

Crystallization of Good Practices and Lessons Learned on the Promotion of Human Rights Education in Thailand¹

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The Amnesty International Thailand (AI-Thailand) has been implementing a human rights education program, as a part of its mandate, for more than a dozen years. The program covers a wide spectrum of activities in different contexts and mostly responding to its main targets, particularly educators and youth.

During the past four-year period (2005-2009), AI-Thailand has expanded the coverage of its target groups under the program by including community leaders, social workers and non-governmental organization (NGO) activists. As a result, the participants from the target groups undertook pervasive human rights education activities in their respective communities. Moreover, their different experiences enriched the human rights education activities using the group dynamics approach, and resulted in enhanced long-term networking.

The human rights education program of AI-Thailand has been receiving financial support from the Rights Education Action Program (REAP) of Amnesty International Norway since 2004. The program has been divided into two implementation phases, 2004-2006 and 2007-2009. It is being implemented by a Working Group on Human Rights Education comprising of the Chairperson of AI-Thailand Board of Committees, resource persons, facilitators, and the Director and Coordinator of Human Rights Education Program of AI-Thailand.

This article presents the lessons learned on human rights education work of AI-Thailand done in the challenging human rights context in Thai society, and crystallized as good practices of the program. The article also discusses the results of the “SWOT analysis” undertaken to identify the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats encountered during the two-phased implementation period. Finally, the article presents as part of the conclusion the recommendations and findings of the program for its future implementation.

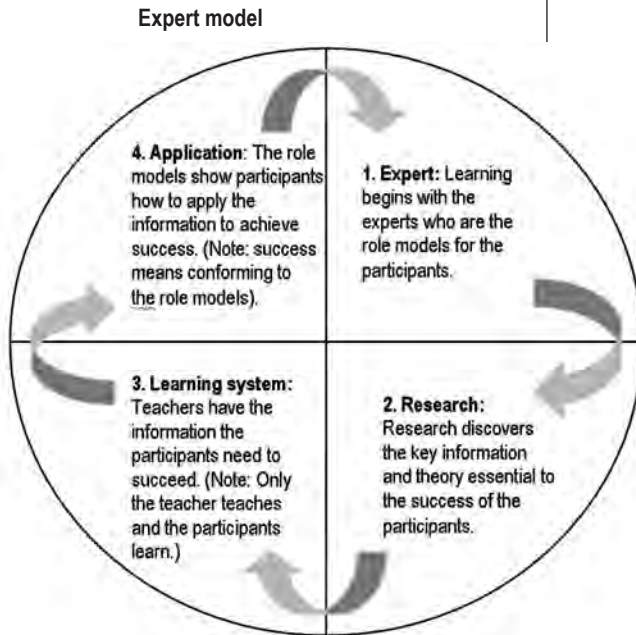
Expert and Spiral Models²

Apart from the lectures and explanations of resource persons in the Expert Model, AI-Thailand firmly undertakes the participant-centered learning process, the Spiral model, which is innovative and interactive because it facilitates dialogue, exchange and mutual learning among the participants. The key activities of the program consist of core plenary sessions

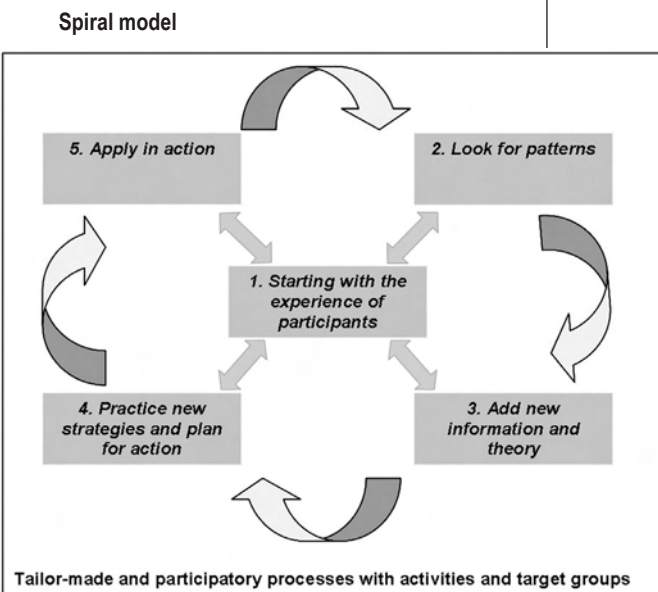
with sub-group meetings, panel presentations, thematic working groups, community visits, exhibition, and cultural performances. The details of the Expert and Spiral models are shown in illustrations below.

Human Rights Education Activities

The main target groups of the Human Rights Training Program of AI-Thailand are educators, community leaders, social workers and NGO activists, while the training content covers all fundamental human rights and specific needs. The training workshop is divided into three schemes:



1) Human Rights Education Workshop – this is meant for general audiences who are not familiar with human rights. It aims to provide basic knowledge on human rights during a three-day program for around twenty to thirty participants per workshop. The workshop employs group dynamics and participatory approach in order to encourage the participants to share their experiences, discover their common ideas, knowledge and beliefs, and increase their knowledge of human rights.



