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DEMOCRACY

FACT CARDS FOR CIVIC EDUCATION



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Contact:

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung
Uganda Office
51a Prince Charles Drive
P.O. Box 647, Kampala
Tel: +256 414 259 611
www.kas.de

Responsible for publication:

Project Director: Dr. Angelika Klein
Project Manager: Yusuf Kiranda
Project Coordinator: Regina Bafaki

Authors: Dr. Fredrick Kisekka Ntale, Dr. George Okiror, Mathias Kamp

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CARD 1: DEMOCRACY

What is Democracy?

The word democracy is derived from the Greek words “*Demos*” meaning people and “*Kratos*” meaning power or rule. Directly translated, democracy therefore means “rule by the people”

In a democratic country, ultimate power rests with the people: Hence a “government of the people, for the people, by the people”.

Principles of Democracy

- People have the power of choice and the right to elect their leaders at all levels of governance.
- Decisions are made by majority and have to be accepted by all, but minority interests are respected and protected.
- Everyone has a voice and gets an opportunity to be heard.
- Everyone has the right to participate in decision-making, regardless of gender, age, race, ethnicity or other criteria.

Basic Conditions for Democracy

- Open and fair competition
- Citizen participation in decision-making
- Respect for civil liberties
- Sharing of democratic values such as tolerance, fairness, mutual respect, honesty, responsibility, accountability
- Acceptance of the democratic rules by all players



Benefits of Democracy

- All citizens have equal opportunities for participation in public affairs.
- Political decisions reflect the will of the people.
- Leaders are accountable to citizens and do not abuse power.
- People have the same rights and duties and no one is above the law.
- Divergent opinions are tolerated and peaceful co-existence is enhanced.

“Democracy starts at home”

Democracy can only function if the citizens believe in it and share its values.

Therefore democracy is not just limited to areas of formal political leadership. Instead, it forms a guiding principle even for every day life. It should be practiced for example in families, communities, schools, at workplaces, and within civil society organizations.

Democracy in the Ugandan Constitution

“All power belongs to the people who shall exercise their sovereignty in accordance with (the) Constitution”

[Article 1 (1)]

The people shall express their will and consent on who shall govern them and how they should be governed, through regular, free and fair elections of their representatives or through referenda.

[Article 1 (4)]



Every democracy must follow some **basic principles**:

- **Citizen Participation:** Citizens are part of the decision-making processes.
- **Equality:** Citizens are equal before the law and are given equal opportunities.
- **Political Tolerance:** Differences between the people are accepted and diverging viewpoints respected.
- **Accountability:** Elected leaders or public officials have to answer to the common citizens regarding their actions, decisions or indecisions.
- **Transparency:** Leaders allow for public scrutiny into what they do while in public office and citizens have access to information.
- **Regular, Free and Fair Elections:** Free and fair elections give citizens the chance to elect leaders of their choice to represent them.
- **A culture of accepting the results of elections:** Once free and fair elections are held, and a winner clearly emerges, the results are accepted by all players.
- **Separation of powers:** The separation of powers of the three arms of government prevents the abuse of power, for example through corruption.
- **Human Rights:** Democracies strive to protect the rights and freedoms of their citizens from abuse.
- **Multi-Party System:** A multi-party system is a set-up where there are more than two political parties competing for power. This gives the people a wider choice of political alternatives and candidates.



- **Rule of Law:** This implies that no one is above the law and it requires that all citizens observe the law and are held accountable if they break it.
- The government, once elected, is **responsible for all citizens**, not just those who voted for the successful party.

Democratic Institutions

The success of democracy in a country is dependent on having strong institutions. These institutions include the three arms of government:

- **Legislature:** The assembly of the citizens' elected representatives (Parliament) is for example responsible for making laws on behalf of the people, passing the national budget and checking the activities of the Executive.
- **Executive:** The executive arm of government comprises mainly the President and the Ministers. It is responsible for providing political leadership for the country and for implementing laws and policies.
- **Judiciary:** The Judiciary through its respective structures such as courts interprets the law.

Apart from the government institutions there are also **other important actors in a democratic system:**

- The **opposition** as a “government in waiting” which offers political alternatives and scrutinizes government.
- The **political parties** who present alternative political programmes and who can field candidates for elections.
- Independent and diverse **media** who provide the citizens with crucial information and means of communication.
- **Interest groups** and **Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)** in which the people organize themselves, for example in order to promote their interests, influence government policies or serve the needs of the community.



