

Focus

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Editorial

Local Community Human Rights Work

Local communities (be they villages, districts, towns or cities) provide a unique context for human rights work. They define both the limitation and opportunity for realization, protection and promotion of human rights.

Local community human rights work takes many forms in accordance with the needs of people in a specific locality. Human rights work includes enhancing the capacity of rural women in undertaking economically beneficial farming activities. It includes engaging the members of the community on how to change community perception and systems affecting persons with disabilities. It covers the provision of information to victims of human rights violation or abuse to enable them to seek protection from and remedy for their suffering.

Most significantly, local community human rights work is crucial in helping build the confidence of disadvantaged or marginalized people in asserting their rights and in participating in societal and local governmental processes. Both individuals and families, as basic units in every community, benefit from local community human rights work. This is seen in the case of human rights workers helping persons with disabilities develop their confidence to become "independent and engage society" by encouraging them to enjoy "independent living at home" with the support of the family.

Rural Women for Sustainable Development

Alga Rural Women's NGO

Rural women in Jerkazar village, Isyk-Ata Rayon in Kyrgyzstan decided in 1995 to establish an organization of women to address the violation of their rights to land. At that time, Kyrgyzstan was implementing an agrarian reform program and women (especially single mothers, widows and single unmarried women) were treated unequally in acquiring land. This organization, named Alga Rural Women's NGO (Alga), has since then been working for the improvement of the social status, and economic and living conditions of rural women, and creating enabling environment for women's participation in economic life of the village and in decision-making processes of the local government.

The transition of Kyrgyzstan to market economy in early 1990s shocked the country and its people. Rising unemployment, reduction of state social protection services and deterioration of the living standard of the majority of the population, especially the rural women, were the consequences of the new economic system. Rural women were pushed into vulnerable situation with the growth of poverty, deterioration of the public health system, work and home responsibilities and lack of control over family resources. This situation existed in the context of patriarchal traditions and norms that

affected their status in the family and society and increased gender-based violence and discrimination.

Alga aims to improve the status of rural women and their standard of living by raising their awareness of these realities, building their capabilities for self-actualization, strengthening their participation in the economic development programs and advocacy for their rights, and adoption of empowering strategies and structures that can raise their social status and economic condition. Alga also helps strengthen their social partnership with different stakeholders to ensure gender equality and support for empowering strategies and structures which promote the status of women and their families.

One of the advantages of Alga is the diversity of its membership: their age varies from seventeen to seventy years old; some of them are widows, single mothers, divorced women and mothers with many children.

Alga developed a comprehensive

program for rural women empowerment and integration of gender approaches in sustainable livelihood programs that support poverty alleviation. This program has several components:

- a. Leadership development and strengthening of capacity of the poor rural women to lift themselves out of poverty - this component includes increasing capacity to participate in rural community development and budgeting, facilitating access to resources (such as funds/loans) and introducing innovative technologies (such as those that protect



the environment and prevent the pollution of ground water and the introduction of alternative energy resources). It also includes the creation of community groups, rural women's groups, youth alliances and networking; and

- b. Information and awareness-raising campaigns, community meetings, and consultations - these activities focus on sustainable livelihoods and strategies which require consultation and assessment with the women on their needs and priorities, and information dissemination on methodologies for developing personal or household strategies to attaining sustainable livelihoods, and on needs and opportunities for income generating initiatives.

Rural Community Activities

Alga starts rural community activities by organizing participatory community assessment, information campaigns on women's rights (social, political and economic), and other strategies to reach out to rural women, especially those belonging to ethnic minority communities and religious groups. These activities are done during informal meetings in the women's homes, cultural gatherings, meetings (in local schools, village shops and halls), family events and other occasions.

The rural women view the existing economic problems that affect their needs as relating



to land and property rights, labor migration, unemployment, payment gap and low wages for women, poor social infrastructure, and lack of support for starting small business (existing programs are generally not considerate of the situation of women). The problems in engaging in small business include high interest rate and guarantee requirement (collateral) by microfinance agencies, gender-based violence suffered by those who travel to market places, lack of vocational education and affordable technologies, and lack of access to agricultural inputs and financial resources to support their entrepreneurial endeavors. Land laws are biased against women and do not consider cultural traditions that often place land in the hands of men. Rural women often work in the informal sector and lack basic social protection such as sick pay, maternity leave or retirement. Women spend an average of four and a half hours on unpaid domestic labor that limit their opportunities and choices.

