

Back to School: Human Rights Education in the Asian School Systems

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HURIGHTS OSAKA started collecting documentations on human rights education in the school system in 1995. Aside from collecting teaching/learning and other materials used by different institutions (both governmental and non-governmental), HURIGHTS OSAKA has compiled a substantial amount of information on the human rights education initiatives in the different countries in Asia and the Pacific. Most of these documented initiatives have been published as articles in the annual publications of HURIGHTS OSAKA as well as research reports.¹

Recent news on human rights education in the school system in several Asian countries triggered a quick and limited review of these published articles. The review brought out interesting aspects of the progression of the human rights education initiatives in three countries: Sri Lanka, India and the Philippines. There are certainly many significant human rights education initiatives in other countries, but information available in HURIGHTS OSAKA on these three countries have been quite substantial to merit special citation here.

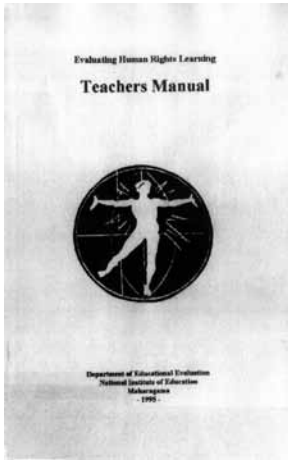
Continuity and Improvement

Specific initiatives on the teaching and learning of human rights in the school systems in Sri Lanka, India and the Philippines started in the 1980s in Sri Lanka and the Philippines, and in the 1990s in the case of India, and continued till the present. These initiatives have the support of the government and private and public schools. A brief review of these initiatives follows.

Sri Lankan experience

The teaching of human rights in Sri Lankan schools started way back in mid-1980s. Social studies curriculum incorporated human rights themes based on the initial human rights education program of the Human Rights Centre of Sri Lanka Foundation. The Human Rights Centre supported the

training of teachers, enrichment of the curriculum and “discovery-based” activities for students. The National Institute of Education partnered with the Human Rights Centre in developing “suitable instruments to assess student achievement levels on Human Rights and facilitate the teachers to make the teaching a more pleasant experience.”² This partnership led to the publication of *Evaluating Human Rights Learning – Teachers Manual* in 1995. This publication is apparently the earliest human rights education evaluation manual produced in Asia.



The civic education curriculum of Sri Lanka has integrated human rights content for a long time. A 2009 report of the Regional Unit for Social and Human Sciences in Asia and the Pacific - UNESCO states that the “subject of Civics and Governance, taught in grade 11 includes units on the concept of Human Rights.” It also states that the National Education Institute (NIE) of Sri Lanka has produced a teachers’ instruction manual to support the teaching of civics and governance.³ The integration of human rights content in the civic education subject has been proposed several years before. Sri Lankan educator-participants in the 2006 South Asian workshop on human

rights education organized by HURIGHTS OSAKA presented proposed human rights content in civic education.⁴ Their proposed contents on the topic “Human Rights and Duties” are very similar to the approved human rights content of the current civic education curriculum in Sri Lanka. The recent human rights education initiative came about as a direct response to the ending of the internal armed conflict in 2009.

Sri Lanka has started the work on recovering from the trauma brought by the internal armed conflict and of preparing the ground for lasting peace. The Sri Lankan government established the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LRRC) on 15 May 2010 to do a fact-finding on the internal armed conflict covering the February 2002 to May 2009 period and to propose measures to prevent the recurrence of the conflict and hopefully pave the way for reconciliation.

The Sri Lankan government informed the United Nations Security Council Interactive Briefing on 5 June 2009 that it was in the process of ini-

tiating a domestic mechanism for fact-finding and reconciliation as way to express its “commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights.” Then Sri Lankan President, Mahinda Rajapaksa, explained that “in order to accomplish this task it has become necessary to set in motion a mechanism which will provide a historic bridge between the past of a society characterized by inflicted strife and a future society founded on the continued recognition of democracy and peaceful co-existence and the affording of equal opportunities for all Sri Lankans as guaranteed by the Constitution.”⁵

The Commission released its report entitled *Report of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission* in November 2011 after holding a series of public hearings in various parts of Sri Lanka. Section 9.6 of the report provides:⁶

There is also a fundamental need to ensure that lessons from these past incidents be learnt in a manner that they will never be repeated again. In this regard, the Commission also stresses the need for comprehensive, island-wide human rights education programmes targeting the school children, youth, members of the Security Forces, and the Police etc.

