

**MEKHONG REGION
(CHINA, VIETNAM AND BURMA)
LINKING & LEARNING PROGRAM
ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND
CULTURAL RIGHTS**

**Chiang Mai, Thailand
November 14-20, 2004**

**Announcement of the course
& Application form**

Organised by the

Human Rights Education Institute of Burma (HREIB)

In partnership with

Dignity International

Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)
Asia Regional Resource Center for Human Rights Education (ARRC)

With the Support of NOVIB (Oxfam Netherlands)

Please return to HREIB before 30 September 2004.

SUMMARY

Discourse on human rights is particularly difficult in the Mekhong region. Governments of the region keep a tight control on the activities of its people and human rights is largely regarded by the authorities as taboo or western concepts promoted to secure western supremacy. Equivalent terms for human rights are difficult to find in the languages of the region and the human rights language appears removed from the mind-set of the people.

The previous narrow focus on civil and political rights and the neglect of economic, social and cultural rights even by human rights activists have contributed to a distortion of human rights and the undermining the indivisibility, interdependence principles of human rights.

Human rights in essence are about our right to be human beings – our right to live life in dignity. They are universal applying everywhere to everyone in all cultures and they are inalienable. The project aims to take grassroots groups and activists on a non-threatening voyage of discovery of human rights and help them to become more comfortable and confident in the discourse on human rights in its fuller meaning.

In this respect, a focus on economic, social and cultural rights give a good entry point for discussion on human rights in the Mekhong region.

Human Rights Education Institute of Burma (HREIB) proposes to organise a training course on economic, social and cultural rights working with experienced trainers from the different world regions. The course will provide knowledge and skills related to using a human rights framework in poverty eradication activities. The training will be aimed at grassroots activists from social and economic justice movements particularly from Burma, China and Vietnam and who are working directly with those living in poverty and social exclusion or those assisting movements working on poverty and social exclusion.

The project will be undertaken by the Human Rights Education Institute of Burma (HREIB) in partnership with Dignity International, and in collaboration with Asia Regional Resource Centre for Human Rights (ARRC), Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) who will collaborate as facilitators and resource persons in the programme.

BACKGROUND

Dignity International, in partnership with the International Human Rights Internship Program and Forum Asia organised two Linking and Learning Programmes on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the first in November 2002, and the second in December 2003. The programme involved grassroots activists/multipliers from social and economic justice movements around the world and who are working directly with those living in poverty and social exclusion or those assisting movements working on poverty and social exclusion. There is an enormous demand for ESC Rights and in the past two years over 700 applications were received from over 120 countries of the world for the Global Linking and Learning Programme. However not all good applicants can be included in the global programme and some may benefit more from a programme with a regional focus.

The applicant organisation, Human Rights Education Institute of Burma (hereafter HREIB) participated in the Global Linking and Learning Programme on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights by the Dignity International in December 2003 and as a part of the follow-up process plans to multiply learning on economic, social and cultural with a focus on the Mekhong region.

The proposed geographical focus is the Mekhong region in particular the three countries of Burma, China and Vietnam.

REGIONAL FOCUS

Mekhong is the most dynamic region in the last few decades, in terms of remarkable economic growth. The high economic growth however was accompanied by social injustice within countries of the region. Conflicts among groups that emerged are in fact expressions of struggles for survival both by local communities who are struggling to sustain their livelihood and by elites to maintain their power.

Economic development, however, remained unequal within and across the Mekhong region. As a result, poverty has persisted in many parts of the Mekhong region. Income inequality has plagued most countries in Mekhong region. Vietnam, China and Burma have lagged behind the other countries in the region in terms of per capita incomes and access to basic social services.

The overexploitation of natural resources resulting in the degradation of environmental quality and in turn the destruction of the base for sustainable livelihood of the local communities has pushed the local communities to misery and destitution. Despite rapid economic growth, and notwithstanding the fact that daily lives in the region did improve in many different ways, the danger of a downturn affecting the lives of hundreds of million also remained firmly present.

At the time of the Asian economic crisis, the potential danger became manifest and fierce, and it ravaged the daily lives of people who had earlier felt falsely secure. One of the many lessons learnt from the crisis is that the repressive and undemocratic system of governance creates insecurity for citizens. In achieving human security, and in trying to guarantee daily living in general, there is a need of social and economic provisions and also political participation, especially by the weak and vulnerable since their voice is vitally important.