Rural women want to discuss all sorts of agro-economic,

livestock and business planning issues. They also want to learn about waste management, water scarcity, and adaptation and alternative technologies in response to the impact of climate change. Alga's activities have very good resonance in the communities. Besides training and consultation for women, development of social partnership with local authorities and other stakeholders is very important. This is particularly effective when their requests for service are in line with government programs, such as the national program for regional development. Women's networks in turn provide a good vehicle to disseminate messages about these programs and take active part in their implementation.

Rural women want to learn from other women with similar problems, experiences and also best practices. They organize peer exchange system to scale up the impact of good experiences.

Besides their work on income generation initiatives, women express interest in getting more involved in the implementation



of the new Development Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals in their communities. More than ten initiatives on the improvement of local social infrastructures in accordance with women's needs and priorities have been developed and implemented with the support of the local authorities. These initiatives of women's groups are appreciated by the community and local authorities; some of them received Letters of Appreciation and Gratitude presented during the celebration of the National Rural Women's Day (June 18th) and World Rural Women's Day (October 15th).

Alga's members actively participated in local and national campaigns for the adoption of new laws on prevention of domestic violence, prohibition of religious child marriage and 30 percent quota for women in the National Parliament and Local Councils (rural self-governance structure).

For women's economic empowerment during the 2018-2020 period, Alga created vocational training courses in places where rural women live.

These vocational courses are organized mainly for young women from poor families, ethnic minorities, and also for migrant women. The courses allow them to find jobs or start

their own business using the practical skills (such as tailoring skill) they acquire. There is a high demand for tailors but the training on tailoring is normally expensive, available only in cities and mainly for men (in accordance with tradition). Women with tailoring skill are also able to improve their economic well-being through savings in the family budget by sewing or mending/altering clothes for family members or household items such as curtains, beddings, bed covers, blankets and pillows.

Cases of Women's Empowerment

Alga's support to rural women's business initiatives yielded good examples of women's economic empowerment. Below are some experiences:

1. Raising livestock for meat and milk production and home gardening - Mehriban L., a woman from the Turkish ethnic minority diaspora in the Krasnaya Rechka village, raised young cattle (a bull and a milking cow) with the help of her family members. The meat of

the bull and the cow's milk were later sold in the market, with some amount of milk left for family consumption. She also planted different varieties of fruits and berries in her garden. Mehriban said that this opportunity helped a lot in improving her status within the family and gave her "personal power." She learned many things during the Alga meetings and training and became more self-confident. Her communication and networking with women in her village and those from other villages improved to a great degree. When Mehriban became seriously ill and was almost paralyzed, the income she earned allowed her to get medical treatment. Inspired by her experience, she planned to increase her domestic farming and production;

2. Meat and milk production, setting up of sustainable feeding base for cattle – Alia K., a woman from Bashkir ethnic minority group in Novo-Pokrovka village, raised calves and sold their meat and milk. With the income earned, Alia's family was able to buy a small plot of land to construct a separate farm for more cattle breeding. Alia said that this farming initiative was extremely helpful for her personal status and built her self-confidence. Alia wanted to help other rural women by sharing her experience and establishing a demonstration site. She also

became more active in the activities of her community;

3. Milk processing, integration of variety of milk products for healthy nutrition – Saltanat N., a young Kyrgyz woman in Beshkunkey village, received support from Alga to buy needed equipment like milk separator, refrigerator, and oven for cooking oatmeal and nuts to make granola in a special way. Learning how to produce yogurt and granola, Saltanat sold her products in the market. She also learned how to make soft cheese from the milk her cows produced. After some time, Saltanat managed to find regular customers in the city sports club and fitness center. She said that this support gave her great power —“she feels like she got wings,” “it’s so nice to feel that you can earn your own living”— and she thought of new ideas on how to develop her business further;

4. Livestock farming – Jamila K., a Kyrgyz woman from a poor family in Jerkazar village bought a small calf and a foal. She rented a plot of land to plant crops and established a feeding storage for cattle. She subsequently sold the meat of the horse and the cow’s milk, with some milk left for her children’s consumption. Jamila said that this income generating activity was a very important experience considering that she failed to get credit from a microfinance company because of lack of property

to guarantee the loan. As a result, Jamila was able to fulfil her old dream of building a new house for her big family. Jamila said that “It’s difficult to express that special feeling that you can bring change to the living standards of your family and that your kids can have a dignified life, it’s really incredible!”

