

NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE FIFTH PHASE (2025-2029) OF THE WORLD PROGRAMME FOR HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION.

INTRODUCTION

Definition of Human Rights Education

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of Nigeria was established by the National Human Rights Commission Act 1995 (as amended) in line with the United Nations General Assembly Resolutions 48/134 of 20th December, which enjoins all member states to establish Human Rights Institutions for the promotion, protection and enforcement of human rights. The Commission also provides avenues for public enlightenment, research and dialogue in order to raise awareness on human rights issues.

In 2010, the enabling law of the Commission was amended, which further conferred on the organization additional powers in terms of promotion and protection of human rights and enforcement of its decisions. Notable amongst the additional provisions in the amended Act are:-

- The complete independence of the Commission in the conduct of its affairs.
- Establishment of the human rights fund.
- Express powers of investigation.
- Recognition of and enforcement of awards made by the Commission.

Human rights education is one of the core mandates of the NHRC of Nigeria, a department in the Commission (Human Rights Education and Promotion department) is dedicated to this mandate.

The Commission agrees with the definition of human rights in the draft plan of action for the fifth phase of the world program for human rights education which states that; *“human rights education includes any learning, education, training or information efforts aimed at building a universal culture of human rights”*¹.

As a part of its activities, the NHRC trains, sensitizes and creates awareness on human rights education. This is achieved by organizing

¹ Draft Plan of Action for the Fifth Phase (2025-2029) of the world Program for Human Rights Education, para.4

trainings for students and teachers, law enforcement officers, civil servants, market men and women, women and children, etcetera.

World Programme for Human Rights Education and Related Initiatives

The Commission appreciates the various initiatives of the World Programme for Human Rights Education adopted by states which encourages the implementation of effective and sustainable plans for human rights education at the national level.

The International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010) is an initiative that is applauded by Nigeria because of the importance of peace and non-violence in the schooling environment of children, especially those at the North-Eastern part of Nigeria that are grappling with the scourge of insurgency.

In response to the incessant attacks witnessed in Nigerian schools by armed groups, the Nigerian government signed the Safe School Declaration Document (SSDD) on 31 December 2019. The SSD signals Nigeria's acceptance and commitment to its implementation of the Safe School Declaration which is basically about the protection of schools environments from attack during armed conflict.

There is also the National Plan on Financing Safe Schools (2023-2026), which is a concerted effort by the Federal Government to mobilize sustainable funding and the political will to provide a protected and safe learning environment for learners, teachers, and non-teaching staff of educational institutions.

Another initiative that is welcomed by the NHRC is the fourth phase (2020-2024) which was dedicated to youth empowerment through human rights education. The Commission recognizes the importance of human rights education for youths given their large number in Nigeria. Considerable percentage of the teeming youths in Nigeria are unemployed and are handy tools for recruitment by terrorists and bandits rampaging the country; hence the importance of human rights education for them that would create a culture of respect for human rights and gears them towards productive ventures for national development.

Objectives of the World Programme for Human Rights Education

The Commission agrees with the objectives outlined in the Draft Plan of Action for the Fifth Phase, specifically para. 9(c) which provides: “*To ensure a focus on human rights education at the national, regional and international levels*”². The Commission, in collaboration with the Nigerian Education Research and Development Council has reviewed and infused more human rights contents in the curriculum for civic education of senior secondary schools in Nigeria.

Human rights clubs have been established by the Commission in Nigerian schools and ongoing training and re-training exercise organized for teachers and students on human rights.

Background

The Fifth Phase is a forward-thinking initiative that addresses contemporary challenges and leverages opportunities presented by digital technology, environmental sustainability, and gender equality. By aligning with the 2030 Agenda and fostering synergies with other human rights initiatives, this phase aims to create a more just, equitable, and sustainable world for future generations.

The Commission recognizes the importance of utilizing digital platforms to enhance the reach and effectiveness of human rights education. E-learning modules, online resources, and interactive platforms can engage young audiences more effectively than traditional methods. The Commission, through Its human rights education department, organizes human rights education competitions like quizzes and debates amongst secondary school children so as to make human rights education more interesting and exciting for them.

The Commission also recognizes the interconnection between human rights and environmental sustainability. Educating youth about the human rights implications of climate change—such as the right to health, food, water, and housing—is essential. Empowering young people to advocate for environmental justice and sustainability aligns with broader human rights goals. This includes promoting youth-led initiatives and participation in decision-making processes related to climate policies. The passage of the Not too Young to Run Bill by the National Assembly of Nigeria in July, 2017 and its signing into law in 2018 by the President is

² Ibid, para.9 (c).

reflective of Nigeria's commitment in youth engagement in governance and meaningful leadership.

The Commission appreciates the importance of the 1995 Doha Declaration, where states expressed their commitment to develop educational programmes for youths as agents of positive change in the prevention of crime, focusing on the protection of human rights and the rule of law.³ The Nigerian National Youth Policy (2019-2023) aims to promote the enjoyment of fundamental human rights and protect the health, social, economic and political well-being of all young men and women in order to enhance their participation in the overall development process and improve their quality of life.⁴ The Commission organizes radio and television programmes where youths are sensitized on human rights protection and phone-in feedback and complaints are received from the audience

The Commission firmly believes that human rights education for youth and children is a *sine qua non* for building the culture and respect for human rights amongst the youth which ultimately forestalls the perpetration of crime amongst young people. The Commission promotes this culture and respect for human rights by embarking on regular human rights sensitization in schools and establishing human rights clubs in them.

