

An Alternative Space for Discussion of Human Rights Issues in Ethiopia: Experiences from ECSEC¹

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Abstract

The political changes taking place in Ethiopia since 1991 have led to the proliferation of the debate on human rights. The period after 1991 has also been characterized by the emergence of new actors, notably non-government organizations (NGOs) some of which have made human rights the focus of their activities. The experiences of one of these NGOs in Ethiopia, that is Eneweyay Civic and Social Education Centre (ECSEC) and its educational programme in human rights are the focus of this paper. ECSEC maintained that the overall objective of its programme of education is to create awareness on human rights and democracy among the Ethiopian peoples, and to create an environment in which the people could better exercise their rights. Accordingly, the assessment based on focus group discussions and individual interviews of the participants indicated that the educational programme of ECSEC's contributed to the organizations objective in terms of creating awareness in human rights among the participants in the programme. Secondly, this article argues that the creation of an alternative space for discussion of human rights issues could be one of the major achievements of the programme ECSEC conducted. The analyses in this paper demonstrates that despite the challenges posed by the uncertainty surrounding the continuity of the programme and the political context of human rights violations a programme of education based on an innovative and effective method could contribute to the expansion of the space for discussing human rights at the societal level, as part and parcel of attempts to institutionalise human rights in the context of contemporary political developments in Ethiopia and beyond.

Introduction

The political change that took place since 1991 in Ethiopia has fostered the proliferation of the debate on human rights. This period has also witnessed a significant increase in the role of new actors in Ethiopia notably non-government organizations (NGOs), some of which have made human rights the main focus of their programmes. The attempts to institutionalize human rights in Ethiopia through the works of NGOs include monitoring and reporting human rights violations, human rights awareness through various programmes of education and training, provision of legal assistance, and a wide range of advocacy works (Desalegn & Ayenew, 2004).

NGOs are traditionally viewed as urban-based 'civil society' organizations and have been recognized as a driving force behind the democratization and the containment of the state (Allen, 1997). One of the key characteristic of NGOs, especially those in the global South, is their dependence on external financial resources for their own existence as well as

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to achieve most of their objectives. NGOs have been widely regarded as agents of popular empowerment that encourage and support ordinary people to articulate their needs and actively involve in decisions which affect their lives (Freire, 1970). It is also important to note that the success of NGOs depends on the nature of their relationships with the state in which they operate. It would be difficult for NGOs to achieve their intended objectives without the support of those in power in the countries in which they provide the 'public good' (Kassahun, 2003). Some of the NGOs have made human rights their main emphasis.

Education in human rights or human rights education, which is the focus of this paper, is understood as a programme aimed to achieve several interrelated objectives which include, but are not limited to, empowerment through an informed and continued demand by the people of their rights and in the protection of their interests; strengthen respect for human rights in promoting understanding, tolerance and gender equality; and in enabling individuals and groups within the society to effectively participate in a political system based on the rule of law. Education in human rights contributes to the strengthening of mechanisms for peaceful resolution of conflicts and greatly supplements efforts aimed to bring about changes within the society for genuine development.³

The programme of education ECSEC conducted in human rights is the focus of this paper. ECSEC is an NGO established in 1995 in Ethiopia. ECSEC's establishment as an NGO as well as its programmes of education were initiated during the preparations for the 1995 Elections 'with the assistance from a group of European Church Aid agencies in Ethiopia' (Pausewang, 1997:203). Since its establishment, it has been engaged in human rights and democracy education. ECSEC's teaching programme in human rights was carried out with a focus on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Civic education and voter education formed the main components of its programme of 'democracy education'. While making this distinction is necessary in order to indicate the topic of emphasis in this paper, in practice ECSEC's programmes were interrelated in addressing its objectives.