5. Home gardening and making fruit and vegetable preserves – Gulzara A., a Kyrgyz widow with a big, poor family in Internationalnoe village, learned different gardening technologies and established a shop for producing various preserved fruits and vegetables for the local market. She also taught her neighbors how to enrich family nutrition and store food for winter. Young women in rural communities suffer from anemia because of lack of good nutrition, vitamins and minerals. Gulzara had good harvest of fruits (apricot, apple and berries – raspberry, blackberry) and vegetables that she made into preserved food both for family consumption and for sale. She also invited other women to help her. Her shop acquired a good reputation in the community, and women working outside the village became her customers. Thanks to the income of her small business, Gulzara now could afford to pay for the preschool education of her children and more time for her own training and business. She was able to

repay part of her housing loan, pay for the education of her children and take care of her aging parents. She expressed having increased self-confidence and that “she is a mistress of her own life.”

Final Note

Alga believes that the potential of rural women to become leaders in the work for sustainable development can be nurtured. Rural women are a big resource in strengthening the capacity of local communities to become active participants in the local and national policy development processes and to be fully involved in realizing national programs that directly impact their lives.

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Advocating for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Jordan

Asia Abdel Mutaleb Yaghi

I and four other Jordanian colleagues (three women and a man) with various disabilities started in 2008 to work earnestly on educating other persons with disabilities about a law that should be protecting them. But their families were not sure about our efforts because we were a group of activists who did not belong to any formal organization. And when we asked for government service for persons with disabilities, government officials would reply: Who are you? This led us into thinking of creating a group that would deal with matters related to persons with disabilities (specifically about the law) and would advocate and demand for their rights.

In the same year, *Ana Insan* was born. In English, the Arabic words “Ana Insan” translate into “I am human,” and thus the English name of the organization became “I AM HUMAN” Society for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (I AM HUMAN). It is a disabled persons’ organization (DPO) that is non-governmental, non-profit and volunteer-based. It now has almost four thousand members all over Jordan. Women with disabilities (WwDs) constitute the majority of its members.

I AM HUMAN aims to provide WwDs with equal access to all

spheres of community life, including realization of all social, economic, political, cultural, health and legal rights under Jordan’s Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities No. 20 of 2017 (DPRL)¹ and referenced by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

It created the Leaders’ Forum to raise awareness of issues affecting persons with disabilities (PWDs), promote the concept of inclusion, secure medical aid for them, and build their capacities through training on outreach, advocacy and claiming rights at both national and international levels. It networks with local and international organizations on empowering and building the capacities of PWDs. It trains female and male PWDs on all matters related to their lives including political empowerment, building advocacy capacities, self-acceptance and other matters. It works on combating violence against women with disabilities, drafting and implementing plans related to equality, non-discrimination and economic empowerment of PWDs. It is also involved in the revision of several laws on human rights and PWDs’ rights, including revision of the Law on the Rights of Persons with

Disabilities No. 31 (2007). It has a team of volunteers from different parts of the Kingdom that undertakes these activities.²

I AM HUMAN is implementing major projects at present including the following:

- Inclusive Decisions for Equal and Accountable Society (IDEAS) project that aims to strengthen the role and capacity of disability-focused civil society organizations in working



Focus group discussion for children with disabilities on the provision of psychological, cultural and social services to them at the Society for the Preservation of Petra.

with the local governments, media and PWDs to ensure better representation of PWDs in the policymaking process and better understanding and protection of their rights;

- Training for students participating in the Jordanian Student Conference of Speakers of Parliaments project in King's Academy;
- Training WwDs on leadership skills in cooperation with Mobility International;
- "Economic Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities" project which aims at building the capacity of PWDs to be able to work and become economically independent;
- Project at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Department of Special Education at the University of Jordan that presents success stories to students in special education class. The stories discuss the barriers facing PWDs and the means to overcome them including measures to condition the community on changes needed to support PWDs;
- Implementation of "I want my right to 4%" campaign for the fulfilment of the rights of PWDs and their empowerment under Article 4C of Law No. 31 of 2007 on employment of PWDs. The campaign is being undertaken in Amman, Irbid and Zarqa, and funded by Stars of Hope.