The Ministry of Education of Sri Lanka supported the implementation of the education-related recommendation of the LRRC through the project on developing supplementary reader for secondary students on human rights and the trainers training manual that includes an activity on human rights.

In 2015, the Ministry of Education along with partner institutions (National Institute of Education, German Cooperation, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, and Save the Children) released two publications, namely, *Protecting Rights for a Peaceful Tomorrow* and *Trainers Training Manual - Empowering Teachers for Learning-Teaching Process (Civic Education)*.

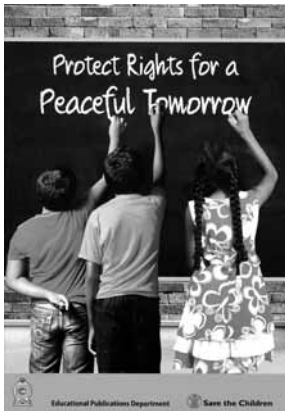
Both publications support the implementation of the Civic Education Curriculum. The supplementary reader publication is entirely devoted to learning about human rights under the Civic Education curriculum. The Sri Lankan Minister of Education explains the importance of the supplementary reader:⁷

It is an accepted fact among the academia that although there was awareness of rights and freedoms, flaws in translating knowledge into action was one of the main reasons for the crisis that prevailed in the country for over three decades. Imparting

knowledge, promoting human rights and providing school children with a rights friendly education will certainly make school children today, the citizens of tomorrow, gain a deep understanding of their rights and duties. I firmly believe that such an understanding will lead to peace, unity, brotherhood and development within the country and school children who are part of the knowledge economy will contribute to a human rights knowledge centred society, when they leave school and step into the wider social spectrum.

The supplementary reader has twenty stories that are grouped under 1) “Civil and Political Rights and Responsibilities,” 2) “Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and Responsibilities,” and “Collective Rights and Responsibilities.” Each story contains simple statements about human rights, which are further explained by the texts of relevant provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and also Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The supplementary reader has one chapter explaining the basic principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Its final chapter includes a list of institutions that work for the protection and care of children, and simple presentation of the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

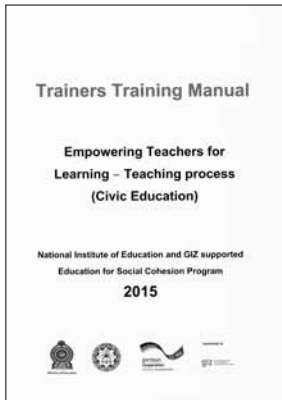


The trainers training manual is a “Manual of Instructions on Civic Education... [and] an important contribution to the implementation of the National Policy on Education for Social Cohesion and Peace.”⁸ It covers all topics/contents of the Civic Education subject from grade 6 to 11 and the activities related to the different topics.⁹ This training manual has a section on “Student Parliament,” which is an “exceptional

program introduced as a co-curricular activity by Circular No. 14/2016 of the Ministry of Education.”¹⁰

While one activity is devoted to human rights, there are two other activities that can relate to human rights, namely, the themes on “Management of Conflicts” and “Multicultural Society of People.”¹¹

The production of the two materials on civic education strengthens the continuity of efforts on teaching human rights in the Sri Lankan school



curriculum from the 1980s to the present. The current context of building the structure that would support lasting peace in Sri Lanka is also an opportunity for further development of human rights education in the school system.

Indian experience

In India, what started as an experiment in 1996 by the People's Watch Tamil Nadu (PTWN) has grown into a full-blown program in the state of Tamil Nadu. The experiment covered nine schools in 1997 under Phase I, while for the 1998-2000 period under Phase II different rights were included (children's rights, women's rights, the dalit's rights, and refugee rights) for one hundred thirty five schools.¹² PTWN subsequently established the Institute of Human Rights Education (IHRE) in 1997.¹³

From the latter half of 2005, the program spread to nine other states (Gujarat, Tripura, West Bengal, Orissa, Chattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, and Rajasthan).¹⁴ In expanding to other states, IHRE translated its human rights modules initially written in Tamil into English and the other Indian languages (Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Oriya, Bengali, Gujarati and Hindi). The modules were "dynamically adapted and rewritten to reflect the local reality and is relevant to local human rights issues."¹⁵ Its expansion to other states allowed thousands of students to join the program.

