

Introduction

THE MAIN OBJECTIVE OF *Human Rights Education in Asia-Pacific* is to bring out to a larger audience the experiences of individuals and institutions on human rights promotion and education in different countries in Asia and the Pacific.

The experiences of practitioners are significant guideposts for fellow practitioners. In fact, practitioners always learn from each other. This is true among human rights educators.

The diversity of contents of the articles in this volume underlies the rich menu of lessons to learn from.

Sectoral Issues

Several articles dwell on specific sectors such as persons with disabilities, children, young girls, youth, Indigenous Peoples, migrant workers, and men/fathers, as well as local government officials and non-governmental organization workers. The articles explain the different thinking and approaches in dealing with specific sectoral issues. There are similarities among these experiences, however, as explained below.

The articles express the need for these sectors to have a voice in matters that affect them. Such voice has to be expressed at different levels – from personal interaction with those willing to listen to them, to platforms for society to hear them, to opportunities for governments to receive their demands, to forums of international human rights mechanisms that are tasked to address their issues.

Human rights promotion and education play a significant role in enabling the members of the sectors and their supporters to raise this voice at such varied levels and to facilitate change.

The articles discuss the characteristics and situations unique to each sector that define the sectoral human rights promotion and education program.

Thus, Maselina Iuta explains that for persons with disabilities who do not know the sign language, there is a need to use gestures, facial expression, or whatever is used in the country to communicate with them that would make them feel included since their own way of communicating is being used.

To Aiki Matsukura, human rights education can also mean “accepting the persons right in front of you as they are, reaching out to them and getting involved in their situation so they could realize or get back the potential they have or originally had - the power to live, strength to believe in themselves, or the strength and mindset to care for their own selves.”

SERATA, on the other hand, “engages boys and men in activities and programs meant to promote healthy masculinity so that men may become allies of women in the pursuit towards dismantling sexist patriarchal structures.”

In the case of prefectural or provincial level program, a network of people and organizations working on human rights is a key element in implementing a human rights promotion and education program. This is the role being played by the Osaka Prefectural Human Rights Association whose program is meant to reach municipal employees, and promoting human rights training for “people working in welfare and medicine” and “private bodies, corporations, etc.”

The larger society needs to have a human rights promotion and education program in order to effectively address the problems of sectors that do not enjoy their rights. As explained by Iuta, human rights are:

Not only for people with disabilities to understand their own human rights, but also for people without disabilities, so they can understand that everyone has the same rights and they too can support the promotion of accessible and inclusive opportunities. (emphasis mine) (see page 20 of this volume)

Developing a Program

An important component in documenting experiences on human rights promotion and education work is about the development of program and activities. What initiated the development of a program? How did it develop? Why were certain activities chosen? And what changes were made in the activities over time?

Answers to these questions enlighten people who are interested in human rights promotion and education. They can trigger examining one’s existing program and the corresponding activities. They can inspire the adoption of a different or new perspective and approach, and new activities. They can bring confidence to those who are planning to create their own program and activities on human rights promotion and education.

The article on the Kiwa Initiative explains how a human rights promotion and education program can develop focusing on a “new” issue – the link of climate change to human rights.

In the context of the Pacific Island States, discussing climate change in light of human rights adds a significant element in addressing climate-related problems. What kind of human rights promotion and education program must then be adopted?

Climate-related problems led to the adoption of new principles and frameworks. The United Nations want rights-based, gender-sensitive and socially inclusive nature-based solutions. What would these solutions really mean?

The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) has defined nature-based solutions in the following manner:

Resolution 5 defines the concept of nature-based solutions as actions to protect, conserve, restore, sustainably use and manage natural or modified terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems and calls for more collaboration and resources.

This is explained as

[...] actions to protect, conserve, restore, sustainably use, and manage natural or modified terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems, which address social, economic, and environmental challenges effectively and adaptively, while simultaneously providing human well-being, ecosystem services and resilience, and biodiversity benefits.

The UNEA definition became known as UNEA 5.2 (adopted during the second session of the 5th United Nations Environment Assembly, 28 February to 2 March 2022 in Nairobi, Kenya). Nature-based Solutions or NbS became a new principle that should be reconciled with human rights principles.

As explained in the Kiwa Initiative article, the United Nations’ Human Rights Council recognized the “right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment to address the human rights impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution and to ensure rights-based environmental action.” This statement is useful in linking NbS with human rights.

The Kiwa Initiative did the right approach of bringing people on the environment and human rights fields to develop the program together.

Human rights (including ideas such as Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion [GEDSI] and human rights-based approach) have to be merged with environmental concerns through “three main pathways: (1) the development of resources and training material, (2) the facilitation of a Community of Practice (CoP) and (3) awareness and capacities development on human rights and GEDSI.”

Training for Advocacy

Several articles discuss training for advocacy work. The ASEAN Youth Forum (AYF) aims to empower the youth in Southeast Asia to enable them to actively participate in different activities supporting the rights of the youth. The Migrant Forum Asia (MFA) aims to train migrant leaders and non-governmental workers on advocacy for the protection of the migrant workers.

Both AYF and MFA support the need to engage governments in ensuring that the rights of their sector (youth and migrant workers respectively) are protected and realized. Thus they have educational programs that support advocacy.

