

The Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights and Its Human Rights Education Program

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The Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO) is a nonprofit, apolitical human rights organization mandated to promote human rights and monitor human rights violations in Cambodia. It was established in 1992 following the 1991 Paris Peace Agreement, which declared the need for human rights education in Cambodia. Article 16 of the agreement provides that the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) shall implement a human rights education program in order to encourage respect for and understanding of human rights. The 1993 Constitution also provides the basis for human rights education: “The Kingdom of Cambodia shall recognize and respect human rights as stipulated in the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the covenants and conventions related to human rights, women’s rights and children’s rights” (Article 31, Chapter III).

Main Programs

LICADHO implements a number of programs:

Human rights education

A team of trainers and educators compiles and develops training curriculums, pamphlets, illustrated booklets, and posters for provincial teachers who conduct classes on human rights, basic legal procedure, and democratic principles for soldiers, students, monks, and civil servants. Provincial teachers also disseminate human rights information to the general population at the district, commune, and village level in 14 provinces.

Monitoring human rights violations

Trained staff members investigate and intervene with the authorities in cases of human rights abuse, as well as monitor, analyze, and document them. Phnom Penh and provincial detention centers are monitored weekly to ensure that all prisoners and detainees have access to legal representation and medical care, and that vulnerable groups such as women, minors, ethnic minorities, and political prisoners are treated fairly.

Medical assistance

A medical team regularly provides medical care to prisoners and prison guards. Special-

ized medical care and supplementary food are given to pregnant women and to children who stay with their mothers in detention centers. LICADHO also provides medical care and direct assistance to victims of human rights violations.

Anti-torture project

A team composed of a social worker, counselor, doctor, administrator, and foreign adviser works with victims on their physical, psychosocial, and economic rehabilitation. Legal assistance is also provided to victims of human rights violations and sexual abuse and exploitation.

Child rights

Specialized trainers conduct courses and workshops in the provinces on child rights for nongovernmental organization (NGO) workers, children, parents, students, teachers, and civil servants. Monitors respond to complaints of abuse committed against children and give them direct assistance.

Women's rights

A team of trained women organizes workshops in the provinces on gender-related topics for NGO workers, civil servants, ordinary citizens, students, monks, police, and army personnel. Victims of women's rights violations are assisted to seek legal representation, medical care, temporary accommodation, and other emergency needs. Research on issues relating to women is being done in Phnom Penh and the provinces.

Advocacy

LICADHO is a corresponding member of the Federation Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme and an observer member of Forum Asia. It gives information on human rights case studies to Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and International

Prison Watch for compilation and distribution in Cambodia and other countries.

At the national level, LICADHO is an active member of the Human Rights Action Committee, Human Rights Investigation Committee, and End Child Prostitution, Abuse and Trafficking in Cambodia Committee.

It produces regular reports on prison conditions and other issues, and advocates social and legal reforms at the national and regional levels. It actively participates in rights-awareness activities such as the Global March on Child Labour, Women's Day, Children's Day, and Human Rights Day organized at the provincial and district levels every year.

It operates in Phnom Penh and 14 provinces—Siem Reap, Banteay Meanchey, Battambang, Pursat, Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Speu, Sihanouk-Ville, Kampot, Svay Rieng, Prey Veng, Kampong Cham, Kampong Thom, Koh Kong, and Takeo. It has 120 full-time staff members.

The Phnom Penh office provides administrative, technical, and financial support to the provincial offices. It also provides technical support for capacity-building activities and support for sensitive and complicated cases with the collaboration of relevant provincial offices.

Provincial offices

- implement programs at the provincial and district levels,
- hold human rights training and dissemination sessions,
- collaborate with some trainers from Phnom Penh in holding child's rights and women's rights training sessions and workshops,
- monitor the condition of prisoners, and
- investigate, monitor, follow-up, and intervene in all cases of human rights violations in their areas of responsibility.