CARD 3: RULE OF LAW

In a democracy, the exercise of political power must respect the law, the constitution, and the will of the people.

Once leaders are in power because the people elected them they are not free to simply do whatever they want, even if they have the support of the majority. They can only do what the law allows them to do.

This is ensured by the **rule of law** which is a system that protects the rights of citizens from the abusive use of government power.

Rule of law means that everyone has to obey the same laws, ordinary citizens as well as leaders.

It therefore also requires that even state officials have to act within the law and the constitution. They can only exercise their powers to the extent that it is defined by law.

For the rule of law to be effective it is important in a democracy to have an **independent judiciary** that can protect it.

The rule of law also includes the principle of due process which protects the individual against arbitrary laws or unreasonable application of the law.

The principle guarantees fair legal proceedings, which for example includes that every accused shall be notified about proceedings and get a chance to be heard. When a government harms a person without following the exact course of the law it is a violation of the principle of **due process** and it an offence against the rule of law.

Rule of law in a democracy means that:

- All people are subject to the same law and are equal before it.
- Everyone has to respect the rules and obey the law.



- Any person who violates the law will be held accountable.
- Law is fair and impartial - irrespective of ethnicity, race, gender, age, disability, social status and other criteria.
- Political decision-making is regulated by the law.
- Leaders must respect the law; they are not above the law.
- Laws are written down, fixed and constant, and can only be revised under certain conditions.

Rule of law protects the individual

Some examples:

- No one's home can be searched by the police without a court order showing that there is cause for such a search.
- No person can be held under arrest without explicit, written charges specifying the alleged violation. Every person who is arrested has a right to be brought before a court.
- A person accused of committing a crime is presumed innocent until proved guilty.
- Persons charged with crimes should not be held in prison for protracted periods before being tried. They are entitled to have a speedy and public trial and to confront and question their accusers.
- Authorities are required to grant bail, or conditional release, to the accused pending trial if there is little likelihood that the suspect will flee or commit other crimes.
- Persons cannot be compelled to be witnesses against themselves.
- The police may not use torture, physical or psychological abuse against suspects under any circumstances.
- Cruel or unusual punishments are prohibited.



Human rights are universal legal guarantees that protect the **fundamental freedoms** and **human dignity** of every individual. These rights affirm that every human being is entitled to equal treatment and opportunities, regardless of gender, economic status, ethnicity etc.

Human Rights can be civil, cultural, social, economic or political. Human rights are universal, equal and interdependent. They protect individuals and groups, obligate the state and all its institutions and cannot be waived or taken away.

As noted in the **Human Rights Declaration** and reiterated in Chapter Four of the **Constitution of Uganda**, the citizen's rights include among others:

- *Equality and freedom from discrimination*
- *Protection of right to life*
- *Protection of personal liberty*
- *Respect for human dignity and protection from inhuman treatment*
- *Protection from slavery, servitude and forced labour*
- *Protection from deprivation of property*
- *Right to privacy of person and other property*
- *Protection of freedom of conscience, expression, movement, religion, assembly and association*
- *Right to education*
- *Protection of minorities*
- *Right to culture*
- *Civic rights and activities*
- *Right to clean and healthy environment*



- *Right of access to information*
- *Right to just and fair treatment in administrative decisions*

In a democracy there are basic freedoms which include:

- **Freedom of conscience and religion** involve the right to hold and practice your religious or other beliefs as long as they do not threaten the safety or well being of others. An example of this would be the right to wear religious garments including crucifixes and related religious symbols in a public or private place.
- **Freedom of peaceful assembly.** Citizens are free to gather, protest, and demonstrate support or displeasure, with a view to expressing themselves either individually or in a group. These freedoms should however be exercised as stipulated in or under the national laws governing the state.
- **Freedom of speech.** Citizens are free to express themselves publicly. This is a fundamental part of living in a free and open society. It is also necessary in terms of being able to exchange issues and ideas. Freedom of the press is also included when we talk of freedom of speech.
- **Freedom of association.** Citizens are free to associate by way of doing business, socialise politically or otherwise and meet with others in different forums. Such forums could take for example the form of political clubs, political parties, economic and social or cultural associations.



CARD 5: PARTICIPATION & ELECTIONS

People's participation is a central principle in every democracy. Democratic participation can occur in two ways: First, people can participate through established structures of the adopted forms of democracy; and second, they can participate through alternative ways such as civil associations.

