**CIVIC AWARENESS AND PARTICIPATION ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS**

**SECTION OVERVIEW**

The objective of this second section of the 'Protect Project' toolkit is to support participants to gain the knowledge, skills and key competencies to mainstream civic awareness and to empower citizen participation in their activities on Children's Rights.

This toolkit section contains five session plans and a variety of resources to help support facilitation on this subject. Some of the session plans in the training toolkit are introduced with a brief summary of important information that will support the delivery of each session.

This section's contents will support participants to:

* Understand some of the key components of civic awareness and participation
* Gain a basic understanding of some of the instruments of participation
* Gain key tools and skills to mainstream civic awareness and participation in their local work and communities

**Section contents:**

1. Overview of civic awareness, roles and responsibilities (pg. 1-4)
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3. Session plan 2: Introducing the concept of Citizenship - discussing rights and responsibilities (pg. 5-7)
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**NOTES ON EFFECTIVE SESSION DELIVERY**

* Each topic of this section has activities assigned.
* These sessions are designed to be accessible to a broad age-range of audiences.
* Reading the full 'Protect Project' report and preparing required materials before starting trainings and events will ensure sessions are more efficient.
* Read the session plans carefully and follow them step-by-step and make preparations accordingly.
* Try to be present in the place you will carry out activities in sessions plans, before the participants, children and youth workers.
* Place necessary objects in easily reachable and accessible places during sessions.
* Be attentive and present with children and participants in the session.
* Avoid distracting participants, however move around the space to encourage engagement and offer support.
* Enrich the ideas and information in session plans with your personal and professional experiences as long as they are suitable for the purpose.
* Treat every participant equally.
* Revise your preparations and ensure proper precautions and risk assessments prior to the session.
* Test technology before use to ensure it is working correctly.
* Enjoy the learning process, together with your participants.

**OVERVIEW OF CIVIC AWARENESS**

Civic awareness is mostly defined through civic engagement and participation. Civic engagement or participation is any individual or group activity addressing issues of public concern. Civic engagement is defined as *"a process in which people take collective action to address issues of public concern"* and is absolutely *"instrumental to democracy"* (Checkoway & Aldana, 2013).

The concept of civic engagement is particularly relevant in today's societies, as the democratic civil society is facing new challenges. Some of these challenges are:

* An increase in the process of social exclusion
* Growing social inequalities
* Extremism
* Marginalisation
* Racism
* Radicalisation

Civic awareness is difficult to define and raises the question of *who* is civically aware. Generally, it is a person who tends to be involved in politics and civil society and has some understanding of socially and politically affective issues which may then lead to more direct engagement. That can simply include paying taxes, or by following what is happening in different domains like: education, health, employment; or trying to understand more global issues that affect one's community. It may involve working as a volunteer in a non-profit, or being part of a political party, or running as a candidate in an election.

Citizenship, or civic participation, consists of behaviours, attitudes and actions that reflect concerned and active membership in a community. It includes participation in small neighbourhood-based efforts and larger national and international movement. Participation can be represented as more traditional electoral activities, such as: voting; serving on non-profit or school boards; and as less traditional forms of political participation, such as community organising and social activism.

Increasing civic awareness is essential to enabling individuals to critically reflect on the importance of participation in the social and political process, as well as to educate the public in democracy matters.

When speaking of civic awareness and participation, we also speak to core values of citizenship like: respect for human dignity and rights, freedom, democracy, justice, diversity, truth, mutual assistance, due process, property and privacy; self-respect and restraint; and equality before the law and Constitutional State. These have not naturally occurred, but have been won and agreed upon by people and they are in a perpetual state of development and are continually being questioned.

At the very core of each society are its responsible citizens who are willing to contribute to making their community and country a better place to live. The advancement of civic awareness does not happen spontaneously. Those who are civically aware have been, and are, moving through educational processes (starting with lessons at school) or through other learning activities that better help them to understand the important role of citizens in preserving and expanding human rights.

**CIVIC AWARENESS: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

By engaging in civic responsibility and participation, citizens ensure and uphold certain democratic values. The core definition of civic responsibility is comprised of actions and attitudes associated with democratic governance and social participation.