Engaging the people in the discussion of 'people's rights and duties in a democratic society and developing an understanding of participation in deciding everyday issues'⁴ was identified as the main goal of the envisaged programme of education. ECSEC thus viewed its activities as a process whereby 'general issues of democratic behavior'⁵ in peoples' every day activities needed to be addressed. ECSEC believed that the overall objective of its programmes of education was to create awareness on human rights and democracy among the Ethiopian peoples, and to create an environment in which the people could better exercise their rights. In light of these goals and objectives, the programme of education targeted people who have less access to other means of information, 'including the poor and the illiterate'.⁶ Occasionally, ECSEC attempted to reach the police, prison officials, and local government officials, and students in some elementary and secondary

³ 'United Nations Decade of Human Rights Education, 1995-2004.' (<http://www.unhchr.ch>).

⁴ ECSEC Report (1990/91 E.C)

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

schools. In order to achieve these objectives, it was important for ECSEC to develop a suitable method for its programme of education. ECSEC's methodology aims to engage people in discussions and dialogue, while the teaching materials, especially the teaching kits were used to introduce the topics in order to initiate discussions among the participants.

ECSEC claimed that there have been observable changes in attitude among those who participated in the programme of education it undertook. On the basis of periodic activity reports from ECSEC, and an 'Assessment Report'⁷ from 1996-2003, about 2.7 million persons had participated in the human rights and democracy education by 2003, at about 70 different sites in Oromia, Amhara and the Southern Ethiopian Nations and Nationality and Peoples (SNNPR) National Regional States.

This paper therefore focuses on the experience of ECSEC with particular reference to the programme of education in human rights it conducted in different parts of Ethiopia. In this regard it was important to note that ECSEC as well as the funding agencies had made formal project evaluations. These were based on established methods of project evaluations; and have been viewed from the perspectives of the funding agencies, and ECSEC as a 'civil society' organization. This paper aims to appraise the achievements, and the challenges from the perspectives of those people who participated in its programme of education in human rights. In doing so, the assessment focuses on ECSEC's 'Teaching of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights', and the views of the participants that have shown how the programme has contributed to the creation of space for discussion of human rights issues within the society.

Four different sites at which ECSEC carried out its programme of education were selected in order to conduct this study. These were Jima in Oromia, Durame and Shone in SNNPR and Desie in Amhara regions. The process of gathering information during the months of July and August 2003 involved discussion with focus groups and individuals who attended at least one session in the programme of education in human rights. Interviews were also held with ECSEC's teachers at each of the teaching sites visited. The key questions for generating information during focus group discussions and individual interviews focused on how those who participated in the programme of education understood the content and the purpose of the programme; the teaching methods used; the practicability, relevance or the awareness the participants claimed to have achieved; the challenges faced and suggestions made with a view to solve them. While focus group discussions and individual interviews were used as the major method in conducting the study, ECSEC's periodic reports, teaching materials, pamphlets, evaluations by experts and donors⁸ were also examined.

⁷ ECSEC, 'Assessment Report: Enewyay Civic and Social Education Center' by Yacob Hailemariam and Kassa Jarato (June-July 2003).

⁸ 'Evaluation Report' by the Norwegian Embassy (November 2001)

Participants Views Concerning the Purpose and the Content of the Programme

With regard to the purpose of ECSEC's programme of education in human rights, the participants in the programme stated that ECSEC aimed to create awareness about human rights 'so that the people know their rights and better defend them.' The participants argued that ECSEC's programme aimed to 'creating the culture of tolerance and the culture of resolving conflicts and disputes peacefully'. Interviewees also believed that these objectives of ECSEC complement various efforts in creating/ building 'democratic society in Ethiopia'. In general the informants' views were found to be in line with the view that creating awareness in human rights within the society greatly assists efforts to bring about democratic and accommodative political culture in which human rights can be better protected.⁹ Similarly the participants in Desie explained the purpose of ECSEC's programme in human rights in some detail. They stated that the over all purpose of ECSEC's programme of education in human rights was to inculcate the values of freedom, freedom of expression, religious tolerance, peaceful resolution of conflicts, creating able citizens, encourage active participation in public affairs, enhance the people's understanding of their rights and duties as citizen.¹⁰