The program continued to grow through the years. IHRE initiated the establishment of Human Rights Clubs in "250 schools across 15 districts in Tamil Nadu" during the 2016 academic year. This "initiative, started last year (2015) with the support of the School Education Department ...[that] ensured the functioning of the clubs in 120 schools across six districts in the State."¹⁶

The IHRE program has gained much support from government and non-governmental institutions in several Indian states and also from the school teachers and officials. While there is yet no exhaustive evaluation of the program, there are indications of transformation of teachers and students. As explained in 2007,¹⁷

The stories of transformation of human rights education teachers and students and the social impact of the human rights education program we have so far gathered from our work have

touched the hearts of all those who have come to know of them. Stories keep trickling in, from the remote corners of the states, of questions asked that were never before asked, silences broken, voices raised, a little hand of help extended, adults shamed, alcoholics transformed, a silently suffering mother surprised by her little son confronting the drunken father, daughters of fiercely patriotic communities daring to demand education. A twelve-year-old student of human rights education in an area notorious for female infanticide, intercedes when the life of another female infant is to be snuffed out, quotes his human rights education lesson, runs from pillar to post to save the life and ultimately succeeds. Where young girls are married at the age of thirteen or fourteen, a little girl's marriage is stopped by the collective intervention of her classmates. In a place of rampant child labor, a ten-year-old boy being physically abused in a roadside shop is saved by the intervention of human rights education teachers, keeping vigil through the night and bringing the abuser to law. The evidence we are marshalling is, till now, mainly anecdotal, but each anecdote is a stone thrown into the cesspool of centuries of oppression and indignity.

Philippine experience

The many years of implementation of the human rights education initiative of the Philippine government produced a number of teaching exemplars and teacher training materials for Philippine primary and secondary schools. The first teaching exemplars way back in 1987 were developed through a series of activities consisting of consultation workshops, writing workshop, field testing, a Parents and Educators Forum and subsequent distribution of printed copies of teaching exemplars to the schools.¹⁸

The holding of Parents and Educators Forum on HRE was primarily aimed at tapping Parents-Teachers Associations, student councils and faculty clubs in the promotion of human rights. It was "deemed appropriate for parents to know that school children are taught about their rights so that the exercise of these rights are reinforced at home. The teaching of human rights [had] to be cooperatively carried out by teachers and parents. Involving the parents in this endeavor could minimize, if not eliminate, the exploitation and violation of their rights (e.g., ensuring that school-age children [were] in school and [were] not forced to work to help the family financially)."¹⁹ The 1999 forum helped raised a number of issues related to human rights:²⁰

- the increasing number of child laborers, in spite of government's campaign to provide education for all and the existence of free primary and secondary school education;
- the alarming reports of rape of daughters by their fathers or incestuous relationships between them, and the factors that lead to the exploitation of young women;
- the aggressiveness, disrespect and disobedience displayed by children against their parents, relatives and other adults; and
- physical and emotional harm inflicted on school children by teachers and parents.

The forum likewise identified the stance of parents regarding human rights, gender-fair education and peace education.

With the change of school curriculum in 2002 (Basic Education Curriculum [BEC]) for primary and secondary schools, the DepEd revised in 2003 its human rights teaching exemplars to fit the new curriculum. The BEC focused on five learning areas: reading, writing, arithmetic, science, and patriotism. These learning areas are contained in the following subjects at primary school level: English, Filipino, mathematics, and *Makabayan* (Nationalistic), with Science and Health being integrated into English; and at the secondary school subjects: English, Filipino, science, mathematics, and *Makabayan*.²¹

For the primary schools, aside from teaching of human rights concepts using "different approaches, strategies, and techniques," DepEd also²² prepared interactive instructional materials on preventing child abuse...[and] guidelines on indigenization and localization of curriculum to respect cultural diversity. This encourage[d] the use and improvement of local resources. Localizing the curriculum [was] a way to preserve and develop the cultural heritage of the different regions.

