

CIVIC EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR PEACE: IMPACT OF CSOs

A paper presented by Francesca Edeghere at 3rd KAS Roundtable for CSOs and the Media

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Democracies are sustained by citizens who have basic knowledge, skills and will-power to participate effectively in how they are governed. However, they have to acquire the required knowledge and skills as well as project the will-power essential to participating in the process. Therefore citizens in most democracies, especially emerging ones like Nigeria, need civic education.

Civic education in a democracy is education in self government, where citizens actively participate in governance and do not see themselves as just tools in the hands of leaders or passive onlookers. Civic education for citizens is based on **informed, critical reflection and on the understanding and acceptance of the Rights and Responsibilities** that go with being partners in governance. Civic education justifies the common definition of democracy, government of the people, by the people, for the people. Civic education gives “power to the people”. No wonder Aristotle in “Politics” [340B.C.] said, If liberty and equality, as is thought by some, are chiefly to be found in democracy, they will be attained when all persons alike share in the government to the utmost.

Civic education is effective when it is **realistic and addressing the central truths of political life of the citizens**. It is not limited to the formal education of children and youths but it is a life-long process. It starts from the home, when children are taught the ethos of their culture. Civic education is usually included in the school curriculum to enhance values and norms acquired from home. Civic education as a life-long process is sustained in adults because democracy is flexible and should

accommodate new ideas and social issues concerning the citizens. Democracy is not a machine that would go itself. It must be consciously reproduced, one generation after another. [Margaret S Branson.]

Citizen education ensures that power and authority entrusted to the leaders by the citizens must be balanced by their service and accountability to the citizens. On the other hand, citizens also, must contribute their quota in ensuring that they maintain the discipline required to make the dividends of participatory governance workable.

The Components of Civic Education

The knowledge and skills to be derived from civic education are embedded in the following values:

- The Right to vote and be voted for.
- Free and fair elections.
- Respect for Human Rights.
- Acknowledgement of the dignity and worth of the individual.
- Observance of the rule of law.
- People willingly fulfilling their responsibilities.
- Common good being the concern of all.
- Treating all people equally.
- Accepting and Allowing People with different political views to participate in government.
- Elected officials being responsive to citizens needs.
- People are aware of what their government is doing and how it is making its decision.
- Losers in election accept the election results.
- Elected and appointed officials do not abuse power.
- Allowing more than one political party in the country.

- Everyone obeys the law and is held accountable if they violate it.
- Knowledge about the Constitution of the country.

When the principles/values raised above are understood and practiced by the citizens and government, law and order, justice and peace are expected to prevail in society.

Fostering Peace through Civic Education

The Dictionary defines Peace as, freedom from war, tranquility, calm and quiet state, free from disturbance and noise, mental calm.

Albert Einstein's definition is more aligned to this discourse. He says Peace is not merely the absence of war but **the presence of justice, of law, of order- in short of government.** This definition, compliments the essence and values of Civic Education.

Can we have this UTOPIA? An El- Dorado where every need and want are met? Can we totally avoid conflicts? Our comfort- zones are often tickled once in a while by irritants. Therefore, we must learn to sow the **seeds of peace in every relationship.** **Peace is a process that must be nurtured. Conflicts have to be managed and resolved for Peace to reign. It is becoming very important even within the legal circle that conflicts be resolved by mediators.**

But the whole world is in turmoil. There are conflicts in almost all regions of the world. Peace has eluded the world. Terrorism, fratricide, civil wars, fragile family structures and support, massive corruption, limited access to quality education, high rate of unemployment, poor health facilities and services, electoral fraud and violence. These 'conflicts' in governance are more pronounced, especially in countries with developing democracies like Nigeria.

Why have these emerging democracies including Nigeria failed to provide the deliverables of PEACE which are: justice, the rule of law and order? If the

governments have failed to deliver, are the citizens talking and asking for their Rights? Is citizen education really alive?

The Impact of Civil Society Organizations on Civic Education and Peace

CSOs are Non – governmental, not- for- profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others based on ethical, cultural political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Civil society therefore refer to a wide array of organizations , community groups ,NGOs, labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith- based organizations, professional associations and foundations.[World Bank]. Civil Society actors at national and global levels have developed substantive capacity and influence in a range of development issues. Partnering with them can help contribute to the effectiveness of development intervention especially with respect to marginalized and vulnerable groups [UNDP].

The Role of CSOs

Usually, Civil Society organizations are located in the space between the family and the state. They promote and coordinate public action among their members and other citizens. Civil society organizations have been celebrated most often, for their role in promoting and protecting **democracy**. A fundamental aspect of CSO is the **mediating** role they play between the individual and the state. [Anirud Krishna]. CSOs from the statement above are mediators and mediators are peace- builders.

There are so many case studies that have demonstrated how both states and citizens benefit when a **dense web** of civil society organizations mediate the relationship between them. CSOs act as the voices of the citizens. Instead of government dealing with individual interests and needs of the citizens, CSOs articulate their needs and take their concerns as a group to government.

How CSOs use Civic Education to Promote Peace

CSOS are mediators and peace-builders by:

- Ensuring that they have the expertise required in their chosen area of intervention.
- Articulating citizens' interest and demands, particularly when state policies and programs of government agencies do not take account sufficiently of needs of the poor or some other vulnerable sections.
- Defending Citizens' Rights by performing monitoring and watch- dog actions between government departments and donor agencies guaranteeing expected deliverables.
- Delivery of social services and implementation of developmental programmes to complement government action.

Channels used by CSOs to ensure effective impact of intervention

[1] Town hall Meetings. This medium allows the citizens to express their needs as individuals and as a group with common bond. Town hall meetings are to liberty, what primary schools are to science. They bring it within the people's reach; they teach men and women how to enjoy it. [Alexis de Toqueville].

[2] Advocacy Campaigns. These can be used to support a cause or issue to achieve a desired result stating exactly what needs to be changed. It is action directed. The issue at stake must be clearly stated .The usual frame for an advocacy objective is 1-3 years. The message should be concise and persuasive. It is important to build networks of supportive individuals or organizations for efficient implementation and deliverables.

[3] Networking: It is crucial for CSOs to build a strong network with relevant, specific, trusted and visible bodies that can support their interventions. These bodies are: the Media, Local and International Development Partners, Foundations,

Individuals and other NGOs. It is beneficial to draw support from local groups who have the civic responsibility of supporting government development plans because they are close at hand.

CONCLUSION

Civic education is vital in democracies because it provides the citizens the opportunity to participate in governance. Civic education eliminates the winner-takes-all syndrome and allows losers to also contribute to governance. Peace is social justice and an output of civic education. CSOs are primarily concerned with the entrenchment of democratic values in society; they mediate between the citizens and government. CSOs as mediators are peace-builders especially between the marginalized and vulnerable and government.

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. [Martin Luther King Jr.] .

Human beings in their distinctive dignity and with their rights and responsibilities are at the heart of our work. We are guided by the conviction that human beings are the starting point in the effort to bring about justice and democratic freedom [KAS].

CSOs must base their Mission and Vision on these Values.

Thank you for your attention.

Francesca Edeghere

Director of Research/Studies

Fellowship of Partners for the Protection of Ethics and Values [FOPPEV]