Free drawing hour for members of I AM HUMAN with volunteers at the Islamic Scientific College School.

Community Activities

I AM HUMAN holds community training and rehabilitation activities. It has training for parents regarding children's behavior, coping skills and other issues. There are also training activities for members of the community on laws relevant to PWDs and for those involved in the rehabilitation of PWDs. It provides vocational training (such as on physical or

occupational therapy) in coordination with several institutions.

After the rehabilitation process regarding education, work or community engagement is completed, I AM HUMAN undertakes follow-up activities for PWDs to make sure that they had acquired all the needed skills and could integrate well in society.



Asia Yaghi receiving recognition during the 2013 Independence Day celebration from His Majesty King Abdullah II, King of Jordan, for her work on PWDs.

I AM HUMAN monitors and documents cases of violence against girls and women with disabilities in homes, schools, workplaces, institutions, streets and public places. Trained field workers visit places where women and girls with disabilities live and collect data on violations or abuses. It also provides phones to women victims so they can directly seek help from the local government and civil society organizations. Psychological counseling is also provided for these cases. I AM HUMAN workers follow-up through home visits to monitor the condition of the girl victims and also to communicate necessary information to the family.

I AM HUMAN is a partner institution in the “three-year project titled ‘You have a right, a choice...claim it!’, aiming to elevate the response to gender-based violence in the Kingdom with a specific focus on women with disabilities.”³ The project involves provision of legal and psychosocial support to WwDs who are victims of violence. It includes the upgrade of local anti-gender-based violence centers to become “more friendly and physically accessible” for men and women with disabilities who are “more prone to experiencing economic and social discrimination.” It also has an advocacy component that “targets both men and women to raise awareness on women’s rights within marriage contracts.”⁴

Challenges, Reflections and the Future

The 2020-2024 plan⁵ of I AM HUMAN reflects the continuation of its activities by including 1) leadership and empowerment programs for PWDs; 2) training for members of the media, government officials and school educators on how to present the issues of PWDs and how to support their integration in all spheres of life; 3) research and awareness-raising to counter people’s negative perception, attitude and behavior toward PWDs; 4) activities that allow PWDs to express their own views in decision-making processes and participate in different undertakings (such as sports); 5) practical training on how the community can deal with PWDs; 6) provision of advice to PWDs on all issues that they need to know including adjusting to the social environment, enrolling in educational programs, obtaining work, etc.; and 7) implementing protection programs for PWDs.

I AM HUMAN seeks the transformation of the PWDs by improving all aspects of their lives. It seeks to facilitate this transformation by building their capacities without being burdened by the complicated systems of government agencies, training them on how to protect their own selves from violence, and explaining to them the importance of living independently even though they stay with their family.

I AM HUMAN believes that the willingness of PWDs to become independent and engage society arises from independent living at home.

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Endnotes

- 1 Text of the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities No. 20 for the Year 2017, available at <http://hcd.gov.jo/en/content/law-rights-persons-disabilities-no-20-year-2017>.
- 2 For further discussion on this matter, see *Shadow Report on the Status of Implementation of The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Jordan*, submitted to the 17th Session of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, February 2017.
- 3 Maram Kayed, “Rights of women, people with disabilities at heart of 3-year nationwide project,” *The Jordan Times*, 21 November 2019, www.jordantimes.com/news/local/rights-women-people-disabilities-heart-3-year-nationwide-project.
- 4 Statements of Asia Yaghi, in Maram Kayed, *ibid*.
- 5 These are highlights of the plan entitled *I am a Human Society for Rights of Persons with Disabilities - 2020-2024*.

