

Introduction

THE 2019 GWANGJU PRIZE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS SELECTION COMMITTEE awarded an Indonesian choir the Special Prize. The Committee cites the choir for using¹

its singing not just for self-healing but also to help their fellow survivors. Its songs convey a message of peace and solidarity, in the hope that it will educate the country of its forgotten past, in particular the young generation.

This choir is named Di Atas Lima Puluh Tahun (Above 50 Years Old) or Dialita whose “members choose to tell their stories by singing, and together... co-initiate social change, co-constructing new meanings of health and resilience.”²

As a 2016 newspaper report states:³

Dialita is a choir that is made up of women whose parents, relatives and friends were captured, tortured and exiled during the 1965/1966 communist purge in Indonesia. In their late sixties, the members of Dialita co-initiate social change through singing performances. Their performances challenge the dominant style of communicating about 1965 and co-create alternative narratives filled with melodious dialogues and joyful hope for the future. This communicative approach is in contrast to the sufferings they have experienced since the purge that wiped out their family members and took away their freedom and dignity. Through their voices, singing has improved their health.

What is striking in the idea behind Dialita is the use of singing as a medium to communicate truth, facilitate healing, and invite calm reflection on the past. The songs of Dialita are very much like traditional songs that convey hopeful messages. ⁴ As described in the 2016 newspaper report:

In each of their performances, the Dialita choir invites the audience to experience the beauty of their voices and sincerity in their songs. Therefore, although the younger audience members had never heard about the songs and the choir, Dialita performances became an open field for interaction and communication. The boundary between the performers and the audience disappeared as audience members turned into performers of

stories based on their lived experiences, engagement, dreams, aspirations and imaginations.

This seemingly “mild” approach of singing to change public understanding of a historical issue is an example of the use of artistic expression to reach out to the people. Theater (formal or the street performance type), puppetry, dancing (including hip hop) and rapping, visual arts (painting, drawing, sculpting, etc.) and films/videos are artistic expressions that can attract people’s attention to issues and human rights without appearing too somber and serious. Thinking may start once attention to the message is secured. Artistic expressions have that capacity of entertaining people to lead them into thinking of the message being conveyed.

Several articles in this volume discuss the use of artistic expressions as mediums for messaging justice and human rights to the public. Cecille Montenegro learned how to use painting as a way to express her own bitter experience as a migrant worker. She decided to use her art to express feminist thinking on social issues and to provide therapy to distressed women.

Persons with disabilities in Jogjakarta learned how to act in plays and staged a theatrical production to portray their real life and thinking. Irfan Kortschak explains that this project aims to make people see the need to provide a proper environment that supports the realization of the rights of persons with disabilities, and to appreciate their (persons with disabilities) capacity to do things on their own.

To counter the traditional bias against women and girls, the Asian Development Bank-supported legal literacy project uses puppetry to raise and discuss issues according to laws that protect women and girls and to recognize their rights as equal to those of men and boys. The project also uses the traditional painted decoration of trucks to promote “messages that are pro-women and pro-girls, highlighting, for example, the right of women and girls to inheritance.”

Traditional puppetry and truck designs are also cultural expressions. They speak of local cultures both in terms of medium and message. Local cultural expressions are likely to attract more attention in the community.

Equally important is the need to consider the local culture in introducing educational initiatives to indigenous communities. Butet Manurung learned the importance of understanding the local culture in order for her and her colleagues to develop an educational program that serves the needs of the indigenous community such as stopping encroachments on their an-

cestral land and preserving their own culture in order to survive as indigenous people.

The use of the information and communication technologies is an important field that has to be further explored in promoting human rights. Akihiko Morita provides an example of the use of such technologies in his article on learning language that promotes human rights.

Empowerment measures

The use of law to address issues requires appropriate understanding of relevant local laws and processes, as well as development of skills on using them. Paralegal training has long been a major component of legal empowerment, specifically on its focus on practical use of law. Paralegals help people prepare necessary legal documents and seek the services of government. This is seen in the article of Khalid Hussain that explains how the community-based paralegals provide services to members of the community. In a different setting, paralegals can help fellow inmates and even people outside the prison on legal matters. This is the project being implemented by the organization of Haya Zahid and Shahzaman Panhawar. Prisoners and under-trial inmates are trained as paralegals to enable them to help others in the prison facilities address their legal problems.

Wider Reach

The articles of the National Institution for Human Rights in the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) provide an overview of their human rights education programs and activities, which cover different issues and aimed at different audiences (from government officials to young students). The articles explain the important role of national human rights institutions (NHRIS) in human rights education, especially in reaching out to people in the various agencies of government.

Non-governmental institutions also reach out to the government agencies, business and civil society in order to promote human rights. The article of Vicky Bowman and Donna Guest explains a variety of educational activities on the business and human rights issue being offered to government, business and civil society organizations. They stress the need to develop ma-

materials in the local language to be able to reach those in government, business and civil society.

Educational institutions can also join efforts to promote human rights within the academe through the development of teaching lessons that address a basic need for such materials. Among higher educational institutions, lack of teachers who are familiar with human rights and who can teach them in different subjects is a problem. Thus, developing teaching materials for higher educational institutions can help develop such capacity among the educators. The materials can be adjusted to local situations for greater relevance of the content. The use of these teaching materials requires complementary training. This is what Mike Hayes explains in his article on the role of a network of universities in promoting human rights in Southeast Asia. The university network developed teaching materials and provided training to teachers in the member-universities.

Review of Experiences

The articles of Fumiko Noguchi and the Osaka Prefectural Teachers Union review the challenges posed by existing educational approach and policy. Fumiko stresses the need to give utmost importance to the perspective of the people who are affected by human rights issues. In the context of community development, the educational initiative should have “synergy between timely learning and facilitation and social actions such as policy advocacies and lobbying.” To Fumiko, understanding how the affected people think is essential in making Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) effective. An “understanding [of] the totality of suffering the marginalized people have experienced psychologically, physically, economically, and socially” must be the basis of such educational initiative like ESD.

The Osaka Prefectural Teachers Union, on the other hand, has to contend with a new national school curriculum that can possibly set aside human rights education. The moral education subject in the new curriculum has the potential of promoting ideas that oppose human rights. There is fear that the subject would be teaching a “particular sense of norms or values and ... instructions that interfere with the freedom of thought.” Thus the task at hand is on finding ways of ensuring that human rights are taught in the moral education subject.

In all these experiences, the message remains the same: we have to continue all forms of human rights promotion based on our capacity, area of work and issues.

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Endnotes

¹ “2019 Gwangju Prize for Human Rights Winners Announcement,” May 18 Memorial Foundation, 15 April 2019, <http://518.org/Mayzine/201904/subpage/subo801.php>. The “winner of the main prize is Ms. Joanna K. Cariño of the Philippines. Ms. Cariño is founder and an advisor of the Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA) and also the chairperson of SELDA Northern Luzon.”

² Dyah Pitaloka and Mohan J. Dutta, “From victims to survivors: The healing journey of the Dialita choir,” *The Jakarta Post*, 27 September 2016, www.thejakartapost.com/life/2016/09/27/from-victims-to-survivors-the-healing-journey-of-the-dialita-choir.html.

³ Pitaloka and Dutta, *ibid.*

⁴ Watch the choir members sing “Lagu Untuk Anankku,” (A Song for my Child), “Salam Harappan” (Greetings of Hope), “Ujian” (Test) in [DAY01] Dialita Performance on YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=7N5vdjbq56w.