitutes one of the crucial undertakings of the project. The final product of this is a general textbook in three languages, Tetum, English, and Portuguese. This does not only provide access to relevant international academic sources by Timorese students (with the aid of Tetum translations), but also widens the range of possibilities for international cooperation – for instance, by hosting inter-

national students and researchers who choose to spend their mobility or exchange periods in Timor-Leste, as prospectively foreseen by the membership in the GC Regional Programme. The textbook is based on the textbook *Introduction to Human Rights in Southeast Asia*, published under a Creative Commons license by the Southeast Asian Human Rights Studies Network (SEAHNRN), aiming at contributing to the promotion of human rights education in Southeast Asia, as well as current and prospective ASEAN countries. Written by a team of human rights academics from regional universities and editorially coordinated by Mahidol University, it is designed for undergraduate students who study general courses on human rights, and places human rights in a Southeast Asian context, using regional examples and examining regional laws, politics, and practices.

Adapting this textbook to the Timorese context and the transversal course was methodologically set as a participatory joint endeavor by the beneficiaries of the Training Programs and in consultation with the local human rights CSO network. During their fellowship period, the UNTL lecturers and professors worked with their colleagues of the GC and Mahidol University in selecting the most pertinent contents, abridging, and adapting them so as to infuse them with contents relevant to Timor-Leste. The beneficiaries of the 1st Training Program (Human Rights Defenders) on the



Global Campus lecturers at Mahidol University (Bangkok) together with the Timorese human rights defenders, selected to join the capacity building project for the establishment of the Human Rights Centre at the National University in Dili.

other hand, constituted the key to the successful language adaptation and final shaping of the teaching materials. As graduates of the English-language MA in Human Rights and Democratization in the Asia-Pacific (the regional program coordinated by the GC with Mahidol University), they have demonstrated to be better equipped to translate human rights subject-specific terminology from English into Tetum than local translation agencies. This is particularly relevant given that Tetum is a language which has not been standardized.

Along with being a platform for the implementation of the three structural “Studies and Training Programmes”, during the course of the project the Human Rights Centre has rapidly become a point of reference for those interested in human rights education within the local academic community and the civil society at large, including aspiring human rights workers and professionals. The Centre has gradually become a space for open and respectful exchange and debate thanks to a set of regular extracurricular activities such as weekly “Human Rights Talks” and “Human Rights & Cinema” events aimed primarily at UNTL students and professors, as well as the “Fridays at the HRC” aimed at Timorese civil society, in particular small grassroots organizations and activists. These activities are organized in a



University students at the UNTL Human Rights Centre in Dili during the event marking the “International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.”

multilingual way (Tetum, Portuguese and English) to contribute in creating an inclusive environment, while also fostering language acquisition.

Moreover, the methodology applied in the project has been based on a multi-stakeholder active involvement and careful of local ownership, allowing high degree of consistency with the five main areas of intervention set by the World Programme for a successful integration of human rights education into local education systems:

1. Permanent policy measures - adoption of the new transversal course determines a structural change in the public higher education standards;
2. Teaching and learning processes and tools - creation of customized teaching materials, such as the multilingual textbook and the teaching plan mindful of local human rights priorities, especially considering the inputs of CSOs and other local stakeholders;
3. Research - developed with special thanks to the capacity-building of the six human rights defenders, who produced a series of original research outputs based on post-graduate studies and data gathering conducted as part of their "Studies and Training Programme", published regionally and internationally by specialized HRHE institutions;
4. Learning environment - it is necessary to underline the remarkable degree of academic freedom enjoyed locally, as a direct consequence of the aforementioned socio-political drivers; and
5. Professional development of higher education teaching personnel - this was substantiated by the strong commitment of the beneficiary university and decisive request to expand the number of trainees, involving a wider pool of permanent professors, so that all Faculties could be represented.

