



CIVIC UPDATE

CIVIC EDUCATION
Citizen Participation and Inclusion | October 2024

Introduction

Strengthening citizenship is a fundamental democratic development objective and civic education is a critical aspect of developing new democracies and renewing established democracies in the face of emerging threats. Engaged citizens are the foundation of strong and vibrant democratic societies. For democracy to develop and endure, all people must be able to exercise their rights and responsibilities. Since democracy requires an informed and active citizenry, people must understand democratic principles and practices, and be capable of influencing political processes and outcomes.

NDI has a history of conducting stand-alone civic education programs, as well as embedding civic education components into broader programming. In every case, NDI's approach emphasizes building citizen power and driving democratic change and socio-economic development through collective action.

This Civic Update is part of a larger program supported by the National Endowment for Democracy that examined how to improve civic education modalities. A comprehensive civic education guidance document can be found on the NDI website:

<https://www.ndi.org/publications/civic-education-program-guidance>

This issue:

Introduction

PAGE 01

What is Civic Education?

PAGE 02

NDI's Approach to Civic Education

PAGE 03

Case Study: IPP Sri Lanka

PAGE 04

Civic Education Methodologies

PAGE 06

Case Study: CiberSim

PAGE 07

Inclusion and Accessibility Considerations

PAGE 09

Case Study: DISRUP THER

PAGE 09

Case Study: Center for the Rights of
Persons with Disabilities

PAGE 11

What is Civic Education?

Civic education develops knowledge, skills, dispositions, and attitudes that prepare people to participate in a democratic society and foster dignity for all. Civic education helps individuals understand how governing systems work, recognize their rights and responsibilities, and develop an ability to engage peacefully in civic and political activities, such as voting, advocacy, engaging with or running for public office, and community service. Civic education contributes to an informed public that can hold government officials accountable for their actions. By cultivating democratic competencies, civic education centers citizens as power holders.

NDI views civic education through four core democratic competencies: knowledge, skills, dispositions, and attitudes. Civic knowledge refers to citizens' understanding of the basic structures, functions, and processes of their political system, the fundamental rights and responsibilities of citizens, and the avenues for participation. Civic skills refer to citizens' ability to analyze, evaluate, and defend positions on public issues, and the know-how required to participate in different civic and political processes. Civic disposition refers to the characteristics and traits important in a democracy, such as empathy, political tolerance, a sense of civic duty, and a sense of self-efficacy that underpin the functioning of a democratic political system. Civic attitudes refer to the key principles individuals hold to guide their behaviors, such as fairness, openness, justice and equality.

Civic education approaches can target individuals of all ages and have a range of learning objectives, content, and delivery methods. They can involve formal, curricular-based "classroom" education or might involve informal, extracurricular learning opportunities. Informal civic education approaches can include content delivered through town hall meetings, small-group discussions, debate clubs, online tutorials, or any combination of these. In most cases, learners are provided information, tools and hands-on practice. NDI partners, such as civil society organizations, political parties, and media outlets, might also be involved in civic education activities. Learning and practicing citizenship can happen in many settings.

NDI's Approach to Civic Education

NDI's civic education interventions are purposeful, practical, and timely.

- Purposeful: Interventions are intentionally designed to incorporate pedagogical practices (e.g., experiential learning) and tailored to develop select knowledge, skills, dispositions and attitudes based on locally-defined needs.
- Practical: The learning objectives are connected to real-world issues, enabling participants to practice and reinforce their knowledge and skills through action.
- Timely: Interventions are often tied to a transitional moment, the need to address an urgent problem, or to foster participation in a particular process, such as an election.

The approach emphasizes participatory learning methods and connecting education to participation in real-world civic and political activities. This involves programs primarily dedicated to achieving civic education objectives and – more often – embedding civic education components into the objectives of broader democracy and governance programs. NDI's approach adopts experiential methodologies, such as action civics. An action civics model emphasizes learning-by-doing, where participants engage in real-world civic activities rather than only considering theoretical concepts. This model encourages people to practice democracy. For instance, this might include citizens identifying community issues, researching their causes and impacts, and developing and taking actionable steps to address them.

Below: Participants in NDI program Youth Debate Zambia take their turn debating.



