

Institute of Human Rights Education: India Experience

V. VASANTHI DEVI

The Institute of Human Rights Education (Institute), based in Tamilnadu state in India, is currently involved in human rights education programs in schools in ten states across the vast country. The Institute was established in 1997 as part of an experimental program of People's Watch Tamil Nadu covering a few schools in Tamilnadu. People's Watch Tamil Nadu is a civil society organization involved since 1995 in the protection and promotion of human rights, and employs a wide variety of intervention efforts on behalf of human rights violations victims. The Institute was a child of the prior experience of the parent body.

The dream and the reality

The introduction of human rights education in Tamil Nadu schools was the result of a deep reflection that the value of rights can be firmly established only when it is instilled in the tender minds of children as a social virtue, to be safeguarded, protected and nurtured. India, perhaps like all other countries of the world, is a land of a thousand oppressions. Millions of our people - children, women, dalits (the former Untouchables), adivasis (indigenous people), the poor, the slum dwellers and many others - are subjected to injustices, rights denials, exploitations, oppressions, discriminations and violence.

How do we change such a brutal, heartless world? Where do we begin? It can only begin in the classroom, where the destiny of the nation is forged. The seeds of a better world, of love, friendship, compassion, beauty, creativity, freedom, and equality should be sown and nurtured in the minds of children. Such reflections and a firm faith in children as the

hope of a new world led us to human rights education.

Why human rights education?

All education, including technical and professional education, ought to be human rights education in one way or the other. Education should, directly or indirectly, serve the interest of furthering human rights, not of select or privileged sections, but of every human being, irrespective of her class, caste, gender, race, ethnicity, religious or sexual orientation or physical or mental disability. Albert Einstein, the great scientist, once said, "The concern for Man and his destiny is the prime objective of all scientific and technical efforts. Never forget it in the midst of your diagrams and equations." The purpose of all education is to sensitize, to humanize, to take humanity to higher levels of knowledge, awareness, freedom and social responsibility. While pursuit of knowledge is recognized as the purpose of education, the other three, aware-

ness, freedom and social responsibility are not considered inherent to Project Education. If we lose the meaning of education in its wholesomeness, we will end up creating a world without human values or justice and ultimately, without progress, too.

While we define education thus, we are all painfully aware that it is a distant vision. Education has never been the engine for furthering the human rights of every human being at any time in history. It has been a potent class instrument to discriminate, deny, and dominate. Till recent times it had been the monopoly of the ruling, dominant classes and sections in society. In a country like India, the inviolable iron frame of the caste system had strictly guarded this monopoly. Our dharma ordained that education was the preserve of the twice-born. Our mythology has tales of ruthless punishment and brutal mutilation of persons who dared transgress the 'divine order'. Other societies across the world have their own systems of monopoly of knowledge. True education is a threat to power and privilege.

While the modern society has moved far from traditional exclusions, it still practices subtle and nonetheless potent strategies for denying empowering, equalizing knowledge to vast sections of its citizenry. That is why Ivan Illyich had to call for a 'De-Schooling Society' and Paulo Freire had to seek an alternate education through a 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed'. The content of education and pedagogy have been designed, in most countries, to exclude, to mystify large sections of their populace and to co-opt the dissenters into the hierarchical systems.

Education is, with exceptions, an alienating process. It alienates the student from the world around, from the society that gave birth to her and nurtured her. It alienates her from relating to and understanding the denials, deprivations, and the struggles of large sections of community. Our schools, colleges, and our centers of

research have raised high walls around them that cut them away from the community. There are no windows to let in invigorating, lifegiving winds from the world around.

The education that alienates fails to further human rights, justice and equity. It also miserably fails in its ostensible pursuit of knowledge. With blinkers secured on her eyes to shut out the immediate world, the student sees only a fragmented reality. To know is to relate. If you do not relate to the harsh realities of your community, its rights denials, the horrors of its wretched poverty, inhuman deprivation, heartless exploitation and discrimination, then the knowledge that you acquire is partial knowledge, often distorted knowledge.