The actions related to civic responsibility can be displayed in advocacy for various cases that can be considering:

* Political matters
* Economic matters
* Civil causes
* Environmental campaigns
* Elements related to improving quality of life - i.e., better employment conditions, housing rights, equal treatment in health services etc.

Except for being involved with these matters, civically aware citizens also have obligations and responsibilities. As defined by theory, citizens are responsible, productive and caring members of society.

The importance of civic responsibility is paramount to the success of democracy and philanthropy and the previously outlined core values of citizenship. Schools teach civic responsibility to students with the goal of producing responsible citizens and active participants in community and Government. This education can be offered and enriched within non-formal education environments and by a variety of facilitators, including youth and community workers.

The purpose of this section of the 'Protect Project' toolkit is to provide educational material and resources to support the learning of both practitioners and participants on civic awareness, responsibility and participation.

**SESSION PLAN 1: INTRO TO CIVIC AWARENESS**

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| Activity Name | Intro to Civic Awareness |
| Goal | Set the common understanding about Civic Awareness within the working group |
| Equipment List | Stationery |
| Duration | 90 minutes |
| Instructions | The aim of the activity is to research upon the existent understanding related to civic awareness in the group and to build up upon a common understanding related to the concept.  Intro for the trainer: In the next 90 minutes, we will explore together the concept of civic awanress. For this purpose, feel free to express what you know already in your working groups and feel free to debate upon every bright and challenging idea that is being launched.  Splitting the group to 4-5 members (depending on the size of the group), the faciltiator will give the participants 30 minutes to go in their working groups and come back with a common definition of civic awareness. Once the groups are back, they will read the definitions and the trainer will write down the key words/concepts.  Then the trainer will introduce definitions given at the begining of the Chapter on Civic awareness.  The guiding questions for the debriefing can be:   1. What happened during the session? 2. How did the group work went? How did it contribute to your learning? 3. What did you learn from this session? 4. How go back (mentally) to your community and see if what happened in the last 90 minutes corresponds to the reality you know?   Connected to Q 4- What do you feel that your own reality miss? (In terms of the important characteristics of social cohesion that were listed). |

**CITIZEN'S PARTICIPATION**

Citizen's participation is key! Citizen's participation refers to citizen involvement in public decision-making. Within these processes, citizens participate individually or organised in groups and communities of practice. In most cases, citizen's participation has been directed towards *lack* of participation - and extensive efforts have been, and are being, made to continue to empower citizens to participate. This particular direction of participation involves community development, social planning and social justice action.

When citizen participation refers to communities, participation poses questions of access and representation. Citizens who are better educated and wealthier often have greater access to participation that others who face significant barriers to their inclusion in democratic and community processes.

**THE ROLE OF VOLUNTEERISM IN PARTICIPATION**

Ideally, volunteerism and citizen participation should go hand-in-hand. When people choose to volunteer, they often do so for a wide set of reasons including:

* Helping others
* Improving the basic health and educational conditions in their communities
* To support environmental causes
* To help in restoration following natural or manmade disasters
* To combat social exclusion and marginalisation

In all of these cases, those who decide to volunteer do so out of altruism and to generate and maintain wellbeing and public good for individuals and communities. Volunteers are mainly motivated by values that align with those of general civility and citizenship, such as: justice, freedom, peace, equality, dignity and community. The system that values volunteerism is one that, on a long-term basis, looks to ensure the public good for all citizens. As stated by the UN, volunteerism is a basic expression of human relationships. People participate to help others, to stimulate that ethos which is infused with values such as solidarity, reciprocity, mutual trust, belonging and empowerment - all of which contribute significantly to quality of life.

When speaking of volunteerism, we refer to the form of participation that is officially recognised (via volunteering with an organisation/institution). However, supporting other members in the community or traditional forms of helping within families and other relationships are very much important. In this context, we refer to officially recognised forms of volunteering.

Apart from outstanding results in individual work, volunteers are also able to hold authorities accountable and responsible to their citizens. They can work with Governments and civil society to hold those in power to account and to represent the voices of those citizens who are often excluded from decision-making such as women, youth and other marginalised groups. The end result is more inclusive - and ultimately more effective - social, political and communal development.