Participation through elections

One important way of participating in a democratic system is through voting in free and fair elections.

Elections are important because citizens are able to choose representatives, change and/or replace leaders, express support for certain positions or parties as well as influence decision-making and policies.

The citizens must have the opportunity to choose/elect their representatives without compulsion or undue influence. Their choice must be a result of a competitive process where respective parties and all candidates openly enjoy the freedom of speech and freedom of assembly.

Citizens' participation in the political process also demands that the elected representatives are accountable to the people and must regularly return to their constituencies to update their voters as well as seek their views on any issues of contention.

Citizens also have an obligation to become informed about public issues, to monitor the conduct of their leaders and representatives, as well as to express their own opinions.



In Uganda elections are conducted under the oversight of the **Electoral Commission**. The Electoral Commission is responsible for organising the elections, maintaining the voters register and conducting voter education.

Ugandans can vote for their President, their Members of Parliament and their local council leaders in elections which take place every five years.

Participation beyond elections

In a democracy people do not only participate through elections. There are many other ways in which people can participate in social, economic and political affairs.

Some **examples** for these other forms of participation are:

- Involvement in community projects, self-help groups or charity initiatives;
- Communal activities designed to support public programmes;
- Membership in religious groups and churches, sports clubs, traditional associations;
- Involvement in traditional and cultural activities and events;
- Membership in political parties;
- Formation of interest or lobby groups;
- Organising community meetings, dialogues and debates with elected leaders;
- Formulating petitions;
- Involvement in public planning and budgeting processes
- Organising campaigns and legal protests;
- Using the media for raising awareness and publicly expressing opinions.



CARD 6: POLITICAL PLURALISM

Pluralism

In general, pluralism means the acceptance of diversity or multiplicity. It is based on shared values of mutual respect and tolerance of other people's views.

Political Pluralism

Political pluralism refers to a political system where a diversity of opinions exists and where different groups are free to express themselves and promote their ideas and interests. It is an important characteristic of a democratic system.

Political Pluralism in Uganda

Uganda has fully embraced the idea of political pluralism with the introduction of the multi-party system. This means that:

- Ugandans are free to form and belong to different political parties and to hold different political ideologies.
- The different political parties or groups are free to compete for political positions (power) at all levels -national and local.
- The people are free - whether as individuals, social groups or political organizations - to express their opinion on different aspects of politics and governance.
- An individual's or group's opinion cannot be disregarded simply because it contradicts the view of the government or party in power. All views have to be listened to and respected. State authorities do not interfere in the exercise of civil and political rights of individuals and diverse groups.



Political Pluralism in Local Governments

In local governments, political pluralism means:

- Political leaders, including local council chairpersons and councilors, may be elected on a political party ticket or as independent candidates. Therefore different political parties can be represented in a local council.
- The various stakeholders – councilors, civil servants and civil society - are all involved in the decision-making process.
- The views and interests of special groups such as women, youths and persons with disabilities are considered in decision-making.

The Role of Political Parties

A political party is an association of like minded people who pursue common political goals. Political parties seek to influence government policy and to gain power.

In order to win government power political parties compete in elections through the candidates they nominate.

Political parties fulfill the following functions in a democracy:

- Mobilise support for political ideas and positions and recruit membership;
- Nominate and campaign to elect public officials;
- Compete for power within the democratic rules;
- Draw up policy programs for the government if they are in the majority;
- Offer criticism and alternative policies if they are in opposition;
- Mobilise citizens to participate in political and developmental processes;
- Articulate the interests of different groups in society;
- Educate the citizens about public issues.



CARD 7: REPRESENTATION

The implementation of direct democracy at higher local government level (for example at the district level) and also at national level can be very difficult. This is because it is not easy to assemble thousands or millions of people in one place, such as a stadium, in order to discuss and make decisions together. Because of this dilemma, **representative democracy** is used.

Representation means that the power – which generally lies with the citizens - is delegated to a small number of selected people. These representatives – chosen through elections – make decisions on behalf of the citizens.

Principles of Representation

- The ultimate power always remains with the people.
- The elected representatives do not “own” the power – they “borrow” it from the people who chose them.
- The decisions made by the elected representatives have a binding effect for everybody.
- The power given to the representatives is limited to the task for which they have been chosen.
- The power of the representatives is also limited to the time for which they have been elected. Once the term expires they can either be re-elected or replaced with new representatives.
- The final judge of the performance of the representatives will always be the people.
- The representatives do not simply dictate to the people, instead they are supposed to listen to the people and make decisions in their interest.