Other participants in the focus group discussions in Desie and Jima explained that education in human rights as it was conducted by ECSEC was important in understanding the scope of human rights. The participants explained that the realization of the significance of the principles of equality, and the need create the balance between rights and duties constitute an important aspect of the purposes the programme of education in human rights.¹¹ Participants in Shone explained that the awareness about duties vis-à-vis rights was important in that individuals often think about their rights without reference to duties towards others in the community. Others in the focus group discussion suggested that the purposes of such a programme should be understood in terms of improving gender relations, enhancing women's role in decision making at household level as well as with in the society as a whole.¹²

What was interesting in listening to the views of the participants their understanding of the broader context in which ECSEC's programme of education in human rights took place. Participants stated that the objectives and the aims in teaching human rights should be understood in relation to the challenges they themselves and the wider society faced due to the pervasiveness of human rights violations. In other words, their views indicated that the purpose of such a programme of education could not be understood without reference to the actual human rights problems confronted them as members of their communities; as students, farmers, residents of towns, and as government employees. The participants

⁹ Focus group interviews (Jima, August 2003).

¹⁰ Focus group discussion (Desie, August 2003)

¹¹ Focus group discussion (Durame, July 2003)

¹² Interview with a resident of Shone (July 2003)

emphasized that the discussion about the aim of a programme of education on human rights should be understood in relation to the gap between the principles vis-à-vis the actual experiences, and in relation to the practices of state authorities in particular.

One of the key questions for the group discussions and interviews was aimed to probe how the participants understood the content of ECSEC's teaching programme. The responses from the participants took the form of description or 'lists' of specific rights that their teachers presented on the basis of the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Participant's description of the content thus included political freedoms, the rights to work, equality before the law, women's rights and equality of women with men, non-discrimination, mutual tolerance, peaceful resolution of conflicts. Participants in the focus group discussions held in Desie described the content as follows: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, individual freedom and political rights, economic rights, the right to elect and be elected to public offices, freedom from being beaten by the police, inviolability of the human person, human dignity, the right to be presumed innocent before proven guilty, equality before the law, the need for tolerance among diverse peoples in Ethiopia, Children's right to education, the equal rights of women, the rights of children. The list also included, the right to work and job security, religious freedom, freedom of expression, non-discrimination on the basis of ones occupation, fair and equal treatment of minorities, the relationships among or interdependence between rights and corresponding obligations.

In Jima, during the discussions the participants presented the content of the programme as follows: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, women's rights in relation to the day-to-day problems facing them at the household level as well as at their work places, equality before the law and equal treatment by public officials of all who seek their services. Some respondents emphasized that the content of education should be directly related to the problem or the impact of government policies. A resident of the Durame town in Kambata Zone explained that ECSEC's programme of human rights education should be directly related with the families' concern about their children's education and the problems due to lack of jobs after completion of elementary or secondary school. The interviewee emphasized that the content should reflect the concerns of the families and the communities and their uncertainties about change in government policies.

Views on the Methodology of the Programme of Education of ECSEC

Consistent with the aims and purposes of the programme, the active involvement of the participants in the discussion was one of the main features of ECSEC's method of education. As the views from the participants explored below demonstrate, the main feature of the method was that it did not require them to be literate in terms of reading and therefore imposes no restriction in joining the programme and in participating in the discussions.

The teaching material often used to present the lessons prior to the discussions were teaching kits containing brief written descriptions of the issues to be discussed as well as pictures. On several occasion, ECSEC also organized theatre groups for presenting dramas or plays.