At the same time, it is important to note that the experience of the project has demonstrated great practical and operational constraints that have been making the implementation of HRHE actions particularly demanding locally, and the UNTL, among the youngest institutions rebuilt in the post-war Timor-Leste, is still undergoing its internal consolidation. These issues are mostly connected to the very limited office work capacities (strongly hindered by lack of access to internet, use of basic IT equipment, constant uncertainties over planning and follow-up) and the availability of crucial

academic skills (e.g., overall, only eight professors out of seventy-one at the Faculty of Social Sciences hold a PhD, while the great majority of MA holders have degrees obtained during the hardship of partition times with Indonesia, which has severely impaired the learning process and outcomes). Another major challenge has been the dysfunctionality caused by what can be called the “unfulfilled plurilinguism” in Timor-Leste, where *de facto* none of the national languages (Portuguese and Tetum) can be regarded as a fully functional tool of communication (and instruction), as they are not spoken or understood at the same level by different generations. All these challenges generated consistent extra needs in terms of workload and financial resources to be successfully mitigated.

Despite these complexities, the results achieved constitute a very solid basis upon which enduring human rights education initiatives can be enshrined, starting with the new Human Rights Centre which, if it lives up to its full potential, could constitute a valuable complementary addition to the Timorese landscape of established human rights institutions, such as the CNC – Centro Nacional Chega! and the PDHJ - Provedoria dos Direitos Humanos e Justiça. This, together with the genuine political support gathered, the international recognition, the willingness to cooperate from key sectorial stakeholders and national authorities, and thanks to the support of development cooperation partners, should ensure a promising future to



The first extra-curricular activity of the new Human Rights Centre in Dili, featuring a seminar on the role of the NHRI with the Ombudsperson for Human Rights and Justice of Timor-Leste (PDHJ), October 2019.

the Human Rights Centre and broadly to the development of human rights education at UNTL, even at the post-graduate level.

## **Conclusions**

The work of the Global Campus of Human Rights, and especially the example of its latest project at the National University of Timor-Leste, represents a tangible example of the interplay between HRHE actors such as specialized, flexible, field-work based academic institutions, with human rights-based development cooperation instruments. These two spheres successfully join forces to be the key supporters and drivers of policy change in human rights education, linking the concrete needs of the final beneficiaries with the creation of a broad local (and regional) ownership of the process. In Timor-Leste such interaction identified and addressed the primary challenges for human rights education that the WPHRE identifies in the formal recognition by educational policymakers, and in the permanent integration as component of national curricular frameworks, which can be practically achieved only by providing beneficiaries with solid and ample skills and resources, in a shared control of the process.

The emergence of joint, international, multi-stakeholder and co-owned HRHE programs, as those coordinated by the GC through the aggregate potential represented by its network of universities, have the opportunity to credibly contribute to the steering of HRHE evolution, addressing the existent diversity of approaches, setting new models and standards, thereby boosting the impact of HRHE, especially where its affirmation or protection is most needed. In this sense, the successful GC-UNTL collaboration in Timor-Leste allowed for the creation from scratch, and then the consolidation, of the whole human rights education system of the beneficiary university, in this case the only public university of the country.

The structural needs and manifold constraints encountered during the project propelled the GC to further develop a unique working methodology, suitable to build capacities of universities especially in developing countries of the Global South. This has built upon the experiences and good practices gathered over twenty years through its regional hubs around the world, which have engendered an innovative approach to capacity-building, demanding not only academic expertise (typical of classic academic institutions), but also solid know-how in cooperation work, public diplomacy



and international relations, as key assets and needs. In fact, the work mode of the GC allows for the enhancement of the impact of development co-operation actions, by promoting local and regional co-ownership, as well as horizontality of the relations among the partner universities, acting as a conduit between the beneficiary and the donor. This practice-oriented approach well describes the emerging hybridity of the GC in its outreach role and intersection with development cooperation for human rights higher education, and prospectively sets a model with high multiplicative potential for replication in countries in need.

## Endnotes

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\*\* Due to the editorial cycle, this article was written before the official closure of the project, hence minor changes might have occurred in its implementation and timeline, especially in light of the restrictions and limitations that emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic.

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