

Partnership for Education in Citizenship and Development

How to promote education for development, citizenship, and cooperation

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While looking at the different key-components which are involved in this issue, one can find synergies and linkages between Education, Development, Democracy and Citizenship. By enhancing broad-based partnerships between the UN system, governments and civil society actors, one can best benefit from these synergies.

Democracy is part of any sound and complete development process. As Amartya Sen, the winner of the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics in 1998 stated, if we see development as freedom, democracy is very much part of development. It can therefore be considered as the social and political facet of it.

Classically thinking, democracy consists of the indispensable institutions of a representative Parliament, free, fair and frequent elections and an accessible and independent justice. These necessary components stand at the heart of democracy. However, democracy has a long time ago gone beyond its indispensable institutions. It is not possible to only reduce it to this institutional aspect. Citizenship, for instance, is a very vital part of democracy as well.

Democracy needs more than anything else to declare, enforce and strengthen citizenship. Citizenship can be seen as the subjective perception of democracy in a rights-based approach. Considering the importance of citizenship, one has to realize that democracy does not exist from the beginning but it can be taught, learned and transmitted. Therefore, the education in democracy and in citizenship – civic education – is a key-component to building citizenship. This aspect affects essentially the sustainability and robustness of democracy.

A certain kind of education can also be a constraint to citizenship building and democracy. Generally speaking, education systems can be hostile or indifferent to democracy. They can also be inconsistent by being verbally favorable while their methodology is authoritarian.

Under the term education, we include both the formal and institutionalized component of education which is usually targeted at children and the more informal, ad hoc component of education which is offered to adults.

Having realized the importance of education in the process of citizenship building, the international community, the United Nations and civil society organizations everywhere have embraced the need for democracy education.

One of the objectives that the United Nations Democracy Fund prioritizes is democracy education. This complex challenge is impossible to be addressed by a single actor. Neither the UN or a government or the civil society could succeed alone. Recognizing its complexity, one has to realize that this area is an ideal platform for partnership. By creating broad-based partnerships in this matter, all can benefit from the synergies using the competence, capacity and scope of all partners in order to make a difference in education.

The Democracy Fund was welcomed in 2005 by the General Assembly in its 60th session and placed under the authority of the Secretary-General. The Fund lays a great importance on partnerships between the United Nations, civil society organizations and governments. In the first round of funding, projects were supported with US\$36 million, and 60% of the grants have been clinched by CSO. Most of the funding was allocated to Sub-Saharan Africa. One of the priorities of the Fund was to offer support specifically to gender-sensitive programs. Amongst others, the funded projects touch the following areas: supporting grass root organizations, elections, civil and political rights, leadership and capacity development of political parties, anti-corruption, civil society empowerment, dialogue, political and constitutional reform and access to information.

The Democracy Fund has engaged in democracy education since its early days. About 30 per cent, which equals to US\$12 million, of the total funding was invested in projects that develop activities in this service line. The most important intervention is a partnership with women organizations to educate female voters. Regarding this matter, it is very important to sensitize political party leadership. Even if they are underrepresented today, there are many women candidates. In several countries, the Democracy Fund supports these women's active presence in the public arena, as for instance in Ecuador, Afghanistan, Cote d'Ivoire, Uganda, Nigeria and Haiti. The Fund is also engaging in support to Indian advocates who wish to see a bill passed which would reserve one-third of the seats for women candidates.

A second essential partnership of the UN Democracy Fund engages journalists, editors, media people including media owners, and state-owned TV stations and press. These actors can be of the greatest help in democracy education. Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, Paraguay and Timor Leste can be mentioned as examples. However, the media can also cause great damage in the case they would be misinforming the public. Therefore, it is very important to partner with the media actors.

The Fund has also partnered with 300 'paralegals' or social mediators like in the Pacific Island States of Samoa, Vanuatu, Fiji, Kiribati, Tonga, Cook and Solomon Islands. The project's objectives are to develop local leadership codes and to combat local corruption. In this process, the civil society organizations are supposed to play the role of watchdogs to monitor the process.

Furthermore, taking opportunity of the local elections, we partner with Electoral Officers in Bosnia and Herzegovina to work on voter awareness at the local level. A particular focus of the Fund's work in this area is the education for tolerance and ethnic reconciliation. Considering the ethnical backgrounds is indispensable in order to generate more voter turnout.

In Burundi, the Fund brought together jurists, Members of Parliaments, NGOs and the media in a broad coalition in order to implement a rights-based approach. By participating, voting, monitoring and scrutinizing the actors can exercise citizenship.

The young people and their organizations are of course primordial actors in this matter. In Costa Rica, our programme is called "Democracy Builders – Youth Capacities for Active Citizenship". Furthermore, the Fund is supporting the project "I am young and I Get Involved, Therefore I Count" in Romania aiming at contributing to the development of a participatory democracy by informing and motivating the youths aged between 16 and 29 years old who are marginalized from the political process for different reasons. The Fund is also engaged in the Asian continent. At the regional level, it brings together and trains the Asian Political Leaders under 35 years of age. In South Africa, we partner with the IDASA (Institute of Democracy in South Africa) to establish a school for democracy that will offer courses to citizens, civil society leaders, politicians, government officials and professionals from across the continent. With the support of the Democracy Fund Transparency International in Papua-New Guinea is developing school materials for pupils' school boards.

The Fund also targets rural areas for instance in Kazakhstan and Ukraine where the level of participation is usually lower. In the post crisis setting of Nepal, the Fund is supporting rural radios to get in touch with the youth.

The Fund's least typical partners are the Human Rights Commissions – for example Kenya and Nigeria – and the Police and Armed forces. Partnering with these actors is also important in order to assure a good monitoring of the behaviours during elections. The Fund is also working closely with them in education and democratic supervision.

As mentioned above, the Fund is also working – in an impartial manner – with political parties. They are essential actors in democratic education, and need to be approached in this way.

To put this intervention in a nutshell, education for democracy is essential to development and democracy itself. It is education for citizenship. As we deepen and multiply efforts in this direction, we come closer to having a planet of educated citizens, interested in participating and living in free democratic societies. This is a better world than the one we have today. However, today's world has also come a long way in a short time.