The interviews have shown that the participants were generally content with the method of teaching of ECSEC. It was indicated that, especially the teaching kits with pictorial representations or illustrations made it easier for the audiences, the majority of whom could not read and write to actively participate in the discussions. Participants noted that the interest they developed in the discussion method ECSEC used in its programmes by and large relates to its effectiveness in enabling them to understand the lessons. More importantly, it enabled them to relate education in human rights with the realities and the contexts in which the teaching and the learning process took place. For instance in the context of the relationships between the police and the society in Ethiopia, the picture in the teaching kits that shows a policeman beating and dragging an individual, with a crowd of people watching, sparked interest and curiosity among those who attended the sessions almost in all the sites visited for the purpose of this study. Therefore, it was not surprising that when asked to give their views about the teaching methods used, the participants frequently mentioned this as an example which generated discussion and debates on the role of the police, and the beating exemplified in the teaching kit as an act of violation of human rights. Most of the informants indicated that such examples and illustrations made the method quite attractive, and frequently mentioned that they had developed strong interest in the programme as a result. Informants stated that the 'pictures' made it easier for them in grasping the message and helped them to grasp the issues transpired during the discussions. Some of the interviewed teachers also underlined that this method had greatly assisted in the presentations of the topics in a manner understandable to their audiences. Pictures in the teaching kits generated debates not just during the actual teaching sessions but also afterwards. A picture depicting a policeman beating a person while a crowd of people were watching, in particular, continued to generate debates about the role of the police and how the society should have responded to such incidents. Participant in the focus group debated among themselves as to what they thought about it.¹³ A member of the police in Jima who participated in one of the focus group discussions commented that the picture depicting a policeman beating a person was a misrepresentation of the reality. He suggested that this form of expression inculcates negative images within the society regarding the role of the police. He suggested another picture showing the police as the 'the servant' of the people should have been included in the kits. He explained that there should be a balance between representing the role of the police in the maintenance of law and order; in protecting individuals and the community, and property from criminal offences on the one hand and the creation of awareness on human rights violation. Nevertheless, his view concurred with the views of the other individuals and groups in that the use of pictures served as an ideal method for communicating messages in a manner understandable for urban or rural, and educated or non-educated people. It was suggested

¹³ Focus group discussion (Jima, July 2003)

that such a method implicitly created equal opportunity for all people to participate, discuss and debate. Thus the method of teaching that combined the teachers' presentations of the topics in brief with discussions were repeatedly praised as the most successful method, and was believed to have attracted more people as a result.

Practicability/ Relevance in the Views of the Participants

This part of the paper explores the participants' views in relation to the practicability and the relevance of ECSEC's programme of education in human rights. During the focus group discussion in Desie, the participants pointed out that the programme enabled them to 'know' and to understand their rights as well as their duties within the society. The participants maintained that in the past, those who come to attend the teaching-discussion sessions had maintained negative attitude towards the human rights and democracy education programme, by viewing ECSEC as an organ of the state. It was argued that such an attitude was in the process of change, at least among those who attended ECSEC's programme of education. In other words the change in attitude towards ECSEC is believed to have taken place as the participants developed a better understanding of the objectives of its programmes. In general it was argued that the programme contributed to enhancing the confidence of those who participated in enabling them to discuss and debate issues of human rights, equality and democracy in social forums or self-help associations such as *Edir*. It was also noted that it enabled some of them in seeking for remedy through discussions in case of disputes rather than resorting to force and other extra-legal means. Some mentioned that the teaching enabled them to solve peacefully, through discussion, misunderstandings within their family and with their neighbours. It was stated that the principle of the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty often discussed and debated during the actual conduct of the programme played a role in reducing libel and defamation. A member of the police in the focus group discussion in Jima stated that the programme helped him to understand his role as the 'servant' of the people. In general there were accounts of how those who participated in the programme of education intervened to stop the police from beating individuals at market and other public places. Many of the informants argued that ECSEC's programme of education enhanced their confidence and enabled them to be more assertive in their interaction with state authorities such as the police.