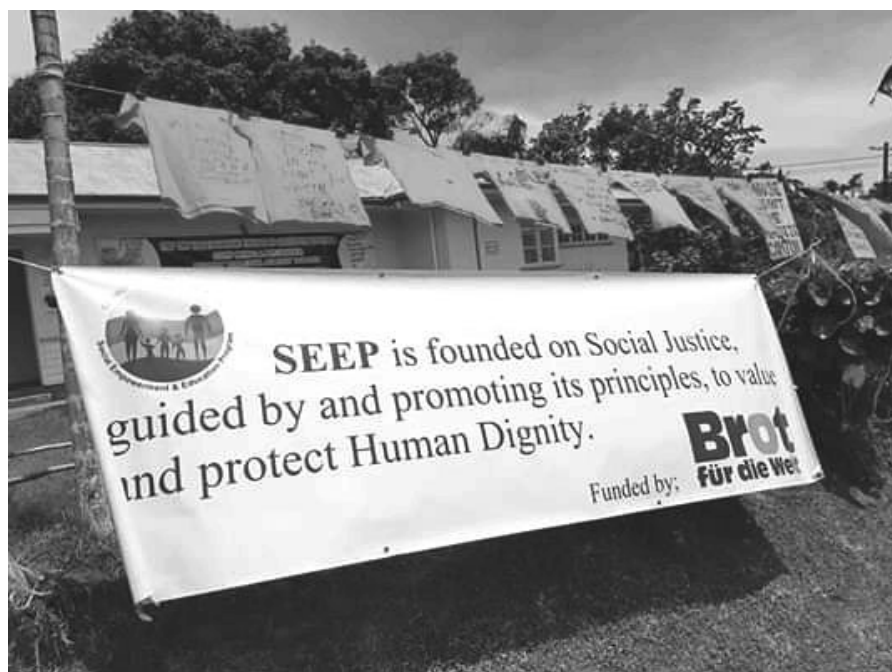
Empowering Communities and Building Resilience

Social Empowerment and Education Programme (SEEP)

At a time of rapidly shifting social and economic situations, there is a growing realization that Civil Society Organisations need to play a leading role in identifying and defining the issues arising out of these changes.

The trend of particular concern is the worsening negative impact of globalization or “unrestrained capitalism.” The repercussions on people in the communities of this concern have been unprecedented, with families being displaced and fragmented. Locally (as well as regionally and globally), there is a growing migration and emigration patterns of communities, as people are forced to leave their homelands and islands, families, lands and farms in search of a better and more secure life.

The Social Empowerment and Education Programme (SEEP) is a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Fiji that is founded on social justice and upholds principles that promote human dignity. It was established as a response to the national challenges initially as a program under the Ecumenical Centre for Research and Advocacy (ECREA), a non-governmental organization established in 1987. SEEP became an independent NGO in 2010 with a base in central Suva.



Social Empowerment & Education Programme (SEEP), Litea Kasatoka.

Why Do We Work in Communities?

At the national level, the ability and the power of the state to protect its own people has weakened as a result of international pressure, many times pushed by corporate agenda. As a result, the state has to redefine its role in terms of priorities, values and policy orientation.

While globalization pretends to unite people, in reality one of its most destructive impacts is the disintegration of social and cultural systems that sustain social cohesion and which bind people together.

Climate change, which is now a global issue has particular

effects on the development of vulnerable island states. With Fiji taking the lead at the 2017 “Conference of the Parties” (COP2017) in Germany, the Fiji Prime Minister (Frank Bainimarama) in his opening address at the conference reiterated that Fiji and the rest of the Pacific, despite the fact that they have the smallest carbon-footprint in the world, would experience the worst impacts of climate change with rising sea levels that would eventually sink islands, the home of thousands of people.

The Fiji government and the World Bank put together a “Climate Vulnerability Assessment” report on how to make Fiji climate resilient. The

one hundred seventy-two-page report detailed the effects of climate change on disaster risk, poverty, sea-level rise, agriculture, food security as well as health and tourism in Fiji. It also strongly pointed out that Fiji needs to build socio-economic resilience, take care of the poor and keep economic growth inclusive.

The challenge then for nations including civil society is how to strengthen relationships between communities of people and among people in order to build resilience. Resilience allows communities to pause and make decisions to retain a sense of identity, relevance and power in these fast-changing times.

As a direct response to the vulnerability assessment report, SEEP continues with empowerment and resilience-building work in the communities. A core element of resilience-building is the sustainable use of natural

resources for future generations. The work of SEEP eventually boils down to having food security and sustainability in the face of climate change and its real impacts on communities and livelihoods.

Community Empowerment

SEEP has been undertaking empowerment work in rural communities in Fiji since 2010. SEEP recognizes that there can be a movement of empowered, resilient and vibrant local communities which are able to increase their participation in Fiji's democratic spaces employing people-centered principles. By affirming their identities with the sustainable use of their natural resources employing "organic culture" (organic farming) and traditional knowledge systems, these communities can confidently engage the global market economy.

