



CENTRE for BASIC RESEARCH

The Role of the Directorate of National Guidance in advancing the contribution of Civic Education to Uganda's Democratic Governance Agenda



The Guest of Honour, Mr. Kamadi Byonabye, Director for Research, Education and Documentation, Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) making a statement at the November 28, 2018 Expert Seminar.

Introduction

Centre for Basic Research (CBR) is implementing a three year project titled: ‘Strengthening Evidence-based Democratic Governance Agenda Setting and Engagement by Civil Society in Uganda’. The project is supported by Democracy Governance Facility (DGF). As part of the project, CBR conducts Monthly Expert Seminars on critical Civic Education issues to generate public discussions around selected thematic areas ranging from social, political, religious, cultural and economic perspectives on civic education.

The Monthly Expert Seminars are considered as an important avenue for the convergence between theories and the practices of Civic Education in Uganda in general. They provide opportunities for Civic Education practitioners for engaging with emerging issues from on-going civic education initiatives and researches to understand not only the contribution of the civic education that has been so far undertaken by the state and non-state actors, their approaches, delivery mechanisms and impact, but also the intellectual debates on the appropriateness of the civic knowledge generated in which are embodied the country’s core national values and principles.

The Monthly Expert Seminars provide an interactive platform for researchers, academics, policy makers and the general public to continue with the debates on the practical necessities of how civic education can become a better vehicle for providing citizens with skills and tools with which to enter the market place of ideas to engage in a deliberative process in which ideals of the democracy we desire as a country are discussed openly and candidly to generate a minimum consensus aimed at enhancing tolerance of divergent political views and promoting peaceful coexistence.

Through Monthly Expert Seminars participants and/or citizens are enabled to think beyond their current political, occupational, intellectual and cultural dispositions because they engage in critical inquiry into broader issues and conceptualization of civic education as well as discourse on the structural constraints in civic education pedagogy, its practical approaches and strategies as a way to understand how several ways democracy can strengthen citizenship.

In other words, the Monthly Expert Seminars are aimed at influencing the democratic governance processes by enhancing on one hand, the responsiveness of government to needs of citizens through dialogue, and on the other, building a critical mass within the citizenry that understands the importance to listening and appreciating each other’s opinions and perspectives.

The theme for the 4th Expert Seminar was: “The Role of the Directorate of National Guidance in advancing the contribution of Civic Education to Uganda’s Democratic Governance Agenda”. It was delivered by Assistant Commissioner for National Guidance, Mr. J.J. Bakalikwira in the Ministry of Information, Communication, Technology (ICT) and National Guidance (MICT&NG). The Guest of Honour was Director for Research, Education and Documentation, Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC), Mr. Kamadi Byonabye. The seminar was held on November 28, 2018 at Centre for Basic Research offices, Baskerville Avenue, Kololo.

Issues Emerging from the Seminar Discussions

It was observed that although Uganda has made progress in advancing the agenda of democracy, there were still some challenges that were bogging down the realization of the desire democratic dispensation. Civic education is one of the many avenues that were considered critical in contributing to the enhancement of democratic governance.

It was noted that colonialism failed to create a good platform for citizen’s participation in the political governance of Uganda. The current democratic dispensation was ushered in under the resistance councils and committees. The latter became the base for citizen participation and for the first time successfully created a convenient political space within which they determined the choices

to pursue in solving their priority problems, ranging from security, land management, community development, women emancipation, social services provision, among others.

It was argued that the principles around which national guidance is anchored are embedded in the reforms contained in 1995 National Constitution which was formulated the Justice Odoki Constitutional Review Commission and promulgation by the Constituent Assembly of 1994/5. The 1995 constitution, among others, defined the national guidelines for addressing political contestations such as nature of the preferred political system; enjoyment of rights and freedoms; the duties, obligations and limitations of citizens; the provisions of National Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy to govern the functioning of government bodies, citizens plus other bodies and persons as a way of providing National Guidance.

