

Introduction

THIS VOLUME compiles a number of reports that speak of experiences and lessons learned in implementing educational programs.

Programs

The articles cover programs that are differentiated by participants, objectives and issues involved. The program participants include migrant workers in Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines and Hong Kong, non-governmental organization workers in the Philippines, youth from rural communities in Pakistan and Sri Lanka, community leaders from Timor Leste, Indonesia and the Philippines, school teachers in Japan, education and government officials in Australia and other countries.

In all these programs, the objective is empowerment. Transit Workers Count Too (TWC2) and Justice Without Borders (JWB) both provide the migrant workers appropriate information regarding labor-related issues, their corresponding legal/human rights and the remedies. JWB goes further by training the migrant workers to become paralegals who can talk to their fellow migrant workers and prepare the necessary information on their claim for unpaid salary and damages due them.

The programs for the youth in Pakistan and Sri Lanka provide exposure to different communities (Pakistan) and ethnic groups (Sri Lanka) that facilitate better understanding of issues that cause the poverty and marginalization of their communities. The program of Institute of Development Studies and Practices (IDSP) stresses the need for reflection on both their thinking and behavior regarding issues that affect their communities. The program of Search for Common Ground encourages the youth to remember (memorialize) the conflict that had divided ethnic groups for decades and facilitate reconciliation and avoidance of further conflict. But such remembering or memorialization has no particular model to follow. It is done in accordance with the culture and tradition of the community that remembers or memorializes the victims of the conflict.

A similar exercise, as form of empowerment, is done at the AJAR Learning Centre at Kampung Damai of Asia Justice and Rights. People from communities in Timor Leste, Indonesia and other countries that suffered conflict and violence are guided on how they can analyze and respond to

their suffering. The trained community representatives are then able to act in their communities as advocates of peace and human rights. Non-governmental organization workers and community leaders being trained by the members of the Alternative Law Groups (ALG) are also being empowered to be able to protect the rights of marginalized communities through existing legal mechanisms.

The Japan Teachers Union (JTU) provides avenues for their members to share and discuss experiences in teaching about issues and related human rights. Such experience sharing helps teachers gain practical knowledge from fellow teachers on teaching human rights and enables them to continue the task.

The Liberation War Museum, on the other hand, provides the opportunity for school children to understand the violence and injustice of the past through its mobile museum and to know how the past affected their own families and neighbors by collecting stories about life during the war for liberation. For students at the tertiary level in Southeast Asia, engaging them in debate on human rights issues is a beneficial exercise in learning (through research) about human rights issues and discussing them in a debate platform.

Both the training of teachers and the extra-curricular activities of children are highlighted as important components on education about peace (and human rights) in the analysis of educational policies of India.

The pilot project of the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) shows examples of ways of making government officials gain the confidence to raise the issue of harassment and other forms of abuse and discrimination that occur in the workplace, and for the office managers to provide the appropriate environment to make this happen. The dialogues among government officials from ASEAN member-states, on the other hand, provide the opportunity for experience sharing and discussion of practical measures to protect, promote and realize human rights.

Learnings

Several articles provide significant lessons learned in the implementation of educational programs related to human rights. The article on memorialization in Sri Lanka discusses the importance of personal encounter among people belonging to different ethnic groups in minimizing prejudice and

discrimination that constituted the root cause of the armed conflict. Visit to the homes of people from other ethnic groups dispels fear and creates bond among them. This activity leads to a better appreciation and acceptance of differences in culture and thinking of ethnic groups, and a more nuanced understanding of the suffering endured during the period of armed conflict. Similarly, visits by youth participants to communities other than their own in Sindh and Northern areas in Pakistan provide opportunities for dialogue on a number of issues. The community visits “helped the participants to debunk cultural stereotypes, see the plight of Hindu minority, understand the feudal system and experience interaction with people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.” Stories and views expressed by members of the communities provide essential understanding of issues that beset people in rural areas.