In the present age the alienating character of education has assumed grotesque proportions, in spite of the democratic pretensions of the modern state. Education today is an instrument for domination, for thought control, for dangerous manipulations, for what Walter Lippman once called 'the manufacturing of consent'. A powerful process of social engineering is operating through our education system to rationalize, justify and perpetuate the horrendous inequities, rights denials, violations of the very right to life and dignity of millions of people across the world. Our schools and colleges, in developed as well as developing countries, are the recruiting grounds for soldiers to defend the imperialist system of global domination. The neo-liberal ideology that rules the world today is a product of our ivory towers, our celebrated centers of intellectual excellence.

The internet is, perhaps, the symbol par excellence of the era of global domination. What is happening to our students today? They are getting hooked on to the internet and float in cyberspace, relating to worlds and creatures, which could as well be from outer space. When our student is logged on, she gets logged off her immediate world, the world in flesh and blood that is around her, the world that brought her

into existence and nurtured her. The virtual world is shutting out the real world. The individual, fiercely alone is the ideal. The aggressive, fiercely competing, self-aggrandizing student is the marketed model today. These are the virtues the management gurus glorify.

In such a dismal educational scenario today, the rationale for bringing human rights education into our schools is almost self-evident. It is to radicalize education as a whole, to make it truly an instrument for liberation, to break a million bondages. It is an antidote to the ills of the contemporary education system. It is the fruition of the search for alternate, liberating education that has been pursued for a long time by reformers, radicals, nation builders, and dreamers.

So, we dared to dream and to challenge and took the plunge. The last nine years have brought rewards beyond our wildest hopes, exciting growth, expansion across the vast and varied landscape of India, warm welcome to our program from unexpected quarters, from insensitive bureaucracy and indifferent political leadership and more than anything else, appreciation of teachers and eager, enthusiastic response of students. We have also had a much smaller share of disappointments and setbacks, which however, pale into nothing compared to the rich rewards we have reaped. It has been an intensely learning experience through a dynamic, dialectical process, not all of which was pre-planned.

Building a national program

Though the Institute had initially launched the Human Rights Education (HRE) program independently, with no reference to the United Nations Decade of Human Rights Education (1995-2004) [UN Decade], soon it opted to come under the global program. The Institute viewed the UN Decade as an opportunity for

concerted and collective action to promote the concept of human rights through educational interventions. At the close of the UN Decade, the United Nations has come up with the World Programme for Human Rights Education (WPHRE) with a special focus on primary and secondary schools, for the 2005 – 2007 period. The WPHRE considers human rights education as essential for the promotion and achievement of stable and harmonious relations among communities and for fostering mutual understanding, tolerance and peace. The Institute is implementing human rights education in consonance with the objectives of the WPHRE.

Beginnings in Tamil Nadu

From its inception in 1997 till 2005 the human rights education program was confined to the state of Tamil Nadu, our base. It is in this state that our vision was sharpened, the content of human rights education developed, our modules for students and teachers designed, appropriate pedagogy identified, partnerships forged and Government's approval won. Since 1997, 100,000 students and over 2,000 teachers in more than 1,000 schools throughout the State of Tamil Nadu have benefited from the human rights education programs of the Institute. Both government and private schools have been covered under it.

The Institute is proud to say that all the schools under the Adi Dravida Welfare Department of Tamil Nadu Government, with their students hailing from the most deprived sections of society, mainly dalits and tribals, have been part of this human rights education program. Since 2002 the program is being offered to students in classes VI, VII, and VIII in the 350 schools under the department.