Community mapping, for example, which is led by members of the community, familiarizes people about the community boundaries and placements of houses, roads, schools and health clinics and assists them in visualizing and defining a starting point for community profiling work.

Violence Against Women

The Office of the Auditor General of Fiji reported in 2019 that¹

[T]he percentage of female victims of sexual offenses compared to male victims has been consistently rising between 2014 and 2017. The most alarming fact is that the largest number of victims of rape, abduction of persons under 18 years of age and indecent assault were minor girls. The number of cases recorded for indecently insulting or annoying any person from 2014 to 2017 decreased by 80%. However, the maximum number (85%) [of victims] for the said crime were women. The number of violence cases reported to Fiji Police Force is low compared to other agencies that collect the same data on violence against women.

Regarding laws on violence against women (VAW), the Office of the Auditor General explained that the²

[C]hallenges faced with legislations include victims of violence being disadvantaged due to the gender neutral tone of legislation[s], thus the need to review them in a



Community mapping in Aviuta Gucake.

comprehensive and systematic manner given the passage of time since their enactment. There is also inconsistency in the application of the legislation for violence against women by service providers due to the pressure on women to reconcile with husbands/partners, women's lack of knowledge about rights and the law and the manipulation of law to undermine women's rights. Despite the positive changes to legislation with the intent to address the problem of violence against women, the use of legislation by women themselves is low due to the lack of awareness, social stigma and fear of repeated violence in their families.

The report also stated that,³

the most alarming reality is that although women and girls make up the

majority of victims for sexual offenses, there were processes that were not in accordance with the relevant guidance materials pertaining to the reduction of crime against Women in Fiji. These include

administration of the National Domestic Violence Helpline, Zero Tolerance Violence Free Community (ZTVFC) and Ministry's co-operation with Fiji Police Force.

In consideration of this situation, SEEP started a "Thursdays in Black" campaign in 2019, first at the organizational level and then at the community level. In communities whose members have been informed of the campaign, people are actively involved not only in the campaign but also in advocating action against violence and discouraging "by-standing" (inaction) when it comes to addressing violence within their own communities. SEEP has black-colored t-shirts printed with key messages for the "Thursdays in Black" campaign. The t-shirts are worn every Thursday by SEEP staff and community partners who have purchased the t-shirts.



"Thursdays in Black" campaign in solidarity with the women's movement on speaking up on violence against women.



SEEP community partners from Lutu, Naitasiri joining the Human Rights Day celebration, 2019.



“Wednesdays for West Papua” campaign in solidarity with the West Papuans who suffer from torture and killings.

SEEP has community activities that inform people about the services available to victims of domestic violence. Photo in the previous page shows the staff of SEEP wearing their t-shirts while standing in front of the street banner with the anti-VAW message and contact details on counselling services and the police for those who might need the information. The banner hangs in front of the SEEP office building to be clearly visible to all passers-by.

SEEP has Community Facilitation teams in different areas that hold community empowerment training on democracy and the principles of human rights. These teams work across four provinces, eleven districts and thirty-eight communities in some of the remotest places in Fiji.

Human Rights Campaigns

SEEP also organizes campaigns on other human rights issues such as the solidarity campaign

called “Wednesdays for West Papua” against the torture and killings of the West Papuans.

Research

SEEP undertakes research on different issues. In 2019, SEEP launched its research report on the mining policy in Fiji. The report entitled *Mining Realities: Assessing State Compliance on the Rules of Engagement* evaluated the government’s compliance under the Environmental Management Act (2005) in relation to mining. Research work was conducted in three mining sites in Fiji, including the Namosi proposed copper mine in Central Viti Levu, the Nawailevu Bauxite Mine in Bua and the Sand Ore Mining operations in Votu, Ba. The research findings included a proposal to strengthen implementation mechanisms and processes by approving authorities. There is also a proposal to put in place social safeguard mechanisms for people in communities who are directly impacted by extractive industries.