2) Workshop on Human Rights – this is for specific audiences consisting mainly of Training of Trainers (TOT) for thirty to forty participants who already attended the Human Rights Education Workshop or are directly working on human rights issues for some time. This workshop starts with an update of the participants’ knowledge on human rights and proceeds to increasing skills on problem analysis and application of human rights in practice. It focuses on experiences, good practices and lessons learned that contribute

to a constructive approach to implementing human rights education programs. The workshop also allows the participants to benefit from and be motivated by the experiences of others. The discussion and application on the implementation and replication of good practices and lessons learned help the participants assess their specific needs for capacity-building and technical assistance, and strengthen their networking at the local level accordingly. At the end of the workshop, AI Thailand staff make the special efforts of ensuring action-oriented outcomes and follow-up on human rights education activities.

- 3) Human Rights Education Activities for Youth – AI-Thailand annually organizes the Camp for Human Rights Youth with a community visit component. The main target groups are students from secondary school to university levels. They learn about human rights principles (i.e., human rights and human dignity as well as equality and non-discrimination), and human rights practices and lessons learned. Community visit allows the participants to benefit from and be motivated by the experiences of others, and to contribute their human rights work to the community.

Since 2006, three Camps for Human Rights Youth have been organized:

- 1) 2006 Camp for Human Rights Youth in Bor Nok - Hin Krud, Prachuapkhirikhan province focused on the longstanding struggle of local communities dwelling in the Thai gulf province of Prachuapkhirikhan against the construction of three coal-fired electric power plants;
- 2) 2007 Camp for Human Rights Youth in Kang Sua Ten, Prae province focused on natural conservation and community rights in relation to the opposition to the construction of a dam in the area.

The participants undertook community research on the richness of natural resources in the area and showed the failure of the development policy that disregard community participation. The youth network has been strengthened through the years with human rights work; and

- 3) 2008 Camp for Human Rights Youth in Paak Moon, Ubonratchathani province focused on the never-ending and peaceful demonstration of Assembly of the Poor, consisting of people who are severely affected by the money-oriented development without people's participation and consultation. Their arable and residential lands were destroyed by these development projects, particularly dams and natural resource conservation policies, while most of them were forced to survive below the poverty line. The Assembly of the Poor has vigorously advocated for effective remedies and rehabilitation programs for the past thirteen years. So far, the government has responded with minimal compensation.

During the 2004-2008 period, AI Thailand organized at least fifteen human rights education activities with around four hundred participants.

Mediums, Instruments and Resources

Within each workshop, various mediums and instruments for human rights education would be either selected or created by the Working Group on Human Rights Education of AI-Thailand, in accordance with the preliminary analysis of the needs of participants, in order to facilitate them to substantially apply human rights education into their work.

For the educators, community leaders, social workers and NGOs activists, AI-Thailand uses

its own human rights education manual, the handbook entitled *First Step*, materials on the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (visual aid in VCD format and a poster on UDHR), documentaries on human rights cases (women's rights, child rights, community rights, and anti-human trafficking, etc.).

For the Human Rights Youth Camp, apart from the distribution of documentations on human rights cases and screening of selected movies, AI-Thailand organizes study visits that allow the participants to benefit and be motivated from the experiences of others. Games and animating activities are also used to encourage participation as well as facilitate team building. The participants are consistently familiarized with the culture of human rights, while they analyze and synthesize their ideas and understanding about human rights.

Music and songs are used as human rights education instruments for both target groups. The following songs are being used:

- *They are also Human Beings*, explaining about the life of migrant workers and the aspect of human value
- *Bua Lar* (the death of a trafficking victim), presenting the human dignity of trafficked woman
- *Kon* (human being), reiterating the basic principle and definition of human being that everyone was born equally having human rights and human dignity, regardless of nationality, ethnic group, language, etc.
- *All Love for People in the World*, explaining the sympathy, and support for the disadvantaged people, etc.

AI-Thailand organizes the key resource persons, especially those working in the field (communities), to lead the human rights education activities for specific issues. Some participants in workshops, who are also resource persons, are requested to make presentations and bring cases, items for exhibitions, films and other resources to share with the other participants.

Participants are required to prepare for the workshop using a set of guidelines and materials that are made available to them at least one month before the start of the training. AI-Thailand also ensures gender balance among the participants.

Challenges and Lessons-learned

AI-Thailand cannot be implement its Human Rights Education Program alone. There are partners that support its activities such as the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, academic institutions, scholars, NGO activists, civil society organizations, and community-based organizations.

There are however constraints and challenges in implementing the program:

- 1) Attitude of Thai society relating to human rights education: In implementing the program, AI-Thailand often faces the problems of misperception and bias regarding human rights from a number of organizations, particularly those relating to educators and teachers. Most head teachers or school principals still overlook the importance of human rights education in schools. Interested teachers do not easily get the permission to attend the workshops. Sometimes, the head teachers or school principals do not allow AI-Thailand to provide human rights education in their schools or academic institutions, since they equate human rights with protests, negotiations and struggles. This situation is likely caused by the long-standing misunderstanding of human rights, as well as prejudice and negative attitudes on human rights. They are the major obstacles to the promotion of human rights education.
- 2) Ambiguity or lack of government policy on the promotion of human rights education: the Ministry of Education decides on

educational policies, including any policy related to human rights education. But if the policy-making level of the Ministry does not issue a clear policy or show proper support for human rights education, subordinate agencies and relevant officials would care less about it. For the example, if the head teachers or school principals do not understand and perceive the important role of human rights education, while the Ministry does not adopt the human rights education as part of the national agenda, the subordinate educators and teachers would disregard it even though it is already contained in the learning process in the school curriculum.