Table 1: Human Rights Education in Schools in Tamil Nadu

Phases	Year	Districts	Schools	No. of Schools	Class	Students	Teachers
1	1997-1998	1	Private Schools	9	9th	1,756	90
2	1998-2000	10	City Corporation and Private Schools	122	8th, 9th	21,320	315
3	1999-2002	29	TNCRI* (Catholic Schools)	238	7th, 8th, 9th	33,785	730
Total		29 (as of 2007)		369		56,861	1,135
4	2002-2005	29	Govt. ADW** (SC/ST) Schools	258	6th, 7th, 8th	25,819	492
	2002-2005	10	Diocesan Schools	134	6th, 7th, 8th	14,330	251
	2002-2005	15	CSI Schools***	155	6th, 7th, 8th	12,650	333
Total		29 (as of 2007)		547		52,799	1,076
5	2005-2008	30	Govt. ADW (SC/ST) Schools	355	6th, 7th, 8th	21,057	(492) + 233 Newly trained
	2005-2008	10	Diocesan Schools	154	6th, 7th, 8th	11,000	200
Total		30 (as of 2007)		509		32,057	433
Over-all Total				1,425		14,1717	2,644

* TNCRI – Tamil Nadu Congregation of Religious Institutions
 ** Govt. ADW – Government Adi Dravidar Welfare Schools
 *** CSI Schools - Church of South India Schools

National program

The response we received from the Adi Dravida Welfare and Tribal Schools inspired and encouraged us to move to other parts of the country. Starting in the latter half of 2005 it has now spread to ten other states of the country as the National Program of Human Rights Education in Schools. The program, at present, covers the states of Gujarat, Tripura, West Bengal, Orissa, Chattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, and Rajasthan apart from Tamil Nadu. Bihar has joined the national program in April 2007 and Pondicherry and Madhya Pradesh are on the threshold of entering the family.

Our modus operandi of taking human rights education to different states varies according to our understanding of the political climate and the educational scenario in different states. We reach out to the government of the state, at the level of political and administrative leadership, with a request to join the National and World Programme for Human Rights Education and with an offer to initiate a pilot program for about fifty schools with orientation to teachers, supply of books, and so on. The state program is then launched with their permission. We also contact private schools and offer it in their schools. We identify a state partner, which is either a civil society organization working with children or an educational institution. We run

the program, along with the state partner, as a collaborative venture. A state co-coordinator is appointed as a full time employee and the key functionary. A State Advisory Committee, with eminent persons in the state is also constituted to advise and guide the state program. We conduct a series of advocacy and sensitizing programs before launching it. We have had varied levels of response and degrees of success.

Our state partners, in collaboration with whom the program is implemented are the following organizations: Loreto School in West Bengal, People’s Cultural Center (PECUC) in Orissa, Justice and Peace Commission in Andhra Pradesh, SICHREM in Karnataka and Kerala, Centre for Social Justice in Gujarat, HOPE in Pondicherry, Hidayatullah National Law University in Chattisgarh, Government Law College in Tripura, Sophia College in Rajasthan and Asian Development Research Institute (ADRI) in Bihar. In addition to the state partner, we seek

the support, solidarity, cooperation and partnership of various organizations/institutions, who become our implementing organizations.

Table 2 below shows the number of schools covered in each State

In every State, various stages were followed prior to teaching human rights. After the identification of the collaborating partners and state coordinators, various actions such as State Level Consultation, constitution of State Advisory Committee, State Implementing Committee and State Resource Team, identification of schools, training of the State Resource Team, Head Masters (HMs) Meeting, Training of Teachers, State Launch of Human Rights Education, translation and printing of modules, and so on were undertaken. Simultaneously, efforts were pursued to get the approval of the government for introducing human rights

Table 2: National Programme of Human Rights Education in Schools

S.No	State	Period	Districts Covered	No. of Schools	Class	Students	Teachers	
1	Orissa: Phase I, Phase II (S.C.* and Tribal Schools)	2005-2008	15	65	6th, 7th, 8th	3300	68	
		2007-2010	25	60	6th	3800	70	
2	West Bengal	2005-2008	3	50	6th	8,290	61	
3	Gujarat	2005-2008	3	36	6th, 7th	3450	44	
4	Kerala	2005-2008	5	55	6th	8500	56	
5	Karnataka	2005-2008	6	80	6th, 7th, 8th	8300	90	
6	Andhra Pradesh	2005-2008	9	70	6th, 7th	4500	65	
7	Tripura	2005-2008	3	62	6th	3500	68	
8	Chattisgarh	2005-2008	4	36	6th	3000	36	
9	Rajasthan	2005-2008	5	17	6th	3000	24	
10	Pondicherry	2005-2008	In preliminary stage					
11	Bihar	2007-2010	In preliminary stage					

