

# Capacitating a New Generation of Human Rights Defenders in Asia

## The story of the Glo-cal Advocacy Leadership in Asia (GALA) Academy

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The world of human rights and development is constantly changing. Different concepts are introduced, and new tools, processes and instruments are set up. Particularly on a global level these developments can come and go very fast, making it hard to both follow what is going on and translating them to local realities. This makes it important to train and capacitate young activists to be able to understand, monitor and engage with these processes, and be a bridge between the global and local level.

Given how significant it is to be able to develop a comprehensive approach that includes both development and human rights, FORUM ASIA together with the Asian Development Alliance (ADA) and the Asia Democracy Network (ADN) initiated the Glo-cal Advocacy Leadership in Asia (GALA) Academy in 2013.

The GALA Academy focuses on capacity building and providing a platform for interaction and collaboration for second-tier leaders of civil society organisations (CSOs) from across the region. The GALA Academy is the first regional training programme which links

the human rights and development communities, and despite its relatively short-time of existence, has already made significant contributions to strengthening the synergy between these two movements.

### Background

2013 marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, which resulted in the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (VDPA).<sup>27</sup> Traditionally, civil and political rights (CPRs) have been accorded priority over economic, social and cultural rights (ESCRs). The conventional focus on CPRs is partly due to the progressive and long-term nature of ESCRs. However, the VDPA affirmed that all human rights – CPRs and ESCRs – are universal, indivisible, interrelated and interdependent. There is no hierarchical distinction between these rights.

This concept has since been embedded in the human rights discourse. It became widely accepted that CPRs and ESCRs complement each other and are best realised when implemented simultaneously.

Development in particular is considered a human right for all individuals and

peoples. The formulation of development as a right is based on the idea that development is more than just economic growth. For instance, the declaration on the Right to Development describes it as ‘a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process, which aims at the constant improvement of the wellbeing of the entire population and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting therefrom’.<sup>28</sup>

Even though the notion of the interdependence and indivisibility of human rights has become well accepted at the international level, FORUM-ASIA has witnessed a lack of understanding and willingness to implement this on all levels. While human rights activists and movements have for a long time focussed on violations and infringements related to both civil and political rights (CPRs) on the one hand, and economic, social and cultural rights (ESCRs), as well as the right to development on the other, it is now time for the development paradigm to be integrated fully in the entire human rights movement.

## The GALA Academy

The GALA Academy was developed to address this need for a comprehensive approach on both development and human rights, and so far it has meaningfully activated intrinsic linkages between the agendas of the two communities.

The GALA Academy builds on the experiences and lessons from a variety

of capacity building activities that FORUM-ASIA has conducted over the last 20 years, including the Annual Training and Study Sessions for Asian Human Rights Defenders (ATSS). It intends to empower Asian CSOs and human rights defenders (HRDs) to develop knowledge and key skills for their human rights and development work.

Additionally, the GALA Academy is a concrete follow-up to the Bangkok Declaration and Statement on the Post 2015 Development Agenda, which was adopted during the first regional meeting of the Asian Development Alliance (ADA) which took place in Bangkok on 21 January-2 February 2013.

<sup>27</sup> Paragraph 5 of the VDPA stipulates that: *‘All human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated. The international community must treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing, and with the same emphasis. While the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, it is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms’.*

<sup>28</sup> OHCHR, ‘The Right to Development Approach to a New Global Partnership for Development for the Least Developed Countries’, 2011.

## Objectives and set-up

The general objective of the GALA Academy is to enhance the capacity of the next generation of CSO leaders in Asia and to allow them the opportunity to share their ideas and understanding of human rights and development. The GALA Academy aspires for its alumni to play a crucial and constructive role in national, regional and international advocacy on human rights, development and democracy.

The specific objectives of the GALA Academy are to:

1. Develop an understanding, among the participants, of the international policy-agenda and processes related to human rights and development in the context of the Post-2015 Development Agenda or Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
2. Improve strategic and critical thinking of the participants by linking global discourses to local contexts; and
3. Enhance collaboration among CSOs in the region in developing cross-sectoral advocacy action plans based on collective analysis.