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Discussions on Human Rights Education

Jefferson R. Plantilla

Several regional and international events discussed human rights education in Asia during the second half of 2019. The 8th Asia Pro Bono Conference, held for the first time in South Asia (Kathmandu) on 13 – 15 September 2019, pursued the aim of developing “socially aware, ethical lawyers and non-lawyers to actively participate, advocate and lead pro bono initiatives as a means to strengthen access to justice on behalf of people in fragile or vulnerable situations.” The pro bono workers do not only provide legal service but also participate in “free community legal education on issues affecting disadvantaged or marginalized members of the community or on issues of public interest.”¹ The 9th World Human Rights Cities Forum (WHRCF), an annual event held since 2011, had special training sessions, namely, a course on Local Government and Human Rights and a course on the Right to the City for local government officials. The 19th Informal Seminar on Human Rights of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), held in Tromsø (Norway) on 4-6 November 2019, focused on human rights education.²

Event Discussions

The Informal ASEM Seminar had a wide-ranging discussion on human rights education. Its

preliminary report (Key Messages report) stresses the following:

Human rights education is essential for creating a culture of human rights — that is, societies in which each of us is encouraged and empowered to take the initiative to respect, protect and promote the full spectrum of human rights for all. With the current global backlash against human rights, human rights education and training is more important than ever.

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Participants shared views that in order to build on the momentum of this global/regional human rights education movement it is important to invest in the human rights education infrastructure: invest in strengthening support for educators, trainers, university instructors and all those others who facilitate learning about human rights; invest in ensuring more coordination and coherence in legal and policy frameworks and guidance for actors involved in human rights education; invest in sharing good practices and lessons learned; and, last but not least, invest in research and evaluation in order to develop educational practice and create the necessary

evidence-base for making the case for human rights education. It was noted as well that democratic space is crucial for human rights education and training to be fully embedded in the societies.

In addition to these areas for “investment” to support human rights education, there should be “institutional commitment, sufficient funding, proper methodology, long-[term] perspective and assessment plans” at various levels and fields of education.

The discussions in the Informal ASEM Seminar support the need to build on the existing human rights education initiatives in Asia, and also to create infrastructures that would enhance the implementation of these initiatives including training, research and exchange of good practices and learnings.

The Declaration of the World Human Rights Cities Forum 2019³ subtitled “Local Governments and Human Rights: Reimagining Human Rights Cities” includes a number of statements on human rights education. It includes an over-all view on the need for human rights education:

13. Concurring with the view that human rights education is a prerequisite to the human rights city, and that it is necessary to make

every person residing in the city or local community aware of their rights as well as their duty to engage in working towards the realization of the inclusive city.

This paragraph emphasizes that human rights education should make “every person” in the city aware and engaged in working for an inclusive city. This idea hews closely to the point raised in the 19th Informal ASEM Seminar that each person should be “encouraged and empowered to take the initiative to respect, protect and promote the full spectrum of human rights for all.”

The 8th Asia Pro Bono Conference stressed the importance of “continuing legal education” for those providing pro bono legal services to the poor and marginalized. The pro bono legal service should come from “a variety of sectors, including the government, judicial, legal, private, academic and civil society.”⁴ Supporting “access to justice” of a specific sector in society (the poor and marginalized) also meant empowering them. A broader definition of pro bono work includes educational work (such as the Street Law program⁵) that aims to enable the poor, underprivileged or marginalized persons or communities access justice on their own. Paralegal training also features prominently in this empowerment concept for pro bono legal service providers as shown in the discussions in the 8th Asia Pro Bono Conference.

In sum, the three events consider human rights

education as an essential tool in facilitating people’s action in building a society that upholds human rights.

Follow-up

Recognizing the need for “[c]apacity building for all actors including the National Human Rights Institutions, civil society organisations, government agencies, private sector and media to deliver human rights education,” the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) started planning for a follow-up project in mid-2020.⁶

This project supports the Informal ASEM Seminar’s “overall objective of promoting mutual understanding and cooperation on human rights issues at ASEM level,” and targets “early to mid-level practitioners from across the ASEM Partners.”⁷

The training is meant to⁸

- Support ASEM Partners’ efforts to strengthen the implementation of national programs in human rights education;
- Take stock of the progress of some human rights education programs as case studies and identify best practices and challenges related to their implementation;
- Build capacity and improve competency in using existing practical tools, methods and techniques to evaluate the implementation of human rights education programs;
- Facilitate information-sharing on evidence-based best practices in human rights education.