For the secondary schools, considering that "the level of discussion, particularly on sensitive issues, is high....case studies are [usually] given where students can analyze and synthesize what they learn about human rights, and decide and commit that they will be respected."²³

DepEd, along with the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines and non-governmental organizations, undertook the revision of human rights teaching exemplars through a number of steps:²⁴

- Analysis of competencies for all learning areas, year levels, and quarters;
- Identification of suitable human rights concepts (using a research-based list [prepared] by the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines of the most common human rights violations);
- Preparation of lesson exemplars as part of a module;
- Orientation and training in the use of the module;
- Updating and review of modules;
- Development of instructional materials and devices on human rights (such as posters, flyers, handouts, reading materials, case studies, pamphlets, and fact sheets); and
- Monitoring and evaluation of the program.

The educational policies further evolved in 2000s. The 2002 law, “An Act Declaring December 4 to 10 as National Human Rights Consciousness Week in the Country and for Other Purposes,” led to Department Order no. 31 that required the celebration of Human Rights Week every December of the year. Furthermore,²⁵

In May 2003, DepEd, in partnership with the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines (CHRP), undertook its initial activities to integrate human rights in the national curriculum (DepEd Memorandum 160, s. 2003), and by 2004, the first training of trainers on human rights education was held (DepEd Memorandum 16, s. 2004). All Divisions of the Department were then enjoined to include human rights in their in-service training (inset) for teachers from May 2004 to 2005 (DepEd Memorandum 130, s. 2004).

In 2005, a law entitled “Special Protection of Children Against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act” (Republic Act 7610) led to the adoption of the educational policy on child protection. It also adopted in 2011 the educational policy for indigenous children; which was described as the right step towards a “rights-based comprehensive, and systemic policy on culturally responsive education for indigenous children and youth.”²⁶ This educational policy resulted in the formal adoption of indigenous people’s education (iPED), a broad educational program that covers the rights of indigenous peoples.

DepEd started implementing IPED in 2016 by identifying three hundred priority sites of indigenous peoples in various parts of the country for basic education access. It has started hiring almost six hundred “new teachers with permanent positions for the new schools in Regions IX, X, XI, XII and XIII where they will be trained to implement the IPED program.” It also aimed to develop at least five hundred “indigenized lesson plans by end of 2016.”²⁷ As of August 2016, “a total of 7,767 teachers and school heads nationwide have undergone basic retooling on IPED.”²⁸

The current debate on the lack of understanding by the students of the martial law era in the 1970-1980 period including the human rights violations that occurred led the DepEd to suggest a “collaborative effort in improving human rights education under the new K to 12 basic education curriculum.”²⁹ The Secretary of DepEd “highlighted as well that while lessons on human rights and democracy, and chapters on martial law are already integrated in the curriculum, capturing and teaching a bigger picture of the era remain to be a challenge because the figures at hand cannot be deemed conclusive.” Also, DepEd³⁰

works with competent people in various disciplines to provide evidence-based and age-appropriate content and context. “Older kids might be more able to handle narratives, but as for the younger children, we will have to be very careful. Balancing authenticity of sources and making it age-appropriate are the challenges...”

Essential Elements

There were many more initiatives in Sri Lanka, India and the Philippines on human rights education in the school system aside from those supported by government as discussed above. Since these other initiatives were mainly programs or projects of the non-governmental organizations, many were implemented in direct partnership with schools, and not necessarily as part of any relevant education ministry program. They contributed significantly to the general experience on human rights education in the school systems in these countries. But as in any program, sustainability is a major issue. Many of the non-government initiatives could not be continued due to a number of reasons including financial and human resource limitations.

The experiences of Sri Lanka, India and the Philippines show the essential need for government support in their human rights education pro-

grams. The support for these programs went beyond the partnership with schools. They involved the national government, and in the case of India the support of state governments, that provide policy and logistical support to the wider implementation of the program in the entire school system.