Embedding Civic Education Within A Larger Program

In Sri Lanka, NDI implemented a multi-year program, Inclusive Political Processes (IPP), as part of the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS). NDI's work under the program focused on strengthening parliament transparency, accountability, and public engagement, particularly with youth, women, and other marginalized groups. The program included two embedded civic education activities. To localize the approach, NDI partnered with the civil society organization Sri Lanka Press Institute (SLPI) to conduct nine provincial-level civic education workshops aimed at increasing public knowledge of parliamentary processes, procedures and activities. SLPI also developed and delivered an online interactive course in three languages (Sinhala, Tamil and English), and facilitated a youth parliamentary visit. Program participants included journalists, social media influencers, and bloggers between the ages of 20 and 30.

SLPI's provincial workshop series aimed to raise awareness among young people on parliament's functions and processes, enabling them to engage with members of parliament (MPs) representing their constituencies. The program also offered a platform for young journalists from each district to engage in dynamic discussions with MPs. Key topics explored included the role and functions of the parliament and MPs, the parliament's role in financial oversight, how parliamentary committees function, the importance of strengthening the relationship between MPs and constituencies, how youth can actively participate in parliamentary affairs, and strategies for increasing representation of youth and women in politics.

Below: Young women participants in NDI Sri Lanka's parliamentary internship program engage in a group discussion.





“The "Know Your Parliament" Youth workshop was an exceptional learning experience, providing invaluable insights into the inner workings and significance of the parliament. Expertly curated, the workshops offered a comprehensive understanding of the parliament's role in our society. The sessions were engaging, interactive, and thought-provoking, making complex political concepts accessible to young participants.” - Program participant, Trincomalee District

Above: A young women participant in NDI Sri Lanka’s parliamentary internship program presents during a workshop on the roles and functions of different parliamentary committees.

As part of the program, young people were also invited to apply for an internship in a parliamentary committee. The internship included civic education workshops covering parliamentary processes and procedures, the role of parliamentary staff and the secretary general, and administrative duties. Young people were assigned to a committee based on their education, qualifications and interests. Interns also participated in special training sessions conducted by parliamentary staff, which covered topics such as administration, committees, sectoral oversight committees, research department operations, drafting press releases and constituent services. In total, the internship program placed 80 university graduates and offered 25 training sessions during their internships. During feedback sessions, the assistant secretary general highlighted that the interns’ contributions were vital to the effective functioning of the parliament, with many interns contributing to parliament’s legislative and oversight functions by bringing valuable youth perspectives to parliamentary committee hearings.

“The internship program was a transformative journey in my life that bridged the gap between theory and practice. I got to immerse myself in the workings of the legislative body that provided invaluable experiences unattainable through textbooks. Interactions with the parliament staff and elected officials have enriched my understanding of the cultural and social dynamics that influence legislative decisions in Sri Lanka” - Parliamentary Intern

Civic Education Methodologies

Different educational methodologies offer unique opportunities, limitations, and trade-offs for fostering learning. Practitioners should understand and consider the different options and constraints when setting learning goals or objectives and designing an intervention to ensure that educational results are achieved.

Common education methodologies can include:

- **Formal Curricular Instruction (in-person, online, or hybrid):** Delivering content in a formal curricular-based format usually entails a fixed set of learning goals and objectives and a methodology that generally takes people through a step-by-step, iterative learning process where the content builds on itself.
- **Workshops, Public Forums, Small-Group Discussions, Learning Circles:** These methodologies are designed so that participants interact and discuss their ideas, opinions, and questions and rely upon experienced facilitators who can effectively ensure inclusion and guide and shape the discussion.
- **“Edutainment”:** “Edutainment” methods blend educational content with entertaining formats to engage and inform learners. These methods leverage various media and interactive activities to make learning about civics entertaining and memorable. These strategies can be particularly effective in reaching audiences, such as young people, who might prefer more informal learning opportunities.
- **Arts-Based Learning:** The arts occupy a critical space in every culture and are essential to cultivating an engaged and active citizenry. Arts-based approaches can use mediums like theater, visual arts, and digital media to create projects that address local problems and foster a sense of agency and civic responsibility. They have the potential to enhance critical thinking and empathy by exploring diverse perspectives around local, national, and global issues.