Human rights education program

Human rights education activities began when the Phnom Penh office was opened in

1992. The main objective of the program is to raise awareness of human rights and democracy at all levels of society through group training and dissemination of information. Every provincial office has one educator to carry out the program at the provincial level. The Phnom Penh office has four staff members responsible for conducting human rights training sessions for the general population once a month in Phnom Penh, and, upon request, in Kandal province. It is also responsible for producing information material, preparing the annual meeting of LICADHO's educational staff, as well as making reports to the donors.

From 1992 to May 1993, human rights education activities focused on disseminating information about human rights, democracy, and voting procedures to Cambodians, including students, in preparation for the UN-sponsored elections in May 1993.

After the elections, LICADHO broadened its human rights education activities. It began by using UNTAC's *Book for Human Rights Trainers* for training activities for the general populace, including students, but without specific adjustments in the curriculum for particular target groups such as school children.

About 29% of those who received human rights training from LICADHO in 1999 were students. Other target groups include the police, monks, civil servants, and the general public.

The human rights training program in schools provides education directly to the students rather than to the teachers. LICADHO's educators directly teach students about human rights because schoolteachers do not yet have the capacity to handle the topic.

As other organizations began to develop and conduct human rights training designed for students, LICADHO decided to stop targeting students in 1995-1997, and focused on other groups.

However, because of the great demand from many schools in the provinces and cities for LICADHO to restore its training for students,

it started a new program for school children in early 1998. Its education department created a new curriculum to train the students in grades 9 to 12 (16 to 20 years old). The curriculum is based on 10 topics:

- What are human rights?
- Legal rights of human beings
- Violations of human rights
- Prevention and resolution of human rights violations
- The rule of law
- The relationship between human rights and Khmer traditions
- Women's rights
- Child rights
- What is democracy?
- Voter's education

Generally, LICADHO holds one training course every two months at high schools in every province where it has an office. There were previously no activities in schools located in Phnom Penh in view of similar training activities conducted by other organizations there. But since 2000, training courses have been held in some city schools upon the request of student associations.

Each training session takes three days (a total of 18 hours or 6 hours per day) involving around 25 students. The sessions are sometimes adjusted to the regular school schedule so that an ordinarily three-day program may take five to six days to complete. The number of participants may also be flexible, with each session having 25 to 50.

During the course, each student receives one book, one pen, and other educational materials developed by LICADHO's Education Department, such as handouts containing the lessons or short texts with illustrations; illustrated materials explaining the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and a copy of the Constitution.

The trainers use a mixed methodology—short lectures, conversation and debate, discussion groups, and case studies. The trainers use LICADHO posters on subjects such as the obligations of the police in pretrial procedures, the obligations of the gendarme, the rights of prisoners, domestic violence, human trafficking, and child rights.

At the end of each course, students are tested to determine how much of the training they have understood. On other occasions, such as Human Rights Day celebrations, groups of students are asked questions about human rights. In the 1998 evaluation of the knowledge of human rights among 1,760 students who attended LICADHO training, 35% have “good” knowledge; 50%, “average”; and 15%, “weak.” Similar evaluations of other target groups indicated that only 20% of the participants have “good” knowledge.

LICADHO’s 14 provincial offices implement the annual work plan developed by its education unit. The 112 training sessions planned for 2000 were all successful.

LICADHO’s human rights education in schools program is mainly operated in secondary and high schools in the provinces where its offices are located. From 1998 to 2000, the program operated in 30 secondary schools (out of 364) and 36 high schools (out of 140); 7,172 high-school students and secondary-school students were trained during this period.

From 1992 to 1999, LICADHO provided human rights training courses to a total of 65,734 people, 21,340 of whom were students.

Relationship with the Ministry of Education

LICADHO’s program started without formal government approval as a curricular activity, consisting of three full days a week inserted into formal school hours. LICADHO submits a request to conduct a training course in a school. Upon approval of the request by the

school director, the students are automatically assigned to attend the training course. Because human rights are among the main subjects of the national general education program, LICADHO’s program is not called “out of system” but “extracurricular.”

In 1993, the Ministry of Education authorized LICADHO to conduct training and dissemination sessions throughout Cambodia. LICADHO representatives meet once in a while with the chief of the ministry’s Administrative Department to brief him on LICADHO’s school programs. The department provides administrative support to different schools and writes reports for the minister.