*S.C. - Scheduled caste

education in schools. Advocacy at the national and state levels is an ongoing activity so that human rights education becomes integral part of the regular school curriculum. While human rights education is being taught, regular school visits, Teachers Review Meetings, Summer Training for Teachers, celebrations of important days, interactions with HMs, teachers and pupils are carried out to facilitate and strengthen the process.

We have had varying experiences in our interactions with governments in states. In Karnataka and Orissa the governments have been enthusiastic partners from the beginning. At the other end, in Gujarat and Rajasthan, ruled by the Hindu communal Bharatiya Janata Party, with the communal carnage witnessed in Gujarat recently, we were wary of directly seeking the support of the government. In these two states, a civil society organization and a reputed women's college implement the program respectively, bringing in interested private schools. Even in these states government support is gradually being won.

Designing the content

Human rights education is offered in Classes VI, VII and VIII. The Institute has brought out three modules on human rights education for the use of students and teachers in Classes VI-VIII. Of the three modules, the first is an introduction to human rights, the second is exclusively on child rights and the third deals with discrimination. These modules were initially written in Tamil, and are now translated into English and the other Indian languages of Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Oriya, Bengali, Gujarati and Hindi to enable the expansion of this program to the other states and its eventual spread to the rest of the country. (See annexes for the cover pages of some of the modules). The writing of each language module is entrusted to a group of education, human rights and language experts of the state. Care is taken

to see that in each state our original module is not mechanically translated, but is dynamically adapted and rewritten to reflect the local reality and is relevant to local human rights issues.

Pedagogy: search for the appropriate

The radical education of human rights education needs a radical pedagogy. The classroom, as it exists today, is ill suited to transact a humanizing education. Classroom relations are power relations, with the teacher wielding absolute authority over the students within its confined space, while she herself is a low level functionary in a bureaucratized, elite-driven, elite-centered education system. The curriculum, evaluation methods, a fiercely competitive culture, and concepts of discipline militate against nurturing a human rights and democratic culture. Human rights education needs to be a child-centered education, respecting the child's role as constructor of knowledge rather than treating her as a passive recipient of information. The child who comes into a class is treated as an empty vessel, into which ready-made, pre-cooked knowledge is poured. Every child brings with it to the classroom a fund of cognitive and cultural capital. This rich capital must be fully utilized in the collective process of classroom transactions.

And human rights education cannot be imparted within the four walls of the classroom. It has to be learned, out in the world, in the midst of people, particularly among victims of injustice and rights violations. It cannot stop with acquiring information, but should lead to courageous and collective action in solidarity with the victims.

Our search for appropriate pedagogy is proving to be endless, constantly evolving, as we delve deeper into our mission and as we move across a land of immense variety and richness.

We started with small steps, departing from inception from the rote-learning system of the

Indian classroom. Every lesson is introduced by way of stories, dialogues, historical incidents, experiences, media reports of everyday violations of human dignity and so on. Our insistence has been on participatory mode of learning. We advocate sharing by students of their and others' experiences in class, interactions with victims of violations of human rights, interviewing, games, inspecting places where violations have taken place, submitting petitions to authorities, and so on.

The impact

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.