Scope

The Commission welcomes the council's specific emphasis on education and training, with a targeted focus on children and youth in the Fifth Phase of the World Programme for Human Rights Education (2025-2029). This draft of action marks a significant advancement in the global effort to entrench human rights principles in education. This phase emphasizes the integration of human rights education with digital technology, environmental sustainability, climate change, and gender equality for the Fifth Phase.

The inclusion of digital technologies in the Fifth Phase is a timely and essential move. The Commission acknowledges the critical role that education plays in shaping the values, attitudes, and behaviours of future generations. These skills are necessary for young people in both formal and non-formal education to navigate the complex challenges of our

³ Resolution 70/174, annex, para. 10

⁴ NGYouthSDGs, March 23, 2022, nigeriayouthsdgs.org.

modern world and with human rights knowledge to foster a culture of respect, tolerance, and equality.

In today's digital age, children and youth are increasingly exposed to online platforms and technologies. It is crucial to educate them about their rights and responsibilities in the digital world, as well as the potential risks and how to protect themselves. This includes teaching them about online privacy, cyber bullying, good digital citizenship and protection from online exploitation and abuse. As emerging digital technology increasingly aid human activities to migrate to virtual spaces, the ability of citizens to freely work, express themselves and organize online has become essential. Digital rights, therefore, encompasses all the necessary guarantees and entitlements that enable citizens to undertake social, economic, political, cultural and professional activities online without hindrance and harm, either by state actors or non-state actors.⁵

Digital identity, data privacy, child protection in online spaces, freedom of expression online without bullying, hacking, etcetera, are protected in Nigeria by the Data Protection Act (2023) and Cybercrimes Act (2024). The regulatory agencies are: Nigeria Information and Technology Development Agency, Nigeria Identity Management Commission (NIMC), respectively.

The environment and climate change are issues of huge importance in Nigeria, the increasing drought and reduced rainfall that results in desertification in the northern part of Nigeria and the excessive rainfall that causes flooding in the southern part of the country is a cause for concern.

Section 20 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria provides for the protection and improvement of the environment and a safeguard of the water, air and land, forest and wildlife of Nigeria. Also, the National Policy on the Environment of Nigeria, 2016, ensures environmental protection and conservation of natural resources for sustainable development. Similarly, the National Climate Change Policy for Nigeria 2021-2030 assists in achieving reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and reduces the adverse impact of climate change.

Gender equality is a trite addition to the Fifth Phase of the draft plan of action because of the importance of mainstreaming women issues in human rights education. In Nigeria, Section 15(2) and 42(1) of the 1999 Constitution prohibits sex-based discrimination, while the National Gender Policy (2021-2026) provides guidelines for mainstreaming gender

⁵ Upscaling NHRC'S Capacity to Protect Digital Rights. July 31, 2023, Spaceforchange.org.

in various sectors of the economy with the overall goal of reducing gender inequalities and enhancing participation of women, men, girls and boys in socio-economic and political development.⁶

Education plays a pivotal role in combatting gender-based violence and discrimination. Addressing gender equality within human rights education ensures that both boys and girls are equally aware of their rights and responsibilities. This includes challenging gender stereotypes and promoting equal opportunities in all spheres of life.

The Fifth Phase is closely aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). This is a commendable move, the Commission believes that the synergy between human rights education with the 2030 Agenda will enhance an integrated approach to achieving a broader global agenda for sustainable development.

Specific Objectives

The Commission agrees with the specific objectives outlined in the Fifth Phase of the Draft Plan of Action, especially the plan to “*promote human rights education for children and young people as complementary to other actions for protecting and promoting their human rights.*”⁷ The Commission regularly embarks on massive human rights sensitization and education in primary and secondary schools, establishing human rights clubs and promotion of debates on human rights amongst young people. The most recent of these activities is the establishment of human right clubs in some government and private schools in FCT, Abuja.

Components

The Commission agrees that for effective human rights education for young people, the four components for effective human rights education for children and youth should be read in conjunction with those identified in the plans of action of previous phases of the World Program for effective planning, design, implementation and follow-up.

Policies and Related Implementation Measures

The NHRC agrees with the implementation measures adopted in the draft plan. States should ensure the development of a national strategy for

⁶ National Gender Policy (2021-2026), Vision Spring Initiatives. <https://vsinigeria.org>

⁷ Ibid, para.26 (e)

adequate allocation of human and financial resources in implementing the draft plan. They should also develop policies to ensure that education and human rights education are accessible to all children and youth, without discrimination, particularly those in situations of exclusion or vulnerability⁸.

The establishment of the National Commission for Almajiri and Out-of-School Children Education on the 27th May 2023 by the Nigerian government addresses the education of children in situations of exclusion or vulnerability.

Actors and Coordination

The Commission aligns with suggestions/recommendations outlined in the Draft Plan of Action for the Fifth Phase for actors and coordination of the Plan of Action.

States should indeed establish a coordinating body that involves relevant government entities, civil societies, with widespread representation of children and youth, including those in situations of exclusion or vulnerability.

Steps for Implementation

The steps for implementation outlined in the Draft Plan are good but the risk involved is the possibility of the membership of the coordinating body being high-jacked by politicians within member states for subjective party gain.

International Cooperation

The Commission agrees with the mid-term report submission that will enable states identify gaps and challenges in the implementation process.

Conclusion

The World Program for Human Rights Education (from the first-fifth phase) is a welcomed initiative of the United Nation Human Rights Council, which tackles the need for human rights education amongst children and young people.

⁸ Ibid., para.29 (a vii)

The formative age of the target audience boosts and enhances the culture of respect for human rights of persons; it also serves as a needed tool in the fight against human rights violations.

States and human rights institutions are enjoined not to relent in championing the success of this laudable program that is tailored towards instilling the culture, growth and respect for human rights in children and young people.