In response to LICADHO’s requests, the ministry agreed to provide materials and resource persons to train LICADHO’s human rights trainers in modern education methodologies such as the participatory or student-centered method. In response to the ministry’s request, LICADHO, in turn, provides it with human rights education materials.

LICADHO, however, still requires approval from the provincial governor, chief of district, and the provincial and district education offices to implement the program. Usually, the chiefs or representatives of the local education offices are invited as chairpersons or distinguished guests during the opening or closing ceremonies. Schoolmasters have to approve the start of the training sessions, requests for which must be sent to them at least seven days before. They often respond three or four days before the training sessions begin. In some provinces, they approve one-year schedules; in others they approve one session at a time.

Relationship with schools

The formal education system in Cambodia has three levels: primary education (grades 1 to 6), and two levels of secondary education—secondary school (grades 7 to 9) and high school (grades 10 to 12). The secondary-school students who go through the three years

of study can take the examination for a diploma, completing the first circle of secondary education. High-school students who go through three years of study can take an examination for Baccalaureate II, completing the second circle of secondary education. For higher education, students study for four years to be able to take the examination for a bachelor's degree.

In reality, in primary and secondary school, one teacher is required to teach 25 to 45 students. As for higher education, one professor is required to teach 30 to 50 students.

As human rights are a subject in the examinations to get a diploma and Baccalaureate II, LICADHO decided to target secondary-school students from grades 8 to 9 and high-school students from grades 11 to 12, for three reasons:

- Some of them will become leaders who will take part in realizing human rights.
- Some will become ordinary citizens who cannot be easily abused by other people.

- Some will become ordinary citizens who are capable of leading other people in addressing human rights violations.

Human rights perceptions

According to LICADHO's August 2000 survey, done prior to the training sessions, 40% of students think that human rights are a new concept in Cambodia and Western in origin. Some think that incorporating human rights into the school curriculum unnecessarily lengthens the school year. Others think that human rights organizations protect thieves, causing anarchy.

However, 60% think that human rights must be understood by all Cambodians and that they must be realized in any democracy.

The schoolteachers surveyed described the students before the human rights training sessions as follows:

- They criticized human rights organizations for protecting thieves.

TABLE 1. Percentage of children covered by the formal education program (by sex, age group, and residence)

Age group	Percentage of total			Urban			Rural		
	All	M	F	All	M	F	All	M	F
7+	26.0	30.3	22.1	30.4	34.4	26.3	25.1	29.5	21.2
7-14	64.3	66.3	62.3	75.3	76.8	73.7	62.4	64.5	60.3
15-19	40.6	51.4	30.0	54.6	64.8	45.0	37.6	48.7	26.8
20-24	8.3	11.6	5.3	16.1	22.4	10.1	6.7	9.2	4.4
25+	1.4	1.7	1.1	2.3	2.9	1.7	1.2	1.5	1.0

M = males, F = females

Source: General Population Census of Cambodia (1998), prepared by the Ministry of Planning, July 1999.

TABLE 2. Statistics on students and teachers/professors

Level	Number of students	Number of teachers/professors
Primary education	2,204,599	52,211
Secondary education	341,303	17,164
Higher education	22,511	2,109
Total	2,568,413	71,484

Source: Annual reports of the Primary Education, Secondary Education, and Higher Education Departments (1999-2000).

- They did not understand the meaning of human rights.
- They thought that human rights were useless in Khmer society.
- They formed gangs.
- They spoke to each other without courtesy, and disregarded morals.
- They did not pay attention to their teachers.
- They used violence to resolve conflicts among themselves.
- They did not respect school discipline.
- They caused anarchy and a sense of insecurity to pervade the schools.

The survey also shows what changes students and teachers observed in schools after the training sessions:

- Students have become aware that human rights are relevant to Khmer society.
- They realize that human rights guide people in respecting each other and peacefully resolving conflicts.
- They realize that people have to respect the law.
- They understand clearly that the courts (not human rights organizations) exercise the authority to release or detain a person accused of stealing.
- Some agree that human rights are not a new concept in Cambodia and have roots in Khmer history and tradition.
- They think that mob killing of suspected thieves is illegal and that those responsible must be punished according to the law.
- Some think that human rights give people the knowledge to legally solve problems and peacefully redress human rights violations.
- Some are determined to share their knowledge on human rights with their relatives and neighbors. They said, “If everybody understands and practices human rights principles, real and full peace will exist in Cambodia.”