All in all, **political representatives are supposed to serve the people** who put their trust in them by electing them.

Functions of Representatives

The Constitution and other laws spell out the functions of representatives, both at the national and the local level:

National level functions:

- Providing national leadership
- Making laws
- Passing and amending the Constitution
- Allocating national resources
- Approving state budgets, taxes and other revenues
- Designing public policy
- Controlling government action
- Mobilising efforts for the development of the country
- Informing government about constituency situations

Local or constituency level functions:

- Providing local leadership
- Passing local rules and regulations
- Designing and implementing plans for local development
- Allocating local resources
- Aggregating and articulating the interests of constituents to relevant authorities
- Helping to settle conflicts and resolve grievances of constituents
- Mobilising efforts for the development of the constituency
- Informing constituents about government actions

Qualities of a Good Representative

A good representative of the people needs to have good leadership skills. He/she needs to be trusted, close to and regularly consult the people. He/she needs to understand the needs of the people, in order to make the right decisions.



GOOD GOVERNANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY

Governance is the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented.

In politics, governance is the exercise of power or authority to manage the resources and affairs of a country (national level) or for example a district (local level).

The main “manager” of these affairs is the government. But governance also involves many other actors such as NGOs, interest groups, political parties, etc.

Good governance is the kind of governance that is democratic and adheres to the following principles:

- It is participatory: the masses are part of the decision-making processes (mostly through representatives);
- It is consensus oriented: it seeks for broad consensus in society rather than minority views overriding;
- It is accountable: leaders at national or local government level are to answer to the masses at some point in time;
- It is transparent: decisions are made according to clearly defined rules; they are not made in secret because the people have access to information;
- It is effective and efficient: the leaders in charge produce results that meet the needs of the people; resources are used in an efficient and sustainable manner without waste;
- It respects the rule of law: decisions are made and implemented in accordance with the existing laws.

Because it respects the law and takes into account even the voices of the minorities, good governance makes a country more stable



and peaceful. It minimises corruption and makes sure that services are delivered to the people. It is responsive to the needs of society. Ultimately, **good governance brings development** for the whole nation.

Accountability

Government accountability requires that public officials, elected or unelected, have an obligation to explain their decisions and actions to their citizens.

In a democracy, there are a number of mechanisms to ensure that public officials remain answerable and accessible to the people they serve:

- Regular **elections** and **fixed terms** of office make sure that the citizens frequently get the chance to decide who should occupy public offices. For example, if voters are not satisfied with the performance of a political leader, they may vote him or her out of office when their term expires.
- **Rules** and **regulations** that define the powers and responsibilities of public officials. The rules also define how citizens may take action against those officials whose conduct or performance is considered unsatisfactory.
- **Ethical rules** and **codes of conduct** for public officials, outlining unacceptable practices
- **Monitoring** of public officials, for example through parliament, the courts, independent auditors or the media
- An **obligation** for public officials to **report**, so that the public has access to information about their activities.
- **Protection mechanisms** for so-called “**whistle-blowers**” who report corruption or misconduct of public officials.
- An obligation for public officials – especially elected leaders – to regularly **consult the electorate** and the different stakeholders in the country (or the district).
- In addition, citizens can also get involved more pro-actively to hold their leaders accountable, for example by forming interest groups, starting **community initiatives**, organising campaigns or using existing **complaints mechanisms**.



CARD 9: CIVIL SOCIETY & MEDIA

In a society we usually differentiate between three different sectors: The public sector (the government and state institutions), the private sector (business), and the civil society sector.

Thus, **civil society** is the part of a country's life that neither falls under the government (public) nor the business (private) sectors.

Civil society is used as a term to describe the diversity of non-governmental and non-commercial groups and organisations such as self-help and interest groups, social movements, NGOs, religious groups etc.

A strong and vibrant civil society is important for every democracy because:

- Civil society is an area where every citizen can easily get involved and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) can mobilise citizens for civic action.
- CSOs provide additional opportunities for the people to participate in the democratic system.
- CSOs can help to oversee the conduct of state officials.
- CSOs can also help to advocate and give voice to citizen's political desires and ideals.
- CSOs can complement the services delivered by the state, particularly at community level.
- CSOs can help to inform citizens, educate them about democracy and remind them of their rights and responsibilities.
- CSOs can help develop citizens' skills to work with one another to solve common problems, to debate public issues, and express their views.
- CSOs can provide a training ground for future political leaders.