Developing a 'culture' of human rights in the region is critical. Given the delicate nature of civil society and central authorities relations in the region, this culture needs to be developed in a non-threatening way. It is important to understand that human rights are not western concepts or 'sticks' used by them to condemn the authoritarian regimes but they are about people's right to be human and to live life in dignity. A proper understanding of human rights, its universality, inalienable and holistic nature, will allow people to realize that human rights can help achieve a win-win situation for all.

Economic, social and cultural rights may be a good entry point for fostering of a culture of human rights in the region. It is by establishing this culture that will ensure that principles of economic, social and legal justice are respected not only in times of economic growth but at all times. It is also by developing a culture of human rights that will lead to open public discussion, critical awareness among citizens of their human rights especially the poor and the marginalized. Democratic participation can directly enhance security through supporting human dignity, and lasting democratic forms of government.

RATIONALE

Interest in economic social and cultural (ESC) rights has grown in the past few years. Recognition of ESC rights as human rights will finally give human rights its full meaning and help put human rights discussions in a new and a fuller perspective. As explained above, this will also allow more meaningful discussion on human rights in the Mekhong region.

A number of organisations specifically dealing with ESC rights have sprung up and global networks have been formed to encourage communication and exchange on activities related to ESC Rights. Realising that human rights are more than just civil liberties and realising the potential of a human rights framework, even some development NGOs are beginning to adopt the "human rights" approach in their work for strengthening their development work. Local

organisations and movements working with the poor and socially excluded are taking greater interest in human rights as their concerns are now increasingly being recognised as falling under the human rights framework.

There is a “hunger” for knowledge of human rights and what a human rights framework can offer to advance social and development goals. How can we adopt such a framework in our daily work? What are the success stories in adopting such a framework? What international and regional human rights instruments are available and how can we make most use of them? Who is responsible for promoting, protecting and fulfilling these ESC rights? How can we become more active in promoting these rights?

This project forms a follow-up of the annual Global Linking and Learning Programme on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights organised by Dignity International in partnership with the International Human Rights Internship Program and Forum-Asia.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The overall goals of this project will be:

- to enable civil society and grassroots organisations in the region to discover human rights (in particular economic, social and cultural rights), what they are, and how they relate to the daily lives of the people;
- to help them discover how a human rights framework (human rights based approach) can help strengthen their development work and help them gain confidence in integrating human rights in their work; help prepare the ground for human rights;
- to strengthen their knowledge and skills and thereby contribute to building the capacity of grassroots movements to better promote and defend basic ESC rights.

Course Objectives

The specific objectives of this project will be to:

- ◆ Provide leaders/multipliers from grassroots organisations and movements in the Mekhong region with the knowledge and a better understanding of human rights in particular economic, social and cultural rights;
- ◆ Equip them with the skills necessary, including facilitation skills to become active in promoting and defending ESC rights;
- ◆ Provide a space for the exchange of experiences and ideas in the area of ESC rights and facilitate where necessary collaborative action through appropriate follow-up after the learning programme.

Expected results

Participants will:

- gain additional knowledge and skills on using a human rights framework for poverty eradication and be able to apply this in their daily work;
- based on the inputs and the experiences shared develop strategies for strengthening their work in the area of ESC rights
- plan appropriate follow-up and remain in contact with the other participants and the organisers for joint action and exchange.

During the grant period of one year, expected results that are – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound (SMART) are:

- 20 multipliers/catalysts (see later for participant profile) from the Mekhong region will have attended the programme. Following the programme, these participants will have:
 - gained knowledge and shared understanding on human rights (what they are, how they relate to everyday realities, and the potential of human rights);
 - gained knowledge and skills on the practical application of a human rights framework in their daily work;
 - gained facilitation and module development skills on ESC rights and carried out one echo training by group each in three countries in a year after the core program;
 - integrated or begin a process of integration of a human rights framework in their daily work as a follow-up;
 - gained access to resource persons and other contacts from the region and internationally to assist them on future follow-up work;
- Multiply the learning programme upon returning home by organizing Echo trainings one in each countries;
- Excellent quality learning materials that will be designed in a way which will enable the participants to use and multiply them; and wider reproduction and availability of the learning materials through programme folder, report and internet;
- All participants will be put on the database of the organisers and will receive news bulletins and relevant publications from the project partners;
- As every single participant is considered an 'investment', each one will be integrated into the planning and future activities of the project partners. One specific example would be, to link the graduates of the programme to the process of local focal points for Dignity International¹ so that results of human rights education can be strengthened through coordinated local/international action.