Equally essential is the role of the non-governmental institutions in maintaining human rights education programs. The Indian experience is a very good case of non-government-led initiative that progressed from an experiment to an institution-based program, and from several schools in one state (Tamil Nadu) to hundreds of schools in several Indian states. The Sri Lankan experience has likewise shown the need for support from non-government institutions, especially in the recent teaching and training materials projects. The Philippine experience shows also a strong link with non-government institutions. This is seen in the process the DepEd adopted in implementing its program. It has the consultation and workshop activities that allowed representatives of non-governmental organizations to contribute to the development of teaching and training materials needed in its human rights education program.

The role of the academe is also essential especially in incorporating the human rights content in these education programs. In India and the Philippines, there were representatives from the academe who helped implement the programs. In the Sri Lankan experience, the staff of the National Education Institute (which is the main institution in integrating human rights in the civic education curriculum) can be considered not only as educational officials but academics as well.

Final Note: Challenges

These experiences however have to be seen in a broader context that directly and indirectly impacts on human rights education.

The issue of relativist view of human rights has not gone away. It comes back every now and then. This is an important context that can directly affect the human rights content being taught and learned inside the classroom, but also the kind of support that governments provide to human rights education. There is a need to maintain the international human rights standards, based on agreements adopted by states, and thus ensure that human rights are not defined differently. The manner by which the international human rights standards are taught and learned should certainly be

contextualized, and made interesting, creative and effective. Human rights are important not only because of their nature, but also because they have been agreed upon by states (necessarily also by their governments) since 1948 as a necessary component in achieving a better world.

In terms of contextualized teaching and learning of human rights, any human rights education initiative should also be culturally rooted. This does not mean changing the meaning of human rights as defined by the international standards, but enhancing the general human rights concepts by the riches of the relevant local cultures and wisdom. As one education official saw it:³¹

It is not only about bringing children to school, but more important[ly] ensuring that education is culturally rooted and that the elders, culture bearers and the whole community are actively engaged and empowered in the learning process. This is at the core of the DepEd mission and our shared commitment with IP [indigenous peoples] communities as we journey with them in their struggle for self-determination and their aspirations for their ancestral domain...

And yes, human rights education should add to the effort to make children dream about a better future for themselves, their families, and their communities.

With these, it is time for HURIGHTS OSAKA to go back to school in its human rights education program after some years of hibernation.³²

Endnotes

1 The publication of *Human Rights Education in Asian Schools* started in 1998 and continued until 2009. The whole set of this annual publication is found in: www.hurights.or.jp/archives/human_rights_education_in_asian_schools/. *Human Rights Education in Asia-Pacific* started in 2010. Complete set of this annual publication is available at <http://www.hurights.or.jp/archives/asia-pacific/>.

2 A.A. Navaratna, editor, *Evaluating Human Rights Learning – Teachers Manual* (Colombo: National Institute of Education, 1995) page 8.

3 RUSHSAP, UNESCO Bangkok, Summary of the Teaching of Philosophy in Sri Lanka, www.unescobkk.org/fileadmin/user_upload/shs/Philosophy/Country_summary_updated_Aug2010/Summary_of_the_Teaching_of_Philosophy_in_Sri_Lanka.pdf.

4 HURIGHTS OSAKA, “South Asia Workshop on Human Rights Education in Schools,” *Human Rights Education in Asian Schools*, volume IX, 2006, pages 122 – 138. Full text of the article available at www.hurights.or.jp/archives/human_rights_education_in_asian_schools/section2/2006/03/south-asia-workshop-on-human-rights-education-in-schools.html. The proposed syllabus can be found in this url:

www.hurights.or.jp/archives/human_rights_education_in_asian_schools/section2/civic-education-grades-6--9.html.

5 “President appoints Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission Monday,” May 17, 2010, <http://archive.is/OguNq#selection-238.1-337.75>

6 The full *Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation* is available at <http://slembassyusa.org/downloads/LLRC-REPORT.pdf>.

7 Bandula Gunawardena, Message from the Hon. Minister for Education, *Protecting Rights for a Peaceful Tomorrow* (Colombo: Ministry of Education, 2015), page 3.