The weeklong training provides a platform to develop strategic glocal (global and local) actions on key human rights and development issues, as well as related regional and international processes for second-tier leaders. The trending paradigm of globalisation is a key issue covered during the GALA Academy.

When looking at the evolution of globalisation, we can see the transition from international, to trans- or supranational, to global, and finally to glocalisation. A development inspired by the realisation that the general concept of globalisation was not sufficient when applied to the different characteristics of local communities. The term glocalisation was developed to mainstream globalisation with a focus on and customisation of local characteristics. It truly is the development of synergy from the bottom up.

The following chart shows the programme of the most recent GALA Academy of August 2015, and is reflective of a typical GALA Academy week.

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	
Introduction to Objectives, Programme Agenda, etc.	Overview of Post-2015 Development Agenda and Related Processes/SDGs	Overview of International Human Rights and Democracy Agenda and Mechanisms	Visit to UNESCAP OHCHR, UNDP, etc.	Workshop --- Media Communications Strategy, Coalition-building	Presentation of Advocacy Strategies and Action Plans	Presentation of Advocacy Strategies and Action Plans	
Glocal Advocacy – Concepts, Principles & Strategies				Role play simulation: SDG 17			Evaluation Closing Session
Workshop --- Skill Learning, Analysis and Advocacy Planning							

Prior to every GALA Academy, homework is given to all participants to prepare them for the discussions on the different issues: human rights; development; and democracy.

The first day gives participants the opportunity to share their opinions on the main issues in each domain, and identify the differences that exist between their own perceptions and the more generally recognised perceptions on human rights and development. Answers usually vary, but often there is also consensus on certain topics.

## **The GALA Academy 2013–2015**

For example, during the last GALA Academy, regarding human rights issues, participants identified: the plight of HRDs; Freedom of Expression (FoE) and Freedom of Assembly and Association (FoAA); ESCRs; impunity; minority rights; and business and human rights as the main issues. Poverty; natural resources; Corporate Social Responsibility; education; the environment; housing; gender equality; democracy; and the SDGs were put forward as pressing development issues. Throughout this exercise, participants were able to compartmentalise and conceptualise issues related to development and human rights, as all these issues are directly or indirectly related.

The next topic on the agenda of the training was a module which gave an overview of different human rights mechanisms and processes at the national, regional and international

levels. It provided knowledge on how to engage with these mechanisms from a development and democracy perspective.

Reflecting on the outcomes of the most recent GALA Academy, participants were thus able to understand and gain basic knowledge of the fundamental functions of UN Human Rights Mechanisms, such as the charter-based bodies, treaty bodies, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and so on.

Looking at the national level, the session tried to breakdown the traditional understanding of human rights being the sole responsibility of the State. The trend has shifted, and now, through globalisation, the responsibility of the State is in the hands of local actors.

The session on the overview of development mechanisms and processes at the international level also provided participants with knowledge on how to engage with development mechanisms from a human rights and democracy perspective. It did so through a concrete case study of engagement with international institutions, such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and other international financial institutions.

The training also provided skill-learning workshops to capacitate participants with necessary skills for their advocacy work at national, regional and international levels. During the workshops, key concepts and components of advocacy were shared. In the context of the GALA Academy advocacy is understood as a set of communicative actions aimed

at producing societal change through enabling and empowering people to speak for themselves.

The module then moved on to present various components of communication, such as public, inter-cultural, and inter-personal aspects, as well as the importance of reading between the lines and understanding the jargon that is used in the UN system. It was emphasised that it is not about how well a language is spoken, rather it is about how effective the message is delivered, specifically when it comes to the role of CSOs and their different communication strategies.

It is important that both human rights and development movements explore other means of communication, like social networking services, than those they normally use. Communication techniques can be learned to improve advocacy efforts, and to gain a wider public audience. With the rapid increase in technology, tools for advocacy have also become multiple.