We have presently taken up the documentation of this intensely human experience, with funding received from the Human Rights Education Programme of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Challenges

We have built a vast network across the immensity of India. We work in twelve states, from Tripura in Northeast and West Bengal in the East to Gujarat in the West, from Rajasthan and Bihar in the North to Kerala and Tamilnadu in the South. We have encountered challenges, bewildering in their variety, throwing questions at us for which we have no answers. We have taken in our little hands a handful of seeds of immense potency and broadcast them across a sub-continent. We have moved with the faith that wherever these seeds fall they will germinate and in the chemistry of mingling with wildly varied soil, a thousand flowers will bloom. We are asked again and again, are you not spreading yourself too thin; is there not a big transmission loss? We acknowledge there is transmission loss. The passion of Madurai (our headquarters) drawn from daily encounters with brutal violations and daily struggles on the side of victims cannot be easily transmitted to distant Rajasthan and does suffer loss in the process. But we have also seen enhancements, in dedication, in our repertoire, in exhilarating new pedagogical methods. We see an exciting dynamics of enhancement operating. The main reason for it is that everywhere we move, we initiate a collective process that rolls on, carving its own trajectory. To cite a few such instances, to the human rights stories we initially identified in Tamilnadu, Orissa has added new ones on land rights, cultural rights and language rights, as these are the inalienable rights the tribal communities, who constitute 28% of the state population, are being brutally denied. We initially developed the modules in the language

of each state. However, in many states, large proportions of the people speak dialects, significantly different from the state language. The curriculum development committee in Orissa is planning to bring out the modules in the major tribal dialects. In Bihar the proposal is from the inception to adopt three major languages of the state as medium of learning for human rights education. Tripura, too, plans to have two major languages, one a tribal language, as learning medium. Our program is for students in Classes VI–VIII and is pitched at that level. In a school in West Bengal the human rights education teachers felt bad that the senior students, who would be graduating out of the school soon are denied the benefit of the rich and empowering human rights education program. So, on their own initiative, they are offering human rights education to students up to Class XII, with suitable adaptations.

I discuss here some of the challenges we face, many of them inherent in the nature of the project we have undertaken:

- 1) Education is in the realm of the state. The Institute is a civil society organization that is making a foray into the realm of the state. It is sometimes seen as breaching the boundary between state and civil society and our credentials to be educators are questioned and viewed with suspicion. The critique, however, softens and dies out as educationists, who have held high academic positions, and persons of eminence constitute our Institute and State Advisory Committees in each state.
 - 2) Dominant sections in all societies control state power. These sections are the beneficiaries of the exploitative, unequal regimes that prevail. Human rights education critiques, challenges and hopes ultimately to overthrow such regimes. That is why Tolstoy once said, “True education is liberating. No government in its senses will allow it.” How realistic is it to expect governments to extend support to a radical education? Here the contradictions between the philosophy and
- practice of a modern democratic state come to our rescue. The Indian Constitution is a profoundly human document and the state is expected to uphold the democratic mandate of the Constitution. The rhetoric of freedom and equality prevails in the public domain and sweeps the horrors of a class-caste society under the carpet. And so human rights education is accepted, perhaps, as belonging to the realm of rhetoric and will be permitted in the classroom till its radical content becomes manifest.
- 3) Still some state governments are uncomfortable with our content. They question the need for talking to students about inequities and violations of human rights. They are worried about the radical implications of human rights education and seek to dilute it. They want us to sanitize our content, “keep caste out, keep untouchability out”. What do we do at such moments, when we are asked to compromise? We have attempted persuasion and when it failed we chose to abandon the program in the particular state rather than compromise and corrupt the soul of human rights education.
 - 4) The age of globalization and reforms in which we are living is a dehumanizing time. The education system is designed for the needs of hegemonic corporate capital. Our children are indoctrinated with the ideology of competition, of fierce, ruthless, man-against-man competition. Children are programmed and launched into the world for global conquest. The individual fiercely alone, slogging every minute to excel is the marketed model today. Some schools ask us ‘when is the time for human rights education? Every minute is needed to coach our students to excel in exams.’ How do we change this mindset? How do we start a process of detoxification, to flush out the poison?
 - 5) And then, do we talk about state violence, which is a good part of human rights violations? The vast majority of students in our