Project Partners

Human Rights Education Institute of Burma (HREIB)

The Human Rights Education Institute of Burma was established in August 2000 by a team of experienced human rights trainers from Burma. HREIB was founded as a politically independent group, unaffiliated but cooperating with the various political organizations operating in support of democracy and ethnic rights. This independence enables HREIB to mobilize and collaborate more efficiently with the other groups, as its identity as a human rights training institute frees it from political loyalties or disputes within the pro-democracy movement.

The Institute uses a highly successful participatory teaching style, and widely disseminates its Burmese- and ethnic-language materials among the ethnic and pro-democracy groups along the Thai-, India-, China-, and Bangladesh-Burma borders; in refugee camps; and at select sites inside Burma. Training topics include human rights; women's rights; economic, social, and cultural rights; transitional justice; and child rights. HREIB conducts on average 50 human rights trainings annually and has produced over a dozen publications including books, educational posters, and informational calendars.

Dignity International

Dignity International originated from the Global Forum for Poverty Eradication on the theme of "Poverty: A Violation of Human Rights" organised by the Council of Europe in October 1999. Dignity international was subsequently developed as a "project" of the North-South Centre

between 2000-2002 and on 1 January 2003 became operational as an independent international NGO.

Dignity International is built on grassroots input and is working to contribute to the eradication of poverty by strengthening knowledge and skills of those living in extreme poverty through human rights. Dignity is working on the conviction that a human rights framework is a practical, and an effective tool for achieving dignity for all.

Its activities are focused on: capacity building for human rights; supporting regional and local work; advancing human rights framework in the debate on globalisation and alliance building to achieve human dignity for all. In partnership with Forum Asia, and the International Human Rights Internship Program, Dignity International organises the annual Global Linking & Learning Programme on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the first global programme of its kind and other learning programmes related to economic, social and cultural rights.

The project partners (HREIB) and Dignity International will also be collaborating with Asia Regional Resource Centre for Human Rights (ARRC) and Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) in the implementation of this project. These collaborating partners will be contributing resource persons and facilitators for the programme and the overall process.

APWLD

The United Nation's Third World Forum on Women, Law and Development held in 1985 in Nairobi, Kenya facilitated the formation of APWLD. Women lawyers and activists from around the region set up the organisation in 1986 on an ad hoc basis and was formally established in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in January 1988. The Secretariat relocated to Chiang Mai in October 1997. The Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) is an independent, non-government, non-profit organisation committed to empowering women in the Asia-Pacific region to use law as a tool to address all forms of women's subordination.

APWLD is the only regional network addressing the issue of women, law and development in the Asia-Pacific and has an outreach with a wide network of women's and human rights NGOs and individuals in the region. The Forum plays a critical role by developing the capacity of partner organisations through training programs, research and creating suitable fora for regional and international advocacy efforts in all aspects of their work when addressing human rights of women.

ARRC

The Asia-Pacific Regional Resource Center for Human Rights Education (ARRC) is a non-profit, non-government, regional organization founded in 1992. ARRC is a support institution for human rights education work in the region. The organization's primary objective is to develop human rights education as a strategy of communities in obtaining participatory social change and in promoting human rights, including the human right to development. It aims to facilitate and promote the sharing of experiences among individuals and groups in human rights education.

Methodology of the training

This training will use a variety of training methods, small groups discussions and practical exercises, presentations, case studies, lecture presentation, role play, simulation, brainstorming and other teaching aids, such as video presentations, tape recordings, proverbs, poems and drama.

The training will be participatory where the learners will be actively involved in their own learning. The programme will be based on the needs or expectations of learners and will be structured in a way to facilitate participation. The learning process is based on the assumption that everyone in the programme has a positive contribution to make on the basis of his/her experience and knowledge.