Educational efforts at preventing extreme violence require measures such as “mitigating feelings of isolation or exclusion by establishing positive connections between students’ own worlds and the worlds of others,” and providing “alternatives to violence and violent extremism by cultivating attitudes and values that encourage students to participate as active citizens in their communities.” Educational efforts for those who suffered from conflict and violence, on the other hand, provide the “opportunity to learn about how non-formal education influences healing for victims of trauma and how to help those individuals become empowered to assert their rights for transitional justice and accountability for human rights violations.” Hedayah points to practical measures of changing thinking and behavior in this regard.

In training people on how to properly react to situations of abuse or violation of human rights, that is, raising a voice to stop the acts of abuse or violation or to change practice and system, the VEOHRC pilot project reveals the need for a “more iterative implementation of the program [that] would provide more support by enabling participants to further practice these skills and troubleshoot some of these challenges in a supportive environment.”

The same project also stresses the need to tailor training program or module to the specific situations of the participants to make them more effective. Similarly, the experience of the Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR) in training field workers shows the need to create “training modules for individuals working with AJAR to better understand how to work with survivors of trauma, including key skills and principles for working with them effec-

tively.” The Education for Shared Societies (E4SS) headed by Hedayah echoes the same rule regarding its educational recommendations: “A guiding principle in the implementation of these recommendations is that they should not be considered universal, but rather guidelines that should be tailored to fit local needs and contexts.” Knowledge and skills have to be appropriate to the context of the participants to ensure their application after the training.

Raising awareness of the general public is a big challenge. There can be numerous messages for different purposes that compete with the human rights messages. However, specific human rights issues may attract more attention, especially when they relate to the daily life of people or to an important player in the national economy. The issues regarding domestic help who work in private homes and migrant workers who are a key resource in construction, service and manufacturing industries in Singapore attract public attention through appropriate educational activities. This public attention is useful in pressuring the government to change policy. As experienced by Transit Workers Count Too (TWC2), “[P]ublic engagement to broaden popular awareness of migrant workers and their rights and encourage support has played a role in bringing about such changes as have occurred, and we think that it has been laying a good foundation for further advances in years to come.” The changes refer to government policies regarding “better securing workers’ pay, days off for domestic workers, and improving accommodation, transport and safety standards.”

In the case of the Association for Toyonaka Multicultural Symbiosis (ATOMS), engaging the public has at least two major objectives: a) to make the Japanese public in the city understand the situation of the non-Japanese residents; and b) to gain public support for the protection and realization of their (non-Japanese residents’) rights. In line with these objectives, ATOMS sees the necessity of focusing on specific issues of non-Japanese residents and offers services beyond “mere provision of information... [but]... are meant to empower [them] ... in engaging the Japanese residents towards “Creating a fair and sustainable, multicultural symbiotic society.”

Practical Suggestions on Educational Programs

Several articles provide concrete recommendations on how to effectively implement educational programs. These recommendations are based on

program or project evaluation and take the form of practical measures that facilitate better program or project implementation.

The evaluation of the Sri Lanka project of Search for Common Ground recommends that “[O]verall, skills building should be more practical, more hands-on, and draw more from real life examples so that the youth can see their applicability to their own lived circumstances better.” It also recommends that “[M]ore needs to be done after workshops end, to promote networking and developing structures of mutual support between participating youth.”

Regarding the use of the “Champions model,” the evaluation of Community Memorialization Project in Sri Lanka recommends “[S]upport [for] the champions to build their knowledge and conflict resolution skills by engaging with small-scale conflicts in their own communities, before engaging with large-scale conflict at the national level.” VEORHC recommends more training to be provided to “Champions on how to be effective facilitators.” And “ongoing opportunity to debrief/get support from the Commission staff” could make the Champions model “an even more effective approach to [project] implementation.”

These are some of the major contents of the articles in this volume.

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