

Introduction

THE EBBING OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC caused a seeming increase of human rights promotion and education activities in 2023 in Asia-Pacific to almost pre-pandemic scale. National-level human rights promotion and education activities are being held alongside those at the Asia-Pacific level.

Volume 13 of this publication reflects this situation and highlights activities that reach out to communities and provides examples of programs in both formal and non-formal education systems.

New International Guide

2023 is also the year when UNESCO adopted the revised version of the 1974 Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

UNESCO announced on 20 November 2023 that “194 UNESCO Member States adopted the Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development at UNESCO’s General Conference.”¹

This 2023 Recommendation is considered necessary for a number of reasons, such as the following:

Our generation is facing threats such as democratic backsliding and the spread of violent and hateful ideologies and conspiracy theories. Our life on our planet is also under threat due to pollution, climate change and the loss of biodiversity which are causing unforeseen tensions, and challenges to health and well-being.

On the positive side, the international community is equipped today with a solid array of normative instruments and technological tools to foster peace and non-violence, which didn’t exist in 1974. We also have data and a rich body of research in education to develop sound policies and monitor their impact.

The revised Recommendation is the “only global standard-setting instrument that lays out how education should be used to bring about last-

ing peace and foster human development through 14 guiding principles.” It wants to ensure²

all people, throughout their life, are **equipped and empowered** with the knowledge, skills, including socio-emotional skills, values, attitudes and behaviours needed for **effective participation in democratic decision-making processes, economic empowerment, awareness-raising and individual and collective actions at community, local, national, regional and global levels** that advance peace and promote international understanding, cooperation, poverty eradication and tolerance, in order to ensure the full enjoyment of human rights, fundamental freedoms, global citizenship and sustainable development through education. (emphasis mine)

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, “adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future.”³ Among the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Goal 4 mentions human rights in its Target 7:⁴

By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, **human rights, gender equality**, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development. (emphasis mine)

The indicator of target 4.7 states:⁵

Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development are mainstreamed in (a) national education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education and (d) student assessment.

It is notable that human rights education is not one of the “educations” in this SDG Indicator. The teaching of human rights in relation to the SDGs needs mainstreaming in the school system in many countries, or needs strengthening in countries that have formally adopted human rights education policies.

UNESCO explains that since Goal 4.7 mentions several topics,⁶

When resources are not sufficient to address all topics, it is only natural to prioritize. In this process, global citizenship education, if prioritized, can be treated as an entry point to address the other topics, such as human rights, culture of peace, non-violence, and cultural diversity.

National Plans

Complementing the international guides on human rights promotion and education are national plans on specific tasks that both the government and the civil society or the non-governmental sector should implement.

The Ministry of Human Rights in Pakistan issued the National Policy Framework on Human Rights – 2022-2027 that includes the principles of⁷

- “emphasizing on the human rights education and training”
- “Modernizing the school, college and university curricula to include human rights concepts”
- “Improving the training and SOPs [standard operating procedures] of the police, prison staff and lower and mid-level judiciary.”

It has specific provisions on human rights promotion and education to address issues related to child rights, women’s rights, rights of minorities, rights of persons with disabilities, and senior citizen’s rights. There is a section on “Awareness Raising and Advocacy Campaign.”

The government of the Republic of Uzbekistan adopted on 7 February 2023 the National Programme for Human Rights Education. This National Programme was drafted by a National Commission for the implementation of the fourth phase of the United Nations World Programme for Human Rights Education. The National Programme is also supported by the National Human Rights Centre of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

More specifically, the National Programme aims

To foster a sense of respect for human rights and freedoms in society and ensure that the recommendations of international organizations are fully implemented, it is necessary to organize on a systematic basis work to improve the human rights expertise of judicial, law enforcement, and other state bodies.