According to the views of one of the residents of Shone town in Hadiya Zone, the programme of education in human rights was in the process of creating considerable impact in changing men's attitude towards women. The informant explained that in Shone and its environs, women were not entitled to any share of property in case of divorce. The informant believed that ECSEC's emphasis on the rights of women greatly contributed in changing the prevailing attitude within the community with regards to equality in rights between the wife and the husband in the ownership and share of property. The interviewee also believed that attempts made by ECSEC had shown some positive signs in creating understanding among the police in dealing with women's cases. It was indicated that prior

to the introduction of the programme, women did not usually report cases of mistreatment and beatings by their husbands since the police dismissed such case by arguing that they would not interfere in such affairs. The awareness being created seem to have contributed to making women to become more assertive in claiming their rights of choice of their partner, and have had impact in encouraging women in these and other areas of struggle for their rights. It was also indicated that the educational programme resulted in the change of attitude in favour of family planning, and that parents should take the responsibility for education for their children. The informant was of the opinion that the increase in awareness in these respects was mainly due to the acceptance within the community of the efforts of ECSEC.¹⁴

Others in focus group discussions carried out in Durame as well as in Shone indicated that the programme in human rights on the importance of the principle of non-discrimination enabled them to be aware of the values of equality of all human beings. The informants were quite enthusiastic in explaining how the awareness they gained in this regard contributed to mitigate discriminatory practices in their communities. In this regard it was interesting to listen to the story about the change of attitude towards the groups whom the local communities in Shone and Durame regarded as 'fuga', where 'fuga' refers to discriminatory and derogatory term ascribed to a group of people who were believed to feed on the remains of dead animals. It was indicated that people usually give them dead chicken and dead cattle. As a result they had been looked down upon and were not usually allowed to sit and eat with other people during festive celebrations such as wedding. As a result of the emphasis given to non-discrimination in the teaching programmes in human rights, such a practice and societal attitudes are in the process of change. The practice was being abandoned and people now bury carcasses of dead animals instead of giving them to the group of people whom they regarded as 'fuga'. In other words, the effort made by ECSEC in this regard was believed to have become the source of the change in attitude within the community. This was therefore repeatedly mentioned as the best example of change in attitude, and it was hoped that other prevalent discriminatory practices could be tackled if given due emphasis in this and similar other programmes of education.¹⁵

Achievements, Challenges and Some Suggested Solutions

As can be observed from the above discussions, ECSEC's overall achievement has been significant in terms of setting trends towards creating awareness in human rights through a programme of education related to peoples' every day life, and by employing a helpful and adaptable method in communicating the messages to the intended audiences. However, the achievement was not without some major challenges. Accordingly, it is worthwhile to examine those problems that arose from different aspects of ECSEC's programme of human rights education: its objectives, the content, the method, and more importantly the constraints arising from the political context within which such an exercise need to be understood. As it is done with discussions in the previous sections, the assessment on the

¹⁴ Interview with a resident of Shone (July, 2003)

¹⁵ Focus group discussions and interviews in Durame and Shone (July, 2003)

challenges and the constraints, and their solutions as suggested by the participants were briefly examined on the basis of the views of the participants.

One of the major challenges according to the participants was that they could not exercise some of their rights even if they gained more awareness about them. Such a challenge was related essentially to the political context in which the programme of education took place. In this respect, the participants refer to their relationships with local state authorities with which they interacted. The participants were aware of the fact that the programmes of education had been carried out in the context where human rights violations in their communities was a matter of daily experience, and thus the gap between the official positions and the actual practices constituted a formidable challenge. Therefore, even though the people were sensitized to claim their rights and tended to be assertive in their interaction with local state authorities, there was observable sense of fear and apprehension among the participants. According to some of the residents of Shone town, it was extremely difficult to demand their rights in matters which brought them in close interaction with local state authorities. They believed that the arbitrariness in the exercise of power by state organs created a sense of pessimism concerning the role of human rights awareness in politically significant relationships between the local communities and state authorities. The problem arising from the lack of implementation by administrative authorities and in local courts of the constitutionally guaranteed rights provided a problematic context vis-à-vis increased awareness with in the population. The views from Shone were especially important in understanding how the immediate political contexts impacted on the programme of education. The crisis with regard to the 2000 elections in Hadiya, the use of force, and the sense of fear and apprehension that followed, constituted a fresh memory in the minds of the population at the time of gathering data for this paper in 2003 (see also Tronvoll, 2002). This has had a negative impact on the process of the education programme. It primarily created a situation in which the participants found it difficult to reconcile the discrepancies between their increased awareness about human rights and the actual practices of state authorities. The fact that local state officials attempted to link ECSEC's teaching programmes with the challenges they faced from the populations such as in Hadiya forced the suspension of the educational programme on a number of occasions.¹⁶ Such negative attitude among local state representatives towards the activities of ECSEC therefore created a challenge. It was indicated that on occasions, the local official had intimidated a supervisor in charge of ECSEC's activities at the teaching sites.¹⁷ This is an indication of the impact of the immediate political climate and the attitude of local state representatives in creating pessimism about the programme of education. As a result of the increase of such pressures ECSEC was forced to suspend its programme in several parts of the country following the May 2005 elections.¹⁸