**SESSION PLAN 2: INTRODUCING THE CONCEPT OF CITIZENSHIP - discussing rights and responsibilities**

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| Activity Name | Keywords |
| Goal | Introducing the concept of citizenship – discussing as well about rights and responsibilities |
| Equipment List | Stationery |
| Duration | 90 minutes |
| Instructions | This activity allows a first approach to the different understandings citizenship as well as to share participants’ understandings of citizenship and their experiences of being a citizen, being as well aware of the complexity of this concept.  Instructions for the trainer:  Divide the big group into two groups of 10-15 participants each. (decide the number depending on the size of your group)  Ask one sub-group to collect 15 key words that they first associate with “citizenship” and the other subgroup 15 key words associated with community. When proposing the key words, participants should briefly explain why. Each key word should be written on a coloured sticky note and placed around the cards where “Citizenship” and “Community” are written in bigger characters.  Ask each group to present their associated key words with some explanation into the big group.  After hearing all the associated key words, ask participants in the big group what CITIZENSHIP is for them and take note of what they say.  Debriefing and evaluation  In the debriefing and evaluation, ask participants to share their first impressions of the exercise. You may use some of the following questions:  What did you think of the key words your group brought up? What about the ones from the other group?  Were there keywords that described linked concepts or realities from the two groups? f Were you aware of this notion already?  Are there any key words that you all associate with citizenship?  Why is this notion so complex?  It is also important to identify, without necessarily fully discussing them, the controversies and disagreements (e.g. the relation between national and European Citizenship). Out of the associated key words and the relations among them, you can group them and challenge them with current examples or controversies related citizenship.  The guiding questions for the closure can be:   1. What happened during the session? 2. How did the group work went? How did it contribute to your learning? 3. What did you learn from this session? 4. How go back (mentally) to your community and see if what happened in the last 90 minutes corresponds to the reality you know?   Connected to Q 4- What do you feel that your own reality miss? (In terms of the important characteristics of social cohesion that were listed). |

**SESSION PLAN 3: EXPLORING THE CONCEPT OF PARTICIPATION - tensions and dilemmas**

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| Goal | Exploring the concept of PARTICIPATION – Tensions and dilemmas |
| Equipment List | Chairs, Stationery |
| Duration | 90 minutes |
| Instructions | The activity is a discussion of open issues and dilemmas related to citizens’ participation. At the end of the session, the participants will be familiar with the emerging tensions in the theory and practice of citizens’ participation, having as well the chance to express their dilemmas regarding the role of citizens in participatory processes.  Instructions fort he trainer:  1. Divide the group into five smaller groups and give each group one theme from the handout. You may decide to use just some of the questions, according to the level of experience and interest of the group you work with.  2. Groups explore the given question, and prepare a three-minute sketch presenting their main ideas on the question and how it relates to their lives. Give participants 40 minutes for exploring the question in the small groups and to come up with the sketch.  3. Take 20 minutes for the sharing of sketches and move then to debriefing and evaluation.  Debriefing and evaluation  The debriefing can include the following questions:  Were there any questions that people found impossible to answer – either because it was difficult to make up their own mind, or because the question was badly phrased?  What links did you find with your daily lives?  fWere people surprised by the results of the discussions in the sketches?  What would help in finding more agreement in relation to citizens’ participation?  What makes agreement difficult?  How are these tensions and debates present in the lives of discriminated groups/marginalised groups?  How are these groups affected by the tensions/dilemmas?  Tips for facilitators  This activity needs a certain developed level of group dynamics and a level of previous knowledge and discussion on the topic. We recommend using this activity closer to the end of an educational process, possibly as a bridge towards taking action and using it as a possible basis for further project planning.  According to the level of experience and knowledge in the group, you may choose fewer questions or adapt them to the issues of tension and debate in your context.  Handout: Questions related to European Citizenship  1. Communities and belonging What makes a community? What makes people feel attached to a certain group or community?  2. Multiple identities What is part of people’s identities? Do people have one identity or several?  3. Think global, act local What makes people care about something bigger than their country? How do they show they care for global issues?  4. Citizen participation - Is citizens’ participation something important in the life of a community? How? Is citizens’ participation important for building a the local identity and to change in the community? How?  5. Building peaceful relations What can contribute to creating peaceful relations between communities or countries? What should be done so that peace is a long-lasting process?  The guiding questions for the closure can be:   1. What happened during the session? 2. How did the group work went? How did it contribute to your learning? 3. What did you learn from this session? 4. How go back (mentally) to your community and see if what happened in the last 90 minutes corresponds to the reality you know? 5. Connected to Q 4- What do you feel that your own reality miss? (In terms of the important characteristics of civic awareness that were listed). |

**ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY**

Citizen participation and officially recognised volunteering are the backbone of many national and international NGOs and of civil society organisations. Civil society and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) have the power to influence individual behaviour and the institutions that are involved on different matters in their contribution to society and community development.