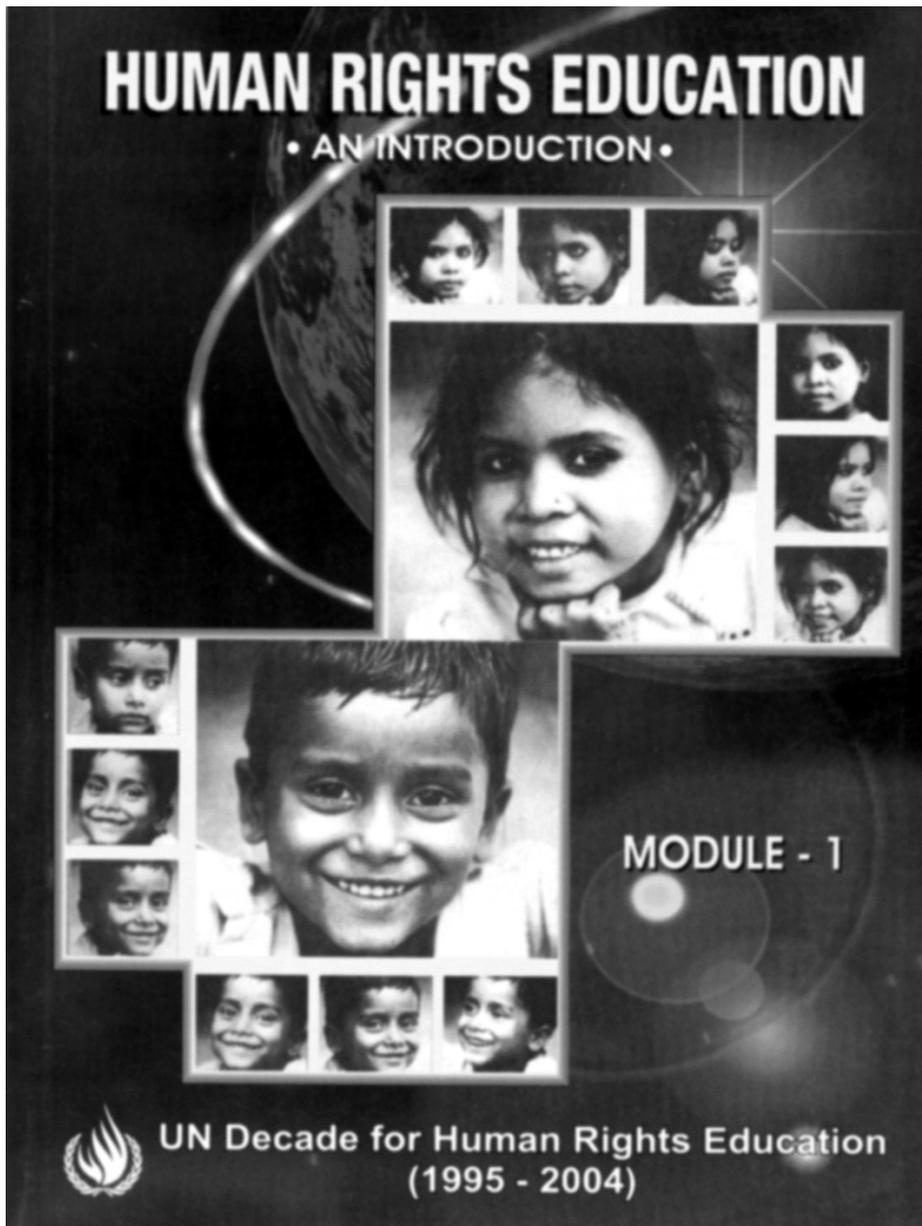
human rights education program in all the states are from sections of the citizenry that bears the brunt of state violence. They are witness to the brutalization of the state, when the police swoop down on their poverty stricken homes and drag away the father or mother, foisting false cases. The children in tribal schools have suffered the trauma of dispossession and displacement, when the guardians of law in unholy alliance with forest mafias flushed out their entire communities like rats from their ancestral lands. Should we speak about these violations in human rights education classes? If we do not, are we not guilty of hypocrisy?