¹⁶ Information from a meeting with the Director of ECSEC

¹⁷ Interviews with ECSEC supervisor in Shone (July, 2003)

¹⁸ Information from meeting with the Director of ECSEC (July, 2005)

At another level, the issue of continuity/sustainability was perceived as one of the great concerns among the participants as well as the teachers. There was observable sense of uncertainty regarding the continuity of ECSEC's programmes. In addition to the problem related to the political context, a number of issues that the participants raised as challenges and problems were directly or indirectly related to the issue of continuity. Informants explained in a number of ways their uncertainties about the continuity of the programme. The fact that ECSEC could not open branch offices at its various teaching sites, including those places visited in conducting this study, was emphasized in explaining the uncertainties felt. So far ECSEC has been running its activities from its office in Addis Ababa. The preparation of the teaching materials, the training of supervisors, and the whole set of work plan were carried out at the office in Addis Ababa. While the main staff, quite a few in number, make frequent field visits, ECSEC has also been able to train and assign supervisors at each of the teaching sites. The supervisors were responsible for ECSEC's activities at the respective sites. They assisted in recruiting and training the 'public teachers'; they organized and coordinated the teaching programmes along with the teachers; they assisted the teachers with the actual presentation, they made audits of the reports, and sent them to the office in Addis Ababa. ECSEC with the help of the supervisors recruited from the local communities the 'public teachers' responsible for making the presentations and in facilitating the discussions. Therefore the works of the supervisors as well as the 'public teachers' were crucial for the continuity of the programme. During the interview, several of the informants maintained that they would have liked to visit the supervisors and the teachers for further discussions and to maintain contact with ECSEC on a long term basis. For these purposes, they believed that there should have been branch offices at the respective sites.¹⁹ While the informants strongly recommended the need to open branch offices at the teaching sites, this did not appear to be the mode of operation of ECSEC. In this connection, some of the informants also mentioned that they wanted to become members of ECSEC.²⁰ In the eyes of most of the informants, this constituted one of the challenges since ECSEC did not cater for open membership and did not consider it to be within its scope of operation. Nevertheless, the fact that ECSEC could not open branch offices for the supervisors and the teachers was viewed by the informants as an indication of the temporary nature of its activities and its teaching programmes. The issue of continuity was also important for the supervisors and the teachers. A growing sense of insecurity among the teachers was observable. The majority of the teachers interviewed maintained that they might stay to work until they secure other jobs on more permanent basis.²¹

Generally speaking, the issue of continuity or sustainability broadly relates to ECSEC's programme of education and other NGO-based works that depends on external resources. So far the existence of ECSEC has been fully dependent on external resources and therefore it has been obliged to carry out its activities in a manner commensurate with

¹⁹ Focus group discussion (Durame and Shone, July 2003)

²⁰ Focus group discussion (Jima, July 2003)

²¹ Interviews with individual supervisors and teachers in Jima, Durame, Shone & Desie (July 2003)

the concerns of those institutions responsible for funding its activities. Dependence on external funding, the need for ECSEC to continue as 'civil society' organization and the challenging political environment in which it has been operating have had direct implications for the sustainability of its programme of education in human rights and in other areas.