In order to effectively carry out the tasks outlined in the National Strategy of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Human Rights, the issue of organizing human rights education, reflecting new approaches, methodologies, and practices is put on the agenda. This is done while taking into account the commitments made by the country within the framework of international documents, as well as new threats and problems caused by the pandemic and its consequences.

Shortcomings in this area impede the growth of the population's legal literacy, particularly among young people, the development of their sense of respect for human rights and freedoms, and the development of the knowledge and expertise of civil servants in the area of human rights and gender equality.

The National Programme has an accompanying “Roadmap” which provides details on how the human rights promotion and education activities should be implemented and identifies the government and other institutions that should work together to implement them. See the Appendix of this publication for the full “Roadmap” document.

National plans are important in guiding governments and non-governmental institutions in undertaking human rights promotion and education activities. They constitute a critical element in pursuing human rights promotion and education at the national and local levels. They minimize resistance to human rights and human rights promotion and education by government agencies and officials as well as some people in society.

Varied Initiatives

This volume presents varied types of human rights promotion and education activities. The activities range from campaigns to outreach programs, and from non-formal training to formal education courses. There are different players involved from a student organization to non-governmental organizations, from a special court to national human rights institutions.

On awareness-raising, the articles from Cambodia, Pacific islands and Taiwan present concrete ways of making the general public aware and informed of human rights issues and concepts. The articles discuss study tours, museum visits, art competitions, rallies, and television and online media promotions. These activities have direct effect on people who participate or even watch or witness the activities.

On non-formal education, the training of human rights workers, government officials, company officials and employees, law students, paralegals and lawyers is discussed in articles from India, Cambodia, Japan and Yemen. The training programs vary from one group to another, but they all concentrate on providing practical skills of protecting and realizing the human rights of the people they work with (particularly the disadvantaged groups in society as in the case of the Indian article), or documenting them to hold people accountable for human rights violations and abuse (as discussed in the article from Yemen). The training content ranges from learning laws and legal procedures relevant to human rights, to learning skills in documenting human rights violations, to filing petitions in government offices and the courts, to working with communities to address human rights issues.

Human rights courses exist in tertiary education as shown in courses in a number of universities in Japan and in a teacher education university in Pakistan. The main concern is on the human rights content and teaching method that should be applied in teaching human rights at the tertiary level of education.

There is also integration of human rights education into the school curriculum discussed in the context of Global Citizenship Education. This is presented in the article from the Philippines. This article somehow follows the UNESCO view that in case of limited resources, human rights and other concerns can be learned through GCED. But in the context of the Philippines, this approach may overlap human rights education that has supposedly been integrated in the school curriculum.

The article from Hong Kong provides detailed discussion of the challenges of inclusive education. The needed support system can be expensive in terms of professionally trained staff, support from the teachers and school officials, and school facilities. There is likewise opposition from parents who want their children with disabilities to enter the competitive higher levels of education without considering the difficulties and disadvantage their children will face. Inclusive education is a vehicle for human rights education for educators and parents who make efforts to realize the right to education of children with disabilities.

These articles are indicative of the complexity of human rights promotion and education work at the ground-level in the Asia-Pacific. Issues in society as well as the institutions that undertake human rights promotion and

education determine the variety of programs and activities being developed for specific contexts and objectives.

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Endnotes

1 UNESCO adopts landmark guidance on education's cross-cutting role in promoting peace, UNESCO, www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-adopts-landmark-guidance-educations-cross-cutting-role-promoting-peace.

2 UNESCO adopts landmark guidance on education's cross-cutting role in promoting peace, *ibid*.

3 History, Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals#history>.

4 Global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, United Nations, https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/Global%20Indicator%20Framework%20after%202023%20refinement_Eng.pdf.

5 Global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, *ibid*.

6 The ABCs of Global Citizenship Education, UNESCO, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248232>.

7 National Policy Framework on Human Rights – 2022-2027, Ministry of Human Rights, <https://mohr.gov.pk/SiteImage/Misc/files/NPFW%20on%20HR%2022-27.pdf>.