Educational team of the course

The educational team for this course is composed by trainers and resource persons with grassroots experience with both development and human rights content from the different parts of the world. The trainers have complementary experience and will be recruited specifically to further design and implement this course. It should be expected that the trainers' team also reflect gender balance and the cultural, political and geographical diversity of the regions.

Working language

The working language of the Training Course will be English. Participants should be able to communicate in English.

Profile of Participants

The training course will bring together up to twenty "catalysts" from the different world regions. These persons will be in a position to spread knowledge and skills they have acquired from the course and to introduce/implement what they have acquired within their own organisations or environment. These participants will be drawn from development organisations, and groups fighting for social and economic justice. Priority will be given to women and those coming directly from the grassroots organisations.

Concerning participants and their profile:

- Should be from China, Vietnam and Burma.
- should be playing an active role within an organisation, movement or community, and plan to continue this work in the near future;
- be in a position to act as multipliers or trainers within their organisation of service;
- work directly or are from the communities experiencing poverty and social exclusion;
- have already some qualification or experience in terms of training and project work;
- be committed to attend the full duration of the course and be supported by an organisation, movement, or community;
- be able to present the context of their work, their way of tackling problems, the challenges they meet and identify;
- be able to work and communicate in English.

Course organisers will be seeking up to 20 participants, and will take into account gender balance as well as representation from diverse social and geographical backgrounds (including disadvantaged and minority groups).

FINANCIAL EXPENSE

Participation Fee

The organisers will charge a subsidized participation fee of 100 US\$. This amount will be paid to the organizers at the start of the Course. This participation fee will cover course materials, lunch and coffee breaks.

Travel Expenses

All selected participants are requested to cover their own travel, board, lodging and other incidental expenses. A limited number of scholarships will be available for selected candidates with no alternative financial means to participate.

Scholarships

Please note that no one will be excluded for financial reasons and that limited scholarships will be available for those with no alternative financial means to participate.

Types of scholarships:

Category A: Fee waiver (to waive the participation fee of 100 US\$)

Category B: Partial Scholarship - Fee waiver + board & lodging

Category C: Full scholarship - Fee waiver + board & lodging and cheapest available economy class ticket

Accommodation

Board and Lodging will be provided in Chiang Mai, northern Thailand by the organisers.

HOW TO APPLY?

You should fill the enclosed application form. Applications should be sent to HREIB with a valid signature and stamp from the sending organisation.

Between 15-20 participants will be selected on the basis of the profile and the overall criteria outline above.

Candidates will be informed about whether they application was selected or rejected by 15October 2004. The HREIB will immediately start arrangements with the selected candidates.

DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS

Application forms should be sent to the HREIB no later than **30 September 2004**, by email or fax to: **hreburma@loxinfo.co.th** Fax: + 6653279472 or mail to **Aung Myo Min, HREIB, P.O.Box 37, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai, 50200, Thailand.**

You can also download the application form at www.hreib.org under the announcement section.

Please indicate what would be the price of the **CHEAPEST AVAILABLE** ticket to Chiang Mai in USD \$_____ with arrival on November 13, November and departure on November 21, 2004.

Please, describe your work in your organisation/movement. Do you use human rights concepts, principles, framework or approaches in your work? If yes, please explain how".

What are your expectations for the course and what would you like to get out of it (please be as specific as possible)?

What do you plan to do within your organisation with what you will learn during this course? How do you see the follow up to this course in relation to the activities of your organisation? How will this contribute to the strengthening of ESC rights (nationally, regionally and/or globally?)

Date:

Signature:

An endorsement from the head of the organisation regarding the applicant's participation at the training and how it would benefit the organisation.

Name

Signature:

Date

Position

**Application forms should be sent to the HREIB no later than 30 September 2004 to be included in the selection process by email or fax to:
hreburma@loxinfo.co.th Fax: + 6653279472 or mail to Aung Myo Min,
HREIB, P.O.Box 37, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai, 50200, Thailand.**

THE ORGANISERS RESERVE THE RIGHT TO CANCEL THIS TRAINING COURSE IN CASE OF FINANCIAL INSECURITY OR OTHER VALID CIRCUMSTANCES.