AYF defines advocacy:

Advocacy involves promoting a cause or issue, and it can take many forms, such as public speaking, organizing events, lobbying government officials, and using the social media to raise awareness. Effective advocacy requires strategic planning, effective communication, and the ability to build alliances and coalitions. (see page 97 of this volume)

MFA defines the need for advocacy:

amplifying their [migrant workers'] voices by equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills in advocating for themselves as well as establishing a strong support system is crucial in ensuring that they are able to carry out the work that they do and the services that they provide. (see page 169 of this volume)

The Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact's (AIPP) “work is grounded and functions at broader levels (local/national to regional and global levels); working with decision-makers, governments, United Nations (UN) agencies and cor-

porations, to be able to speak out on bigger issues that pervade Indigenous communities.” Thus, it

has developed its expertise on grassroots capacity-building, advocacy and networking from local to global levels and strengthening partnerships with indigenous organizations, support non-governmental organizations (NGOs), UN agencies and other institutions. (see page 126 of this volume)

AYF, AIPP and MFA undertake various activities to help develop knowledge and skills needed in the advocacy work of their members (individuals and organizations). The need for training on advocacy work is seen in the activities of AIPP:

AIPP supports Indigenous Peoples Human Rights Defenders (IPH RDs) and Indigenous leaders to effectively engage and influence the human rights mechanisms at the regional and global levels by consolidating common advocacy strategy and strengthening the engagement with national human rights institutions (Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines), and engaging with the UN mechanisms. (see page 129 of this volume)

Additionally, the adoption of the Yangon Declaration in 2014 provided AYF with the guiding principles in its work. It states that AYF is a “youth-based, autonomous and independent regional movement that represents the voices of young Southeast Asians, and [acts] to monitor and evaluate the implementation of youth-related policies, agenda, and recommendations.”

The Yangon Declaration provides an essential frame within which AYF’s human rights promotion and education program can evolve over time. See Annex of the AYF article on pages 121-124 for the full document of the Yangon Declaration.

Continued Learning

The Kiwa Initiative has its Community of Practice (CoP), which plays a significant role in the continued development and sustainability of its human rights promotion and education program. CoP facilitates continued discus-

sion and sharing of experiences by people involved in environmental issues on “critical areas” “where human rights and Nature-based Solutions (NbS) projects intersect, including culturally appropriate human rights-based approaches when working with communities, inclusive facilitation, as well engagement with, and for, people with disabilities, as a key cross-cutting issue.” (see page 152 of this volume)

Similarly, MFA maintains “regular online conversations to discuss different thematic issues, sharing good practices and lessons learned, as well as improving coordination amongst each other such as building connections to better provide services for migrants within their communities (i.e., establishing referral systems for case work and legal assistance, identifying support for return and reintegration, etc.).”

Training must not be a stand-alone or one-off activity. Kiwa Initiative and MFA provide the examples that illustrate how continued learning can be facilitated after the training workshops ended.

This also relates to the need for sustainable human rights promotion and education program that evolves as situations change and new challenges arise.

Formal Education

Human rights are learned in the formal education system from primary to tertiary and higher levels. Experiences from Uzbekistan, Japan and Iran show the learning of human rights using an international educational initiative (Global Citizenship Education (GCED) and in relation to social values and religion. Yumi Takahashi uses GCED to teach women empowerment, gender equality and also Sustainable Development Goals to her students. JD Parker discusses the need to use existing societal values by incorporating “cultural traditions that value harmony, community, and respect for others.” Mahya Saffarinia discusses the teaching of human rights in relation to Islam, and emphasizes the diversity of views on how such link should be discussed and taught at the tertiary level in Iran.

Finally, Tomas Fast points out that societal values and national agenda affect educational policies such as “Zest for Life” (*ikiru chikara*), global *jinzai* or global human resources in the case of Japan that in turn may affect the teaching of human rights.

Human Rights Promotion and Education

This 14th volume of *Human Rights Education in Asia-Pacific* provides another set of documentation and analysis of activities on disseminating knowledge on human rights as well as developing skills needed to take action on them.

This publication stresses “human rights promotion and education” to emphasize the activities that are covered under it. Such activities range from raising public awareness on human rights to activities that are designed to provide comprehensive understanding of rights and the practices that protect and realize them.

Educational programs benefit from awareness of human rights gained by people through popular modes of disseminating human rights information from posters and banners on public walls to flyers given to passersby on the street to advertisements in mass media platforms (print, broadcast and digital). However, there are also cases of human rights being misrepresented and thus misunderstood because of wrong information from these popular communication platforms (particularly mainstream and social media) that require proper correction.

Promotional activities such as celebrating the annual Human Rights Day on December 10th and information campaigns on specific issues or sectors prepare people for more organized educational activities to better understand the meaning of human rights and to learn practical means of realizing rights. Even learning skills on undertaking promotional activities should be part of the organized educational activity on human rights.

This publication has much to offer on how human rights promotion and education should be undertaken drawing from the rich experiences of practitioners in Asia and the Pacific.

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Editor

Endnote

1 UN Environment Assembly 5 (UNEA 5.2) Resolutions, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), <https://www.unep.org/resources/resolutions-treaties-and-decisions/UN-Environment-Assembly-5-2>.

2 See The Human Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment, United Nations General Assembly, A/76/L.75, 26 July 2022, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3982508?ln=en&v=pdf>.