Role of the Media in a Democracy

Like civil society organisations, the media play an important role in every democracy. They provide a platform for communication and exchange of information that is accessible for all people.

The media includes radio, television, newspapers, magazines, books and more recently the internet.

The media are crucial for people to enjoy their right of **access to information** and **freedom of information** as well as their **freedom of expression**.

For the media to contribute positively to the development of democracy, it is important that all actors in the political system respect and protect the **freedom of the press**.

It is also important that the media remain **independent**, so that all information can be presented and all opinions heard.

A free and independent media fulfills a number of very important **functions in a democratic system**:

- Provide accurate and objective information for all citizens
- Provide a platform for exchanging and discussing diverging viewpoints and opinions
- Monitor the activities of government and other public/political actors and expose malpractices (watchdog role)
- Inform the population about government programs and positions as well as alternative positions, e.g. by opposition parties or civil society actors
- Provide a platform for political actors to present their ideas and positions (particularly during election time)
- Educate the citizens about their rights and responsibilities
- Enable the citizens to make informed decisions and choices



CARD 10: UGANDA'S POLITICAL SYSTEM

Uganda is a **Republic**. The political system is defined in the **Constitution** of 1995. Power is separated between the executive, legislative and judicial branches.

The **President** functions as Head of State, Head of Government and at the same time Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. He is directly elected by the people every five years.

Apart from the President, the **Executive** is made up of the **cabinet**. The cabinet **ministers** are appointed by the president under the approval of parliament. According to the constitution, the cabinet consists of the president, the **vice president** and an amount of ministers depending on the discretion of the president. The **prime minister** supports the president in guiding the cabinet.

The **legislative power** is implemented by parliament as the legitimate representation of the people. The members of the **Parliament of Uganda** are elected every five years. The majority of members represent constituencies in the districts, while additional seats are reserved for women representatives as well as representatives of the youth, workers, people with disabilities and the military.

The Ugandan **judiciary** operates as an **independent** branch of government. It consists of magistrate's courts, high courts, courts of appeals, and the Supreme Court. Judges of the three higher levels are appointed by the President with the recommendation of the Judicial Service Commission and the approval of parliament.

From 1986 to 2005, Uganda was under the **Movement political system**. This system applied the principle of individual merit to those aspiring for political office. Everybody was by law a member of the Movement and candidates stood and campaigned on their own merit. With the Referendum



of July 2005 a **Multi-party political system** was adopted. Since then, candidates for political office can stand either as independents or on a political party ticket.

Decentralised Local Government

In line with the Constitution and the 1997 Local Government Act, political and administrative functions, powers and services are shared between the national (central) government and different levels of local government. This is to enhance good governance and people's participation.

The **District** is a very important unit in the Ugandan system of Local Government. Below the district there is a **sub county** and below that lower Local Government Unit Councils exist.

Elected **Local Government Councils** which are accountable to the people are mainly made up of persons directly elected to represent electoral areas. Representatives of persons with disabilities, the youth and women form one third of the council. Each council has a directly elected **chairperson**, who chairs an **executive committee**. The committee is responsible for policy formulation and monitoring of policy implementation.

The Local Government Council is the highest political authority in its area. The councils have both legislative and executive powers. They have powers to make local laws and enforce implementation.

The local governments in a district rural area are the **district council** and the **sub-county council**. In urban areas it is the town, city or municipal council and the city or municipal division council.

On the other hand **Administrative Unit Councils** serve as political units to advise on planning and implementation of services. They assist in the resolution of disputes, monitor the delivery of services and assist in the maintenance of law, order and security. The administrative units are the county, parish (or ward) and village.

The powers which are assigned to the Local Governments include:

- making local policy and regulating the delivery of services
- formulating development plans based on local priorities
- receive (or raise), manage and allocate revenues (budget making)
- appoint commissions, boards and committees for personnel, land, procurement and accountability



Contacts:

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

51. A Prince Charles Drive, Kololo
P.O. Box 647, Kampala

Yusuf Kiranda

Project Manager

Tel: +256 414 259 611

Mobile: +256 772 971 969

Yusuf.Kiranda@kas.de

www.kas.de

Action for Development

623/624 Dan Murika Road, Bukoto
P.O. Box 167729, Kampala

Regina Bafaki

Partner Project Coordinator

Tel: +256 414 531 812

Mobile: +256 782 516 006

btregis2002@yahoo.com

www.acfode.org



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