Games for Civic Education

“Edutainment” is an innovative and effective way to incorporate civic education into a program design and inspire people to take action on issues that matter to them. Since 2018, NDI’s Democracy and Technology Team has worked on a simulation-based exercise called CyberSim which is designed to help players better identify and mitigate digital security threats. CyberSim is a learning methodology that allows democratic actors to experience cyberattacks and their consequences in a safe, inclusive, fictional environment first – generating greater awareness and belief in the importance of investing in cybersecurity mitigations – before suffering the harms that result from successful cyberattacks in the real world.

CyberSim is designed to stimulate players to think critically and apply swift decision-making skills through active participation, group discussions, and collaborative problem-solving. NDI has developed versions of CyberSim tailored to political parties, CSOs, parliaments, and election observers, each set

in a fictional (but realistic) environment, where participants are assigned roles as part of a team working towards a specific democratic objective. In the version of CyberSim tailored to political parties, for example, players are assigned roles as part of a campaign team tasked with getting their candidate elected. The exercise mirrors the unpredictability and intensity of a typical campaign environment, providing participants with the chance to engage in campaign activities while responding to events, such as phishing emails, database breaches, and office break-ins, designed to test their digital security preparedness and the digital resilience required to maintain their candidates’ standing in the polls.



Left: Participants in NDI’s digital security workshop with election observers in Ghana engage in a discussion while piloting the CyberSim methodology.



Above: Participants in NDI’s CyberSim pilot activity in Ghana participate in a group exercise.

As noted by a participant at an August 2024 digital security workshop with election observers in Ghana, CyberSim “showed me that in the elections process, there are a lot of unexpected issues that may arise that we need to anticipate ahead of time...because if we do not it will weaken our efforts at successfully doing an election observation.” CyberSim has also been implemented with CSO partners in Malaysia, Serbia, and Tunisia, and with political parties, parliaments, and CSOs in Kosovo.

NDI has also shared CyberSim methodology with local experts supporting the Tibetan community-in-exile in India. In February of 2024, NDI hosted a two-day training of trainers (ToT) workshop in Dharamshala, India with local partners from the Tibet Action Institute (TAI), a CSO that works with the Tibetan exile community on digital security, and The Tibetan Computer Resource Centre (TCRC), which serves at the Central Tibetan Administration’s IT unit, assisting departments in e-governance and digital security. Given that Tibetan institutions and the community in exile are under constant threat of cyberattacks from anti-democratic forces, digital security experts such as those at TAI and TCRC are constantly searching for engaging methods to illustrate the importance of good digital security to their community. In support of their efforts, NDI shared CyberSim as an additional tool for these experts to deploy in their training with the community.

Inclusion and Accessibility Considerations

Democracy is more likely to develop and endure when all segments of society are educated on their civic rights and responsibilities and are free to participate. However, large portions of the population are often excluded from public life based on their age, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other identity factors. Civic education is one way to help better position marginalized people so they can use civic and political participation as a fundamental means of addressing the social and economic inequities associated with marginalization. However, if civic education curriculums and learning opportunities do not intentionally recognize and respond to exclusion and inequality, they may inadvertently exacerbate existing inequality.

For example, when considering the inclusion of people with disabilities in civic education programming, reasonable accommodation should be included and used to ensure the equal and meaningful participation of people with different types of disability. When people have access to civic education opportunities, this can translate into actions that influence government decisions that impact their lives. To ensure equitable access, civic education programming should seek to provide educational materials in formats accessible to people with different types of disabilities, such as braille, large print, audio recordings, electronic formats compatible with screen readers and Easy Read formats.

Adapting Civic Education Approaches for Marginalized Communities

DISRUPOTHER

DISRUPOTHER is a civic and political leadership curriculum module designed for adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) to increase the pool of AGYW with political skills and aspirations to be politically active young leaders. NDI found that many youth civic education and leadership programs focused on young men and failed to adequately reach and engage AGYW in all their diversity. While the international development community has worked to promote general leadership initiatives for AGYW and invested heavily in thematic areas such as girls' education, health rights, and economic independence, little is being done to develop AGYW's political leadership and civic engagement skills during this formative period. This traditional model

leaves a critical gap in the global community's approach to developing young women's agency and creating an enabling environment that encourages their participation.

To address this gap, the Gender, Women and Democracy (GWD) team at NDI developed a civic and political leadership methodology and curriculum called DISRUPHER for AGYW (ages 12-17). DISRUPHER focuses on supporting AGYW holistically by enhancing their confidence, capacity, and connections. The program supports an action-oriented focus on political engagement, reframing who leads and enabling power shifts that support AGYW's voice and agency.