The seminar was told that while the subject of National Guidance was not new in Uganda's history, it had failed to take centre stage until 2006 when a fully-fledged department was established in the Directorate of Information and National Guidance, in the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). The Department of National Guidance was charged with the ideological element of mass mobilization and political interpretation of news for socio-economic transformation. The primary responsibility of National Guidance therefore is to build consciousness among the citizens and enhance community participation as well as to proactively avert the challenge of ideological disorientation which is the worst binding constraint to national development.

The main thrust is to have a people with collective aspiration through a well-defined ideological path and a national value system that inculcates in them: work ethics, positive attitudes and mind-sets, national identity and positive cultural practices for socio-economic transformation. The Department of National Guidance has therefore, to endeavour to create awareness and understanding of shared concepts of the National Vision, National Values, National Interests and the National Common Good as basic elements in shaping the behaviour and character of the nation. These provide the basic building blocks for identifying and defining Uganda's common identity and aspirations, which all Ugandans can believe in, and consistently strive to achieve. These make it possible to steer the country to development along a clear and guided ideological trajectory.

With its limited capacity, and in a short time, the Department of National Guidance had, through several Training-of-Trainers (TOT), trained a number of tutors on awareness on national values, national interests and national common good. Several community consultative meetings on the role of civic education development workshop and multiparty democracy for nation building; conducted an assessment of the principles of national values, national interest and national common good; conducted research in Gulu, Kitgum and Lira to understand community's appreciation of the national values, national objectives national interest and common good for the transformation agenda. Meetings have also been held with various Ministries, Department and Agencies (MDAs) on the development of the National Guidance Policy, and subsequently an enabling legislation. A National Guidance Task Force has been constituted.

However, to some scholars and participants at the seminar, the Department of National Guidance is seen as promoting primarily the interests of the incumbent government although it should integrate ideologies of the dissenting political parties which are those that are positive in terms of promotion of good values and governance. The seminar was reminded that political parties were re-introduced in Uganda in 2006 when political space was opened up for political pluralism to thrive. Many government agencies including the Department of National Guidance thereafter were largely re-oriented to implement activities which are consistent with the political manifesto of the sitting government. As a result, a part of the audience, especially researchers and intellectuals were skeptical about the extent to which Department of National Guidance had pursued an all-embracing national agenda in which a deliberate effort has been made to bring on board all political shades.

The seminar participants questioned the conceptualization of national guidance as an undertaking of government, wondering for who national guidance was being undertaken, by who and to achieve what political objectives that were linked to furthering the democratic governance agenda. It was intimated that if the activities of the Department of National Guidance are to be seen to benefit the entire country, then it ought to be better resourced, facilitated and all-inclusive in its composition and be more prepared to indulge in nation-wide consultation of all manner of stakeholders at various levels of government and society.

Key Policy Messages

- 1) A National Guidance Policy is lacking. There is need for the Department of National Guidance to rigorously pursue the development of the National Guidance Policy, a framework within which the activities of the department will be guided and resources mobilized.
- 2) The Department of National Guidance is limited in scope in terms of geographical coverage, resource envelope, administration and management which inhibit the roles it plays and extent to which it influences the development of the democratic governance agenda. The department needs to be provided adequate resources and logistics to enhance the roles it plays as a positive relationship between government, civil society, the general public and the country's development agenda.
- 3) The Department of National Guidance is a national institution which should transcend the narrow focus of promoting partisan ideologies of the sitting government by identifying and integrating good values and principles espoused from the ideologies of other political parties in Uganda. Beyond the pre-occupation with ideological re-orientation of the citizenry, the role of the Department should also be expanded to include rigorous sensitization of the citizenry about national values, virtues, norms and rights for enhanced civic consciousness and competencies.
- 4) There is need for increased engagement with civil society, academia and the public especially in the formulation of the National Guidance Policy for greater awareness and ownership.



A section of audience that turned up at the November 28, 2018 Expert Seminar on Civic Education in Uganda held at Centre for Basic Research, Kololo.