The 2019 WHRCF declaration, on the other hand, includes support for human rights education seen in the following provisions:

3. Promise to empower local governments to promote human rights as recommended by the report on Local Government and Human Rights (A/HRC/42/22), starting from the participating human rights cities,

xxx xxx xxx

5) Promise to closely collaborate with the UN [United Nations], other expert institutions, and local governments in establishing a systematic and professional human rights education program for local government officials and citizens for the purpose of [raising] the capacity of citizens and local governments in promoting human rights.

Holding of training activities for local government officials and other relevant persons was also discussed as part of the WHRCF next steps.

These discussions on human rights education re-emphasize the importance of training or any form of empowerment of people who can promote human rights on various issues and at different levels and institutions in society.

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For further information, please contact HURIGHTS OSAKA.

Endnotes

- 1 See Asia Pro Bono Conference, www.facebook.com/pg/asiaprobono/about/?ref=page_internal and www.probonoconference.org/about/what-is-pro-bono/.
- 2 ASEM is an “intergovernmental forum for dialogue and cooperation established in 1996 to deepen relations between Asia and Europe” and “aims to promote mutual understanding and co-operation between Asia and Europe in the area of political dialogue, particularly on human rights issues.”
- 3 Full text of declaration available at www.whrcf.org/bbs/board.php?bo_table=eng_p4_05.
- 4 See 8th Asia Pro Bono Conference Declaration, 15 September, 2019, Kathmandu.
- 5 Further information on the Street Law program can be found in Street Law website, www.streetlaw.org.
- 6 “The Seminar was co-organised by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), the Raoul Wallenberg Institute (nominated by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs), the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Peoples’ Republic of China. The 19th Seminar was hosted by the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in partnership with the Arctic University of Norway (UiT).” Text from www.asef.org/projects/themes/governance/4695-19th-informal-asef-seminar-on-human-rights-#4966-asefhrs19-podcast-launch-conversations-on-human-rights-education.
- 7 See ASEF’s “Call for Proposals - Training Design & Delivery on the Topic of Human Rights Education & Training May 2020” document.
- 8 ASEF, *ibid*.

Empowering Communities and Building Resilience

(Continued from page 12)

Slow Food Network and Backyard Gardening

SEEP supports the global Slow Food initiative, and leads this work in Fiji. SEEP encourages the use of traditional practices and knowledge on food preparation and thus promotes

healthy living in the communities.

For more information, please contact: The Social Empowerment & Education Programme (SEEP), 10 Richards Road, Domain, Suva, Fiji; ph +679 3100 170; e-mails: executiveoffice@seep.org.fj, coordinator@seep.org.fj; Facebook page: www.facebook.com/SEEPFiji/.

Endnotes

- 1 Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Fiji, *Coordination of Actions on Elimination of Violence against Women - Performance Audit*, Parliament of Fiji, Parliamentary Paper no. 129 of 2019, page xv. Full report available at www.parliament.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Report-of-the-Auditor-General-Elimination-of-Violence-Against-Women.pdf.
- 2 *Ibid.*, page ix.
- 3 *Ibid.*



Preparing Kovu kai, smoked fresh water mussels in coconut milk, and palusami for the Slow Food program.



Traditional Fijian earthen oven (Lovo) laid with baked Palusami

HURIGHTS OSAKA Calendar

HURIGHTS OSAKA has started compiling articles for the 10th volume of *Human Rights Education in Asia-Pacific*. HURIGHTS OSAKA specially welcomes articles on human rights education experiences in West and Central Asia, and the Pacific.



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HURIGHTS OSAKA, inspired by the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, formally opened in December 1994. It has the following aims: 1) to engender popular understanding in Osaka of the international human rights standards; 2) to support international exchange between Osaka and countries in Asia-Pacific through collection and dissemination of information and materials on human rights; and 3) to promote human rights in Asia-Pacific in cooperation with national and regional institutions and civil society organizations as well as the United Nations. In order to achieve these goals, HURIGHTS OSAKA has activities such as Information Handling, Research and Study, Education and Training, Publications, and Consultancy Services.

FOCUS Asia-Pacific is designed to highlight significant issues and activities relating to human rights in the Asia-Pacific. Relevant information and articles can be sent to HURIGHTS OSAKA for inclusion in the next editions of the newsletter.

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