Taking a cross-sectoral approach, the curriculum is embedded within programs that fall outside of the democracy and governance sector, but have other socioeconomic, sports, and cultural entry points. For example, DISRUPHER was piloted by NDI's partner, Women Win and their local implementing partners in Kenya and Brazil who adapted the curriculum using a "play-based" methodology. The partners created sports-based games and integrated important themes around AGYW's political leadership such as teamwork, setbacks and resilience, and defining personal values, so that it was taught in a fun, interactive and accessible manner, consistent with their implementation style. DISRUPHER was designed to give partners the flexibility to contextualize the curriculum to fit the needs of the participants and local contexts. It is important to note that because of the age range of the participants and other vulnerability factors, stringent safeguarding policies were put in place along with considerations that guide the suitability of partner organizations.

Feedback on early iterations of DISRUPHER has been overwhelmingly positive. The program was piloted in Kenya and Brazil in late 2022 and early 2023. In Kenya, 78 percent of participants expressed increased confidence in their ability to engage in civic and political processes in their community. In Brazil, 74 percent of participants stated they felt comfortable discussing issues related to politics and decision-making with others - a 62 percent increase from the baseline.

The DISRUPHER curriculum is a significant stride toward addressing the gap in civic and political education for AGYW, promoting a more inclusive and resilient democratic process. By targeting girls aged 12-17, this initiative helps build a longer runway to political leadership, ensuring that their political rights and broader human rights are safeguarded. This cross-sectoral approach, designed to be integrated into existing programs, underscores the importance of supporting the "whole girl" and creating a sustainable pipeline of young women ready to lead and effect change in their communities.

Center for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Moldova

The Center for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CDPD), NDI's disabled person's organization (DPO) partner in Moldova, works with civil society and government stakeholders to improve accessibility and ensure people with disabilities can participate in political and public life on an equal basis as others.

In 2023, with NDI's support, CDPD implemented a civic education initiative designed to provide people with disabilities the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in decision-making processes at the local level and effectively advocate for implementation of accessibility standards.

CDPD organized interactive workshops for people with diverse disabilities to learn their civic and political rights, how local government functions, and how to engage in decision making processes such as budgeting. The workshops included practical exercises on identifying and framing a problem, initiating and sustaining engagement with local government officials, and conducting accessibility audits of buildings to ensure compliance with accessibility standards.

As a result of these educational workshops, participants organized three local-level initiative groups to develop action plans for accessibility standards and compliance. After conducting outreach with local government officials to secure their support, the groups conducted accessibility audits of 60 public institutions across three regions.

Below: Moldova, a CDPD program participant with a physical disability and other members of the local-level initiative group celebrate the installation of a ramp at a public institution.



The groups prepared reports on audit findings and recommendations for accessibility improvements, which they then presented to local government officials.

CDPD also launched a national-level advocacy campaign to create a national accessibility plan. CDPD participated in consultations organized by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection to identify barriers to accessibility of physical infrastructure, transportation, public information, and web communication, and offer solutions to improving access across these areas. Utilizing the findings from the accessibility audit reports, CDPD successfully advocated for actions to update the regulatory requirements in line with international and regional standards, as well as improved mechanisms for monitoring implementation of accessibility standards.

CDPD also implemented a training program on accessibility standards and compliance for public officials and construction industry stakeholders. Participants learned about universal design principles and accessibility standards. As a result of CDPD's efforts, training on accessibility standards is now mainstreamed into the curriculum for architects at several national universities in Moldova. This example of action civics highlights how civic education can be instrumental in expanding the power and influence of marginalized communities in decision making processes.

Conclusion

Civic education is a cornerstone of democracy and governance development. Organized and politically active citizens are instrumental in driving democratic development by helping transform how politics is practiced and improving the quality of life in communities. The design and implementation of civic education programs require strategic approaches that consider cross-sectoral integration, effective and contemporary use of technology, engaging and practical curriculum, and inclusive strategies. By investing in quality facilitation, supporting locally-led solutions, and addressing contemporary democracy challenges in ways that are applicable to citizens' everyday lives, civic education programs can empower individuals to become active, informed citizens and strengthen democratic norms, behaviors and ecosystems.