8 Ruediger Blumoer, Message from Program Coordinator, *Trainers Training Manual - Empowering Teachers for Learning-Teaching Process* (Civic Education) (Colombo: National Institute of Education, 2015) page 5.

9 A.L.S. Abeywickrema, Civic Education Subject Leader’s Message, *ibid.*, page 4.

10 Introduction, *ibid.*, page 7.

11 *Ibid.*, pages 81-95.

12 See Henri Tiphagne, “Experiment in Human Rights Education in Schools,” in *Human Rights Education in Asian Schools*, Volume II, 1999. Full text available at www.hurights.or.jp/archives/human_rights_education_in_asian_schools/section2/1999/03/experiment-in-human-rights-education-in-schools.html.

13 Vasanthi Devi, “Institute of Human Rights Education: India Experience,” in *Human Rights Education in Asian Schools*, Volume X, page 41. For the full text of the article, visit www.hurights.or.jp/archives/pdf/asia-s-ed/v10/04Institute%20of%20HRE,%20India%20Experience-reduced.pdf.

14 *Ibid.*, page 45.

15 *Ibid.*, page 46.

16 *The Hindu*, “250 schools in Tamil Nadu to get Human Rights Clubs,” 31 August 2016, www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Madurai/250-schools-in-tamil-nadu-to-get-human-rights-clubs/article9051462.ece.

17 Devi, *op. cit.*, page 47.

18 Nerissa Lansangan-Losaria, “The Human Rights Education Program of the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS) of the Philippines,” *Human Rights Education in Asian Schools*, Volume I, 1998, page 155. Full text of the article is available at www.hurights.or.jp/archives/human_rights_education_in_asian_schools/section2/1998/03/the-human-rights-education-program-of-the-department-of-education-culture-and-sports-decs-of-the-phi.html.

19 *Ibid.*, page 158.

20 Text based on Nerissa Lansangan-Losaria, “Parents and Educators Empowerment Program on Human Rights,” *Human Rights Education in Asian Schools*, Volume II, 1999, page 30. Full text of the article is available at www.hurights.or.jp/archives/human_rights_education_in_asian_schools/section2/1999/03/parents-and-educators-empowerment-program-on-human-rights.html.

21 Noel Miranda and Corazon L. Echano, “Integrating Human Rights Concepts into the School Curriculum: The Philippine Experience,” *Human Rights Education in Asian Schools*, Volume VII, pages 19-20. Full text of the article is available at www.hurights.or.jp/archives/human_rights_education_in_asian_schools/sec

tion2/2004/03/integrating-human-rights-concepts-into-the-school-curriculum-the-philippine-experience.html.

22 Ibid., page 26.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., page 22.

25 Marie Lourie Victor and Belmer Yano, "Actualizing the Inclusion of Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Education: A Policy Initiative in the Philippines," in *Human Rights Education in Asia-Pacific*, Volume 6, 2015, page 140. Full text of the article is available at www.hurights.or.jp/archives/asia-pacific/section1/9%20Indigenous%20Peoples%E2%80%99%20Rights%20in%20Education.pdf.

26 Ibid. page 141. The educational policy change was contained in Department Order number 62, dated 8 August 2011, "Adopting the National Indigenous Peoples (IP) Education Policy Framework." Full text of the article is available at www.hurights.or.jp/archives/asia-pacific/section1/9%20Indigenous%20Peoples%E2%80%99%20Rights%20in%20Education.pdf.

27 Neil Alcober, "DepEd moves to bolster IP education," *Manila Times*, 30 August 2016, www.manilatimes.net/deped-moves-to-bolster-ip-education/283027/.

28 Ibid.

29 Philippine Information Agency, "Department of Education (DepEd) Secretary Leonor Magtolis Briones on Tuesday underscored the importance of collaborative effort in improving human rights education under the new K to 12 basic education curriculum," 23 September 2016, <http://news.pia.gov.ph/article/view/1141474543063/deped-calls-for-collective-push-to-improve-human-rights-education-in-k-to-12>.

30 Ibid.

31 Alcober, op cit.

32 During the past three years, HURIGHTS OSAKA has focused on researching on the business and human rights issue in Northeast Asia and developing a training manual for this subregion.