In addition to the challenges related to the political environment and the uncertainty about the continuity of the programme discussed above, the participants identified several problems and suggested what they thought could be the solutions. These are briefly summarized below.

Concerning the content of the programme, it was suggested that legal topics should have been included in the programme of education in human rights. The argument for this was that awareness in human rights with a legal content would enable the people in being assertive in defending their cases before local administrative organs and the courts. It was indicated that this in turn required the inclusion of topics on Ethiopian laws as well as some legal aspect of the international protection of human rights. It was hoped that this would enable the teachers to acquire basic knowledge in legal matters so that they better present their explanations during public discussions, with a legal content. It was also suggested that the content of the programme of education based on the full list of the articles contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights should be presented in the form of summary, in order to create space for discussion on the proposed topics, in legal awareness that may be of some use among the public. Others argued that the discussions should include property rights, issues in land rights and education policies.²²

Some suggestions were also made with regard to how some of the issues should have been approached by the teachers. For example, participants challenged the lessons where the teachers presented rape and other forms of sexual assault as a cultural practice. The participants were of the opinion that issues such as rape should have been treated in strict legal sense, from the point of view of law, so that the public would get a clearer understanding and what positions to take on such matters.²³ Some of the interviewees argued that they did not appreciate, for instance, the frequent mentioning of terms like 'slave', 'tenant'/'gabbar', 'blacksmith', when teachers were explaining the principle of non-discrimination. It was argued that 'slavery' and the 'gabbar' system were issues of the past.²⁴ The participants were therefore indicating that the use of these terms as examples were of little or no relevance in the context of the changes experienced in their communities.

The participants in general relate these problems with the lack of experience among the teachers at the respective sites in handling locally sensitive issues mentioned above and others such as abductions, rape, disputes over land and so on. Adequate training for teachers, and when possible inviting experienced teachers from colleges, secondary schools,

²² Focus group discussion in Durame & Shone (July 2003)

²³ Focus group discussion (Jima, July 2003)

²⁴ Focus group discussion (Durame, July 2003)

judges and specialists in specific topics were recommended. The shortage of ECSEC's teachers in relatively larger towns such as Desie and Jima were considered a problem, and the recruitment of more teachers was suggested. Ways and means of using local radio stations to complement the programme should have been considered, as suggested by participants in Desie. Summarizing key points in the form of pamphlets and disseminating them would greatly supplement the programme.

The place and time for discussion was also an important issue for the participants. These concerns were particularly relevant for the programmes that were conducted in hospital compounds, malaria treatment centres and food aid distribution centres. These sites provided the teachers with larger group of participants. This relieved the teachers from travelling outside the towns to conduct the teaching programme. However as observed from the discussions with the participants, the programmes held at the hospital, malaria treatment and food aid distribution centres on occasions created difficulties. The lack of attention among the people gathering for or with other immediate personal concerns, noise and interruptions caused problems to conduct effective discussions. While conducting this study, these problems were observed at a malaria treatment centre in Jima and at Jima Hospital. The participants suggested the need to make adjustments in this regard. Evaluation of each of the teaching/discussion session should be made frequently with a view to make adjustments.

The need for emphasising on government officials as additional targets in programme of education was underlined. In particular 'shedding lights' on rural administration through a continued programme of human rights education was believed to have profound impact on the institutionalization of human rights at the grassroots level, in order to achieve a board based change of attitude. 'Proclamations' alone, are not sufficient according to one of the participants in focus group discussions in Desie. Participants also suggested the need for incorporating human rights education in elementary and secondary school curriculum, and emphasized the need for revising school based Civic Education programmes so that it would allow the room for entertaining specific issues about human rights.