During the training, participants also got the opportunity to learn more about the SDGs, and compare the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with the SDGs. Participants deepened their understanding of the targets and indicators of MDGs and SDGs as well.

They also developed and identified their own priority SDGs, indicators and targets. During the particular session in which they looked into this, human rights mechanisms were further explored and the importance of the SDGs was

explained. Participants also critically analysed the SDGs, focussing on how balanced they were and to what extent they acknowledged the interdependence between human rights and development.

One of the most popular parts of the training was the role-play simulation on the SDG negotiations. Through the exercise, participants gained a sense of the dynamics and processes in the UN system. Moreover, they were able to put negotiation and communication skills into practice, and strengthen them further.

Finally, the training contributed to identify priority goals from national and sub-regional perspectives, and the formulation of strategic advocacy actions. While doing so, participants, once again, got to practice their negotiation and communication skills.

## **Outcomes and changes**

Although the GALA Academy is only three years old, it has produced significant impacts in the human rights and development movement in Asia. In three years, FORUM-ASIA trained around 78 second-tier leaders from 16 countries in Asia. After the trainings, they conducted and supported effective campaign and advocacy activities at the national, regional and international level. Throughout the training, participants were equipped with knowledge and skills, among other related to communication and negotiation strategies.

One interesting outcome has been the creation of a space to share best practices for effective coalition-building

and communication. Participants gained knowledge and skills to engage with the UN and other international mechanisms. Alumni of the GALA Academy have become important national, regional and global actors undertaking glo-cal advocacy.

For instance, Indonesian participants of the GALA Academy held a discussion among 30 Indonesian organisations working on human rights and development in October 2013 related to human rights in the Post-2015 Development Agenda. GALA Academy materials were used for the preparations of the discussion.

In another instance, during the World Social Forum in 2015, three alumni of the GALA Academy, from Cambodia, the Philippines and Taiwan, attended the meeting and organised a regional workshop to exchange ideas.

Another significant outcome has been the increase in mutual understanding between the human rights and development movements. An informal and loose network of former participants was set up on social media, through a Facebook page of the GALA Academy and a mailing list. This platform has been a key tool to share up-to-date information on development and human rights. It has also further strengthened the solidarity between the two camps.

For example, an alumna of the first GALA Academy from China was arrested in March 2015 ahead of an anti-harassment campaign that was launched

to coincide with International Women's Day. Both human rights and development activists worked together to have her, and four other colleagues who were arrested along with her, released. A joint statement from both human rights and development organisations was issued. And an online petition was launched and circulated by GALA Academy alumni to the human rights and development communities. After a month of pressure, the alumna of the GALA Academy was released on bail in April 2015.

## Lessons learnt

It has been only three years since the GALA Academy was introduced, but there are both practical and conceptual lessons learnt.

- On a very practical level, in spite of the fact that homework was given to all participants to enhance their familiarity with the different issues to be addressed during the GALA Academy prior to the training, there was still a gap of knowledge between different participants, particularly those coming from the human rights movement. For instance, during some of the sessions on the SDGs and the post-MDGs campaign, participants from a human rights and democracy background had difficulties to engage, since they were not familiar with the particular campaigns and subject. In order to tackle this issue, FORUM-ASIA identified that there is a need for a national-level GALA Academy.

- Similarly, alumni of the previous GALA Academies from the same countries were not formally introduced to new graduates. It was suggested to connect them so that they could engage with each other before and after the training.
- Furthermore, a sub-regional GALA Academy for the training of trainers was also suggested, as it would provide great opportunities to expand the pool of trainers to conduct national GALA Academies.

## **Towards the future**

As the very first regional training to link the human rights and development communities, FORUM-ASIA has contributed to strengthen both movements, and has created synergy between them. Our work will continue to provide a bridge. As one of the GALA Academy alumni said:

‘I am very lucky to be part of the GALA Academy. I feel more responsible because we are amongst the few people in the world who have in depth knowledge about the SDGs and importance of intrinsic linkages between human rights and development. That is why we – as alumni of GALAA – hold more responsibility on our shoulders to work a lot more and share our knowledge with others.’

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