By collaborating with national and international partners, civil society and NGOs can support the implementation of local, national and international strategies for development.

They can do this via:

* Lead grass-roots mobilisation and advocate on different subjects relevant to the public agenda
* Support the wide dissemination of information on the prevention of different phenomena that can affect society
* Form networks and action groups to promote the availability of resources
* Advocate for and support programmes that could help individuals and groups
* Monitor and work with stakeholders such as private sector entities
* Contribute to putting knowledge and evidence into practice

*"A healthy society is one in which importance is given to formal and informal relationships that facilitate interaction and engagement and thus engender a sense of belonging. It is also one in which there is broad participation by all sections of the population. Communities with these characteristics do better in moving forward to meet common aspirations."* (UN Volunteers, 2016)

**SESSION PLAN 4: VOLUNTEERISM AND PARTICIPATION**

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| Goal | Linking VOLUNTEERISM and PARTICIPATION |
| Equipment List | Chairs, Stationery |
| Duration | 90 minutes |
| Instructions | The aim of the session is to help participants reflect upon the importance of volunteering in their community. Fort his purpose, it is essential that the participants understand that volunteerism is the form of participation to the NGOs activities that is officially recognized. By the end of the session, the participants should also come back with a profile of the volunteer needed in their organization, in order to contribute to raising civic awareness in their communities.  Intro for the trainer:  Using the information available in the manual, the trainer will explain to the group the fact that traditional forms of informal participation are different of volunteering. Volunteers are the ones who participate in a formal and organized way, helping out different causes. They work on a basis of a contract with the NGO that they serve, the recieve recognition at the end of their work.  Then, the trainer will ask the group to form sub-groups (3-4 participants) and to reflect upon the:   1. Knowledge (to know) 2. skills (to do) 3. attitudes (to be)   that one should have to be a volunteer. The trainer can also use the verbs written in brakets or can use pictograms: the brain for knowledge, the heart fort he attitudes and the hands for the skillls.  The groups will brainstorm about the portrait of the volunteer – based on the 3 dimensions. They will come back in the pelnery at the end of the 20 minutes and then the trainer is introducing a 2nd task: the groups will go back and reflect upon the specific skills, attitudes and knowledge that one should have in order to volunteer for civic awareness initiatives. The tasks will have other 20 minutes.  At the end of the working time, the groups will come back and share the lists they created fort he profile. Then, the whole group should put together a commin profile and set up the set of skills, attitudes and knowledge that the volunteer running civic awareness activities should posses.  The guiding questions for the closure can be:   1. What happened during the session? 2. How did the group work went? How did it contribute to your learning? 3. What did you learn from this session? 4. How go back (mentally) to your community and see if what happened in the last 90 minutes corresponds to the reality you know? 5. Connected to Q 4- What do you feel that your own reality miss? (In terms of the important characteristics of civic awareness that were listed). |

**SESSION PLAN 5: 'COLLAGES' - THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY**

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| Activity Name | Collages |
| Goal | Through a collage, participants share and discuss their understandings and views on the role of çivil society.  To explore participants’ understandings and views of çivil society and to promote f To promote participants’ creativity and non-verbal expression on the values and visions associated with the role of NGOs in their communities. |
| Equipment List | Stationery |
| Duration | 90 minutes |
| Instructions | Instructions for the trainer:  1. Divide the group of participants into five groups of 5-6 participants.  2. Ask each group to discuss and express in a collage their views and understandings of the role of NGOs.  3. Each group places their collage on tables with a short written explanation if needed.  4. Ask participants to visit the collages of the other small groups and discuss the meanings of the chosen objects.  Debriefing and evaluation Once the group is back together, the following questions may be used:  Looking at the collages, are there any similarities? How about differences? What do people identify as the role of the NGOs? Are there some emotions or symbols they can include in these dimensions? Or some legal or formal aspects?  Looking back at the whole activity, what more did people learn about the NGOs and their role?.  Pay special attention to the non-verbal messages (drawings, photos, arrows, the relation between the different dimensions and the distribution of the different elements).  The guiding questions for the debriefing can be:   1. What happened during the session? 2. How did the group work went? How did it contribute to your learning? 3. What did you learn from this session? 4. How go back (mentally) to your community and see if what happened in the last 90 minutes corresponds to the reality you know?   Connected to Q 4- What do you feel that your own reality miss? (In terms of the important characteristics of civic awareness that were listed). |

