



CENTRE for BASIC RESEARCH

THE CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING CIVIC EDUCATION IN UGANDA

Centre for Basic Research Civic Education Project



Former CBR ED, Assoc. Prof. Josephine Ahikire handing over copies of Book published by CBR to the Assistant Commissioner, in the Ministry of ICT and National Guidance, Mr. Johan J. Bakalikwira

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Introduction

Centre for Basic Research (CBR) is implementing a project 'Strengthening Evidence-Based Democratic Governance Agenda-setting and engagement by civil society in Uganda', which among other things, entails a nation-wide comprehensive review of civic education in Uganda. The research study, which is supported by the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF), is intended to find out not only the impact of the various civic education initiatives and interventions by state and non-state actors in different parts of the country, but also to identify areas for strengthening civil society engagement in evidence-based democratic governance agenda setting in the country. Civic education is an entry point.

CBR is also undertaking monthly dialogues and several other activities in addition to focusing on civic education. These include, among others, building a reference base of books and other publications on civic education at the CBR library and documentation centre, strengthening the capacities of civil society to engage and indulge in democratic governance agenda setting. While civic education makes citizens accountable, responsive and strengthens good governance, it is important for us to understand how to build a civically conscious and aware citizenry. In Uganda, the standard setting and quality control mechanisms as well as information sharing and coordination framework for civic education is inadequate, if not lacking.

The Key Policy Messages

This policy brief presents key policy messages from the 1st Monthly Expert Seminar on Civic Education by the Centre for Basic Research, which was held on 26th July 2018. The theme of the seminar was: 'The Challenges of Implementing Civic Education in Uganda'. The keynote speech was delivered by the Chair of the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC), Mr. Medi Kaggwa, who was represented by Ms. Idah Nakiganda, the Director, Complaints, Investigations and legal Services at UHRC. The main discussants were Prof. Mwambutsya Ndebesa from Centre for Basic Research, and Mr. Jonah J. Bakalikwira, Assistant Commissioner, Ministry of ICT and National Guidance. The Expert Seminar was attended by participants from government, civil society organizations (CSOs) interested in civic education, higher education institutions, the media and the general public.

Several issues were the subject of the discussions that ensued. Among others, it was noted there is no commonly accepted definition of civic education and no civic education curriculum for schools and education institutions, as well as for the out-of school. There has been confusion, as prioritisation of voter education on one hand, and human rights awareness, on the other hand, have taken precedence over the broader objective of the general need for democracy education in the country, which otherwise is considered as civic education. A clear distinction of what needs to be done to nurture and develop a democratic dispensation in the country has unfortunately not been adequately made and justified.

The following policy issues were identified as critical for consideration by key stakeholders interested in pathways for strengthening the contribution of civic education to the country's democratic dispensation:

I. Handbook on Civic Education

There is a lot of civic education being undertaken in the country by the state and non-state actors. However, there are challenges with not only the way civic education is conceptualized and defined, but also how it packaged and delivered. There is a need for a more systematic and transparent delivery mechanism for civic education at different levels, using frameworks that are consistent with specific contexts within which civic education is delivered to build positive synergies among the various actors involved. There is need for a well formulated national vision for civic education where interventions and activities of all those involved anchor their activities.

There is need for harmonization of education and instructional materials (curricula and modules) and training manuals (handbooks) on civic education tailored to specific needs of different audiences in terms of content, trainers and accessibility to the citizenry. Clear guidelines and approaches need to be adopted to revitalise citizen engagement in civic education. There is a need for a deliberate citizen consciousness raising endeavour on the need for a broad agenda of civic education as a foundation for nurturing a culture of democracy. These resources and materials need to be widely disseminated.

II. Enacting and Passing of a National Civic Education Policy

The Uganda Human Rights Commission in conjunction with the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs have been spearheading a process of developing a National Civic Education Policy to address some of the challenges encountered in fulfilling the mandate on civic education. It is worth noting that this process is still on going, and needs continued engagement to ensure there is a policy that is approved by the Cabinet.

A National Civic Education Policy will make it possible to address some of the key challenges that are affecting the implementation of civic education in Uganda. The Policy will articulate principles, programs and actions that promote the national interests and the common good. There is need for continued engagement of this process by state and non-state actors to ensure approval of the draft policy to engender and influence the building of a civically aware and competent citizenry.

III. Restructuring and Institutionalising delivery of Civic Education

Civic Education in Uganda has mainly focused on the formal school, and yet a large section of school going age children, youth and young adults never went to formal school or are out-of-school, having dropped out early. Even in the formal school, the teaching of civic education has had a chequered history. Civic education in schools has been variously framed over the years, ranging from civics, to political education and much more recently, to leadership and patriotism. Emphasis has been put on transmission of specific civic education content, with little or no regard to issues of civic education pedagogy and philosophy. While the need for civic education in educational institutions at all levels cannot be over-emphasized, it needs to be systematically structured as a thematic curriculum in order for it to become a foundation for moulding responsible and civically aware and competent citizenry.

Civic education is critical to our democracy. Collective effort is needed to ensure civic education is institutionalised in all formal and non-formal education institutions in the country. Appropriate delivery channels and mechanisms need to be put in place to specifically target different gender, age and socio-economic categories, as well as the out-of-school children, youth and young adults. Appropriate positive synergies need to also be built with different forms of media, cultural fora and religious institutions for the delivery and dissemination civic education.

Key Policy Recommendations:

1. There is a need for increased public investment in civic education, in order to, on one hand, increase nation-wide engagements on the subject of civic education, beyond human rights awareness and voter education, and on the other hand, ensure a consistent and a coordinated intervention.
2. While a more nuanced civic education initiative in schools and education institutions needs to be fast-tracked around a carefully thought-through, and all-embracing curricula, it is also important to target children, youth and adults who have either not attended school or dropped out.
3. There is an urgent need to design programs for E-civic education and E-citizenship to make the most of increased access to and use of different kinds of social media, as a way of reaching a larger and more cosmopolitan political constituency.
4. There is need to work with relevant stakeholders to ensure there is not only a National Policy on Civic Education in Uganda, but also a National Law and a National Curriculum on Civic Education as strategic undertakings to nurture a civically competent citizenry that are a foundation of a good democracy.



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