The recommendations from the in-house assessment of AI-Thailand's program implementation provides the lessons learned explained as follows:

- 1) The work on human rights education with teachers and students should be done concurrently with the development and adoption of relevant educational policies on human rights education.
- 2) The process of learning of human rights should employ both the Expert and Spiral Models, with the aim of encouraging participants to apply their experiences in the workshops into their human rights practices as much as they could. The workshops should be innovative and interactive in order to facilitate dialogue, exchange and mutual learning among the participants. The key elements should be the core plenary sessions with panel presentations, thematic working groups, community visits, exhibition and cultural performances, as much as possible.
- 3) A variety of mediums and instruments on human rights education should be used to suit the needs of the target audiences. Survey questionnaires can be used to identify the potentials, needs and level of human rights

knowledge of the participants. The workshop program can be designed exclusively to a particular set of participants upon request and based on necessity.

- 4) Human rights education should be continuous and repeated over time to support deeper understanding and better practical action on human rights. Special efforts should be made to ensure action-oriented outcomes and follow-up activities. Likewise, the echo activities should be done with budgetary allocation, in accordance with the outcomes of the workshops.
- 5) The communication strategies and tactics for the promotion of human rights education should be designed at the beginning of human rights education programs. They should be innovative and interactive, responding to the rapid and overwhelming global change. They should help simplify and familiarize the human rights concept among the people in the society and promote their relevance to livelihood strategies, mainstreaming particularly the non-derogable and fundamental rights with the action-oriented policies of the government. The mass media has considerable role in popularizing and embedding the culture of human rights in society. In the long run, the community as a whole would have to firmly work on the fulfillment of human rights. Communication strategies and tactics, based on AI-Thailand's experiences, can be make use of songs, poems, photos, art works and movies to localize and integrate the human rights messages with social values.

For the implementation of the program in 2009, AI-Thailand will organize a series of advanced and comprehensive workshops on human rights for the program's alumni. It will maximize the use of its experiences on human rights education by clearly focusing on the good practices and lessons learned to achieve a constructive dialogue with all relevant parties

on human rights education issues. Over the last few years, various partnership initiatives have been undertaken in the human rights education scheme, focusing on training and capacity-building related to the practical implementation of human rights education.

At the international level, the United Nations has declared 2009 as the Year of Human Rights Learning. The challenge for human-rights-related organizations, including AI-Thailand, is to determine how action-oriented outcomes to mainstream human rights education in practice (and more than only single-track temporary celebration or commemoration) can be ensured. There should be a lobby for the action plan on human rights education and human rights not to be specifically designed as an interim or ad-hoc measures to promote human rights education, while human rights education should be stipulated as part of government's mandate and state obligation under the international human rights instruments, and in compliance with the National Constitution.

Conclusion

The implementation of the Human Rights Education Program of AI-Thailand during the past three years was done through networking among human rights educators in their own professional capacity and with periodical technical support from AI-Thailand. The combination of learning models, the Expert and Spiral models, has been used to create participant-centered learning process. To provide continued support to these educators, appropriate mediums, instruments and communications should be designed. A strategy on the promotion of human rights in everyday life should be employed in order to mainstream, familiarize, popularize and embed human rights within the society and in livelihood strategies, making them overcome their problems and realize their

basic rights particularly for those vulnerable to poverty and other forms of marginalization and exploitation.

2009 being the Year of Human Rights Learning should be an opportunity to promote national and regional/provincial dialogue on human rights education with action-oriented outcomes. Good practices, lessons learned and achievements in human rights education should be documented and compiled in order for the government and relevant human-rights-education-related organizations to assess their progress so far. A comprehensive Practical Guide for the Implementation of Human Rights Education Programs should be cooperatively done, with the technical and financial support of the government, to ensure the action-oriented implementation and follow-up activities on human rights education.

Endnotes

¹ This article briefly presents the lessons learned in the implementation of the Human Rights Education Program of Amnesty International Thailand. The author, Nitithorn Thongthirakul, is the Coordinator of the program. The article presents the writer's point of view, unless indicated otherwise. Nitithorn has been involved in human rights activities since 2001 through a number of organizations, in both national and international arenas, i.e., National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, Community Organization Development Institute (CODI), Ministry of Human Securities and Social Development, etc. He is currently developing the media on human rights education and works with communities nationwide as the Coordinator of Human Rights Education Program of Amnesty International Thailand.

² These models are taken from the training manual of the International Human Rights Training Program, organized by EQUITAS, formerly known as Canadian Human Rights Foundation (CHRF). Nitithorn attended this program in Montreal, Canada in 2005, with the support from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand.