



CENTRE for BASIC RESEARCH

The Ugandan Elite and Patriotism: What Can be done differently to build a stronger Democratic Tradition in Uganda



The keynote speaker, Mrs. Beatrice Bananuka addressing seminar participants

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 5th Expert Seminar was: 'The Ugandan Elite and Patriotism: What Can be done differently to build a stronger Democratic Tradition in Uganda'. It was delivered by the Assistant Commissioner at the National Secretariat for Patriotism Corps, Office of the President, Mrs. Beatrice Bananuka. The Guest of Honour was the Assistant Commissioner for National Guidance, Mr. J. J. Bakalikwira in the Ministry of Information, Communication, Technology (ICT) and National Guidance (MICT&NG). The seminar was held on December 12, 2018 at Centre for Basic Research offices, Baskerville Avenue, Kololo.

Issues Emerging from the Seminar Discussions

Schools in Uganda have been teaching patriotism following a Presidential Directive issued in 2009 when H.E. President Yoweri Museveni launched patriotism clubs in schools. In his statement to teachers, President Museveni said "I decided to form these patriotism clubs in order to inculcate norms and values among the youth and students in secondary schools." In putting into perspective this Presidential initiative, Centre for Basic Research decided to focus the theme of the December 2018 Expert Seminar on Civic Education on unravelling the contribution of elites to the enhancement of patriotism in the country, and the challenges that have been encountered.

The issues that were of concern to the seminar included the following, among others: What have elites done to right the wrongs in our society? How much have elites contributed to bettering democratic practices in the country? The seminar heard that unfortunately, the majority of the elite were the most apathetic the country has seen in years. As long as they have food on their tables, a roof on their heads, and security, the rest were not their concern. The seminar participants were reminded of Martin Luther King Jr's saying that: "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about the things that matter."

The participants at the seminar were called upon to get more involved in the democratic processes in the country as elites, and to have a positive attitude and mindset. This was because to whom much is given, much is expected. Many a time, the elite are seen as passive people in society especially in issues concerning governance. It is them who never vote, who never attend rallies, who never advise the authorities. While

the latter is notwithstanding, the same elites often have the audacity to demand for accountability when they never get involved.

One of the seminar discussants intimated that it was not questionable that Ugandans have to be patriotic, but how patriotic can they be when those in public positions are not good examples of what patriots should be. Take the example of most Members of Parliament, who are elected to represent their constituencies but once in parliament, they give priority to their personal interests.

The seminar agreed that initiatives aimed at enhancing delivery of Patriotism training should not start and stop with formal school system. There are also many out-of-school youth and adults who also need and can benefit from patriotism awareness and training initiatives.

It was also argued that patriotism needs to be anchored in each and every institution that is relevant for citizen socialization. It should not target only children or those joining public service. Adults and especially the elites also need tailored patriotism interventions. The teaching of patriotism for elites should not stop at the national level because there are also elites in local governments and at community level as well.

The seminar heard that while it is a good practice to teach patriotism in schools, there was also a need to put in place interventions around which awareness and training session on patriotism are entrenched so that citizens in the wider community can attach tangible benefit streams to the idea of patriotism training. The seminar was told that interventions from which accrue tangible benefits that address citizens felt needs such as good hospitals; roads and quality education make it possible to construct an enduring message about patriotism. The latter is a time tested pathway through which citizens put to effect what they learn when in patriotism training.

The seminar heard that while it is a good practice to take school children and all those who assume public offices at all levels through civic education skills training that targets issues of patriotism, such initiatives should also enable citizens to suggest to their leaders what they think works for them. Civic education and patriotism agendas have to integrate citizen perspectives and demands if it has to work for them.

It was proposed during the seminar that civic education and patriotism should so hand in hand. The country needs civic education whose primary goal is to promote patriotism. In preparation for elections, for example, it is important to have more strategic engagement with the population to empower voters to decide which of those who offer themselves as candidates will offer them what works for them. It has been rightly argued that 'we get leader we deserve', which makes patriotism an important yard stick for choosing leaders. This means civic education targeting citizen empowerment for participation in electoral politics should not stop at enlightening citizens on voting procedures, but should also provide a platform for voters to scrutinize their aspiring leaders.

The seminar was challenged whether the patriotism which is being taught in school has a syllabus, and if it does, how was this syllabus arrived at, who is teaching the patriotism, and how it is being evaluated to determine whether it is having the intended impact on school-going children. The seminar wondered what type of discussions the National Secretariat for Patriotism Corps had been having with the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) and higher institutions of learning and universities regarding the development of curricula not only on patriotism but also civic education.

The seminar was told how patriotism is not only about knowledge and skills of how to love one another and living in peace and harmony, that is, being a good citizen, but also about values, norms and behavioral competencies, hence the need to extend it beyond school to also bring on board out-of-school youth, and other social categories.

The seminar heard that care needs to be taken to prevent the attempt to inculcate patriotism from degenerating into radical extremes of different forms of (ultra) sub-nationalisms that could undermine the very idea of a nation-state. Similarly, the idea that a good person is always necessarily a good citizen was also challenged because while the latter does not lie down when democracy is under threat, the former will put emphasis on harmony for the sake of it. Real patriotism is the willingness to challenge those in positions of responsibility when they make mistakes. This 'telling truth to power' was referred to in the seminar as a form of patriotism. True patriotism put country before the self, family, tribal or political party and other narrow forms of interests.

The Seminar also heard that the Patriotism teachings that the National Secretariat for Patriotism Corps was delivering in schools was not a one-sided agenda intended to advantage the incumbent government, but an all-embracing political program that will be good for which-ever government will be in power. Ensuring citizens are patriotic is a constitutional requirement, and as long as it remains as aspect of the national constitution,

it will continue to be the responsibility of government to deliver. The modes of delivery will certainly vary both in space and time.

It was suggested to the National Secretariat for Patriotism Corps that scholars and researchers from institutions of higher learning and academic NGOs such as Centre for Basic Research, as well as representatives of other political organizations should also be invited to interface with the instructors and beneficiaries of patriotism trainings in their 'spaces' and vice-versa, so that there can be a mutually beneficial dialogue regarding broader issues of patriotism, what it ought to be, as well as how it should be delivered.

Among others, the seminar debated the efficacy of participation in elections, as a pointer to the kinds of discussions that civic education practitioners need to indulge in, beyond merely teaching people how to cast their ballots as a right for a patriotic citizen. A seminar participant argued that sometimes, out of frustration with the status-quo, some well-meaning citizens abstain from voting as an expression of their democratic right, and this should not be construed to imply they are unpatriotic. It was revealed that not voting was an acceptable political expression, and constituted in itself, a form of voting. It was argued that if a citizen decided to vote by not voting, then that citizen will have abdicated his or her right to complain about the leaders that get voted into office in an election in which they stayed away from!

Key Policy Messages

- 1) There is a need to extend the teaching of Patriotism beyond the formal school setting. Youth and adults outside of the formal school setting need tailored patriotism interventions that are relevant to their lived realities. This means beyond revisiting the pedagogical methods in the delivery of patriotism to children in schools, there is also a need to explore appropriate andragogical methods that go beyond the class-room based instructions to target the out-of-school youths and adults, some of whom have never been to school.
- 2) The Policy Framework within which the teaching of Patriotism is situated needs to be streamlined with other existing initiatives that contribute to the development of empowered citizens who love their country and can defend its democratic dispensation. There is a need for example for all teaching and training program at all levels to integrate patriotism as an integral aspect of skills enhancement.
- 3) There is a need for wider dissemination of the foundational literature, resources and instructional materials used by the National Secretariat for Patriotism Corps for enhanced engagement with other stakeholders undertaking civic education interventions that contributes to strengthened patriotism and citizenship.
- 4) Many people are citizens of Uganda by birth. It would wrong to assume that therefore this makes them automatically patriots of Uganda. To make citizens to love their country of citizenship is a process of socialization, in which the teaching of patriotism should play a central role. Targeted forms of civic education are one of the many means through which this can be delivered. A lot of attention needs to be put on the relevant pedagogical approaches.
- 5) There is a need to understand the history of all attempts to inculcate patriotism in citizens and the impact which the various initiatives have had in order to learn lessons from their short-comings and draw best practices from their successes. Initiatives to teach Ugandans about Patriotism did not start with the National Resistance Movement (NRM), but existed way back from the days of the first post-independence government when National Service was introduced, leading subsequently to the establishment of a Kyankwanzi which the NRM inherited in 1986.



Seminar participants continued discussions even after the seminar ended.