Conclusion

At the most general level, one can argue that ECSEC's experiences for more than a decade shows both the prospect and challenges to programmes of education in human rights and similar other undertakings. Through its programmes of education, ECSEC has been able to involve a significant number of people in discussion on human rights issues and its efforts appear to have achieved some results in terms of realizing the intended objectives while attempts to contribute to efforts aimed to institutionalize human rights in Ethiopia in general.

More specifically, the findings on the basis of views from those who participated in the programme of education in human rights provided by ECSEC were indicative of its effectiveness. The programme of education based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights enabled the participants to acquire basic awareness in human rights. The effectiveness of the teaching programme was evidenced by the fact that the participants were able to define the over all purposes and clearly identified specific contents of human

rights education as presented in ECSEC's programme based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The participants' experiences shows not only 'learning' human rights as contained in the 'proclamations', to use the word of one of the participants in Desie, but also attempt to practice it in their daily lives and relate the principles to the actual practices in human rights in Ethiopia. In doing so ECSEC's programme of education attempted to bring the usually distant discourses in human rights closer to the life and experiences of ordinary people in Ethiopia.

The assessment in this study demonstrated that the achievements made in this regard were primarily due to the methodology ECSEC used in conducting its programme. The method used was genuinely participatory, and was largely democratic, in that it was able to involve the people irrespective of differences in gender, economic/social status, and more importantly without formal education as a requirement. The discussion or the dialogue as the essential feature of the method of education ECSEC used created a situation where large group of people came together not only to listen to what their teachers had to 'teach' them, but also to discuss and debate on the issues in relation to their daily experiences, and provided them with additional instrument with which to judge the practices of state authorities. It created a situation where the participants were no longer regarded as passive recipients, but as those able to shape the contents by making the demand for relevant programme of education attentive to their needs and interests. The method used attempted to enhance the culture of expressing ones views openly as well as the value of tolerance to divergent positions, along with creating awareness about the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights through an essentially discussion based approach to public education that has been widely accepted among its participants. Therefore in view of the findings in this paper, ECSEC's claim of achieving its objectives is largely valid.

Such an approach in the method used created among the participants the feeling that the awareness they achieved could be of some use, primarily in their interaction within their communities, their families and to some extent in their relationships with local authorities such as the police. It is the realization of the relevance and usefulness of the experiences gained that generated concerns within the participants of the continuity and sustainability of the programme.

The suggestions from the participants have also shown that the programme should be viewed more as a long term programme than a one-time project. Some of the challenges could be solved with more efforts from ECSEC through enhancing the quality of its programme, by improving the content of the programme, with more training and job security for the teachers, and by using of additional methods and mechanisms for complementing the programme.

The participants' experiences also suggest that uncertainty about the continuity of the programme remains to be an important challenge to ECSEC, to continue to provide education in human rights and in other areas it is engaged. This remains an important issue as long as organizations such as ECSEC continue to fully depend on external financial assistance. Even more important is the challenge of the political context in which the programme of education has been taken up. The tendency among the local state authorities

to view such programme of education as threatening would hamper this and similar efforts and endanger the experiences and the positive view the participants have developed toward the programme.

In conclusion, the significance of ECSEC's programme in human rights education lies in the fact that it created a space for discussion of human rights issues among ordinary people. This is significant especially when one observes the challenges encountered by the officially proclaimed freedom of expression and assembly. Experiences in Ethiopia show that the legal and institutional space for discussion of human rights have been monopolized by the state, and to some extent by other political forces including 'civil society' organizations that 'have no hesitation to present their interests as those of the silent majority', to use Pausewang's statement. In such situations, therefore, it appears that the programme that brings together without restriction, individuals and diverse groups to discuss human rights issues is an achievement by itself. While such efforts may not in the short run contribute to the resolution of the most politically antagonistic relationships, participatory programmes of education that create the space for the discussion of human rights and other issues are vital for pushing forward the agenda with respect to human rights. The programmes of education ECSEC undertook and evaluated from the perspective of the participants have just shown the achievements in its contribution to the creation of a space of discussion in human rights.

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