The schoolteachers made the following observations:

- Students could explain to each other the meaning of human rights.
- They are gradually realizing that it is incorrect to believe that “human rights organizations protect and set thieves or robbers free.”
- Students started to become interested in the human rights field.
- Violent conflicts among students decreased.
- Gangs were eliminated.
- They now speak to each other with courtesy, and respect morals.
- Anarchy decreased in the school.
- The majority of students are beginning to respect school discipline.
- They now pay attention to their teachers.

LICADHO’s education program was evaluated by the Capacity Building Through Evaluation of Human Rights Organization project. The evaluation was not specifically focused on human rights education in schools programs.

Problems encountered

Despite the positive results of the training sessions, the program encountered a number of problems:

- Even if the Ministry of Education and provincial governor approve LICADHO’s request to conduct a training session, the request must be made and submitted to the district officers, chief of district, chief of the education department, and schoolmaster, which takes at least one week.
- The quality of the training is adversely affected by the large number of students per session and by the tight schedule provided in the national school curriculum, which causes some schools to cancel some sessions.

- Some students ask for a per diem because other organizations give money to training participants.
- Some schools are in remote, dangerous areas.
- Some schoolmasters are hesitant to accept LICADHO's training schedule. Since each training requires three days, it affects the time frame of the formal education program.
- LICADHO's curriculum has to be improved and developed. The problem is the lack of resource persons who have comprehensive experience in developing curriculum.

New developments

LICADHO continues to believe that the human rights climate in Cambodia will improve if human resources are developed through education and awareness. It intends to continue to target students.

In this regard, LICADHO is now thinking of a new way to implement the program. Previously trained students will be invited to attend follow-up sessions, which will focus on two things:

- assessing students' level of understanding on topics covered in the first training sessions and reviewing topics they have forgotten; and
- facilitating analytical discussions on specific cases in relation to topics previously discussed, most of which concern serious human rights violations, and then seeking legal ways to solve them.

LICADHO's central office is responsible for

- drafting the curriculum,
- training the provincial trainers on how to use it,
- implementing it by conducting follow-up sessions in Phnom Penh and Kandal province (where LICADHO does not have an office), and

- evaluating the curriculum's effectiveness.

The provincial trainers are responsible for

- commenting on how to develop the curriculum,
- attending the training course on how to use the curriculum, and
- implementing the curriculum by conducting follow-up sessions in their provinces.

LICADHO is also considering shortening lectures and employing more participatory and student-centered methods to replace the present method of providing the students with knowledge based on national laws, international laws, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights through lectures, presentations, and group discussion methods.

In the participatory and student-centered methods, students are asked what they think are serious human rights violations. Then they are encouraged to discuss and analyze them and find effective ways to resolve them according to national and international laws. This method ensures that the students have a clearer understanding of human rights concepts in relation to their own environment. Guided by a trainer-facilitator, the students also take the lead in coming up with their own solutions to address human rights violations. This kind of training program can be called "human rights awareness through analysis" as opposed to "transfer of human rights awareness."

Conclusion

LICADHO's program has its strong and weak points. It is strong because it is based on clients' demands. However, it is weak because it does not have a mechanism for sustainability, which springs from the fact that it is not part of the formal school curriculum although human rights are covered by the school examination prerequisite for graduation or being granted a baccalaureate certificate. The previous training conducted by LICADHO has

positively changed the school community, and, it may be speculated, society in general.

The strategy of directly teaching students needs to be changed. LICADHO should consider employing another method such as teacher training instead in order to reach more students. The number of LICADHO's educators is limited, limiting the number of students reached by them.

The curriculum should also be revised to fit the needs of students, with emphasis on the rights of the child. The ideal is a school curriculum that incorporates human rights to ensure that all students will become aware of human rights concepts.