If we do, can we hope to have the continued patronage of the state?

Such are the questions that torment us. Such are the challenges we face. We make a collective effort to analyze them, understand them, and evolve strategies to meet and overcome them and turn the whole experience into a learning experience of great import. Meanwhile some more schools want to join us, a few more states are beckoning to us. We move on.

Human rights education is part of the struggle for human rights, “an eternal struggle, in which a final victory can never be won. But to tire in that struggle would mean the ruin of society.” (Einstein)

ANNEX A



ANNEX B

మానవ హక్కుల బోధన

పరిచయం

పాఠ్యప్రణాళిక - 1

మానవ హక్కుల బోధన కొరకు
ఐక్యరాజ్య సమితి ప్రపంచ ప్రణాళిక

ANNEX C

मानव अधिकार शिक्षा केन्द्र

* लोग निरिक्षण केन्द्र-निष्कलाण्ड मानव अधिकार के निरुद्ध बलनेवाले कर्मी की निगमनी करने हुए, अधिकार की सुरक्षा करने में पत के उपनवास्विक का निरुद्ध करते हुए और मानव अधिकार संस्कृति का विकास करते हुए लोग निरिक्षण केन्द्र-निष्कलाण्ड का मर, 1995, दिसंबर 10 को आधिभव हुआ।

* अधिकारों का उपनवास्विक करने हुए जो व्यक्तित्व के रूप में या पुत्र में उनका अंगरक्षण करने के लिए निवार हो उठे मानव अधिकार के कौशल व क्षमता का शिक्षण देना।

* अधिकारों के उपनवास्विक के कौशल का प्रलेखन करना और उनके बारे में एक भाषण-माला कार्यक्रम चलाना।

* मानव अधिकार सुरक्षा से कनिष्ठ लोग निरिक्षण केन्द्र ने मानव अधिकार संस्कृति की वृद्धि में व मानव अधिकार शिक्षा के द्वारा उचित सह संभान या केन्द्र, नैपुण्य गट्ट, मानव अधिकार शिक्षा के दस साल (1995-2004) के नाम को ध्यान में रखते हुए मर 1997 में तमिलनाडु के सभी स्कूलों में मानव अधिकार शिक्षा के छ भागों में परिचय दिए हैं।

मानव अधिकार शिक्षा का तमिलनाडु के कुछ महा विद्यालयों में भी परिचय दिया गया। गट्टियु ईगाई उच्चतर शिक्षा संघ में संवर्धित महाविद्यालयों में भी मर 2002 में मानव अधिकार शिक्षा का परिचय दिया जा रहा है।

शिक्षा संस्थाओं के अतिरिक्त लोग निरिक्षण प्रतिनिधियों, वकील-गण, पुलिस में संवर्धित विमान, वैद्य-लोग, व्यवसाय-मंत्र के सदस्य, राजनीतिक पार्टियों, पत्रकारों, दलित- वर्ग, अन्य समा और महिला संघ आदि सब को मानव अधिकार का शिक्षण दिया जाए।

वर्ष	जिला	विद्यालय की संख्या	कक्षा	विद्यार्थी कुं.	अध्यापक गण
1	1997-1998	1	9	1,736	90
2	1998-2000	10	122	21,320	315
3	1998-2002	29	238	32,785	730
4	2002-2005	29	238	24,819	422
5	2002-2005	10	131	14,330	251
6	2002-2005	15	153	12,650	333
कुल			906	1,09,660	2,211

* मानव अधिकार शिक्षा में संवर्धित पाठ पुत्र का निवार करना।

* मानव अधिकार शिक्षा का भाषण माला कार्यक्रम चलाना।

* मानव अधिकार शिक्षा में संवर्धित ऑप-मंत्र निवार करना।

मानव अधिकार शिक्षा



बच्चा

अधिकार



जीवन जीते



धारा लेने



पुरखा कसे



दूसरा भाषा

संयुक्त राष्ट्र मानव अधिकार शिक्षा के दस साल

1995 - 2004