**SUPPORTING RESOURCE**

**HOW TO BE INCLUSIVE - the role of inclusivity in community and civic awareness, participation and responsibility**

Nowadays, it is difficult to think of homogenous communities. All communities are engaged in matters related to diversity and moving from multicultural communities (in which each group stays with its own members) to intercultural communities (in which all groups interact with one another).

The following information can assist in sessions on civic awareness and participation, by supporting participants to identify steps they can take to engage in, or encourage, civic-community action. This information can be shared with session participants to use as reflective tools to consider their own ideas around community organising.

The question of *how* to create an inclusive community has been discussed widely in social, political, cultural, educational and economic fields.

A simply definition of 'the inclusive community' is one in which all citizens are treated equally and fairly, and incidents arising from prejudice and discrimination are not occurring often or at all.

The inclusive community is one in which:

* Everything is being done so that citizens are respected and given the same rights of access to resources and opportunities
* Any form of discrimination would be addressed, and could be, eliminated
* All citizens are included in decision-making processes and mechanisms
* Diversity is valued
* Negative incidents arising from prejudice are responded to in a constructive manner

Building an inclusive community is a long and often difficult process. What is essential is that it can be started at any time. Most of the time, organisations and groups will begin to pay attention to the importance of inclusivity after a significantly negative event or incident. Ideally, this should not be the case. Prejudice and discrimination should not be allowed to proliferate until harm has already been done.

In the building of an inclusive community, all groups of citizens should be involved and able to participate. There should be awareness of which groups of citizens are routinely excluded from civic participation and efforts should be consistently made to address barriers to awareness and participation.

**COMMUNITY ORGANISING METHODS**

One of the methods that citizens can engage with to generate change in their community is 'community organising.' Community organising begins with the simple principle that authorities tend to collaborate more effectively with organisation representing civil society if they show that they have the support of the community members (the affected communities - particularly for marginalised groups, this approach is essential). Inclusivity is a vital and foundational element of community organising.

The community organiser works in civil society and supports community members to create their own democratic organisations and institutions such as: membership organisations with committees; working groups etc. - so that they can effectively challenge governing bodies and sectors to hold them accountable to change.

in the process of community organising, those who don't have a say in the decision-making processes can organise for social change in order to rearrange power inequalities by establishing non-hierarchical community organisations.

There are several ways to describe the organising process. Below are the basic steps which are often employed:

1. **Listening process:** Systematically listen to a diverse range of members within the community in order to identify problems, ideas, visions and perspectives and to recruit individuals for the organisation.
2. **First meeting:** Bringing people together to prioritise a list of issues compiled during the listening process. An established membership-based citizen organisation will help to solve these issues.
3. **Regular meetings:** Bring people together regularly to prepare research and strategy for actions.
4. **Research:** Identify potential solutions and the specific decision-makers and institutions which hold power to make these solutions possible.
5. **Action:** Take action to solve problems by engaging these decision-makers and institutions through dialogue, negotiation and/or confrontation and pressure when necessary.
6. **Building the organisation:** Build large, sustainable and democratic groups capable of addressing numerous issues, demands, needs and wishes within the community.

**HOW TO CREATE CONSENSUS in ORGANISED COMMUNITIES**

Consensus decision-making is a creative and dynamic way of reaching an inclusive agreement between all members of a group. Instead of simply voting for an item and having the majority of the group having the final say, a group using a consensus-based method is committed to finding solutions that every person activity supports, or can compromise upon. This ensures that all opinions, ideas and concerns are taken into account. Through listening closely to one another, the group aims to come up with proposals that work for everyone.

The benefits of using consensus within a community can include:

* **Sharing power -** understanding that the decision taken involves working more together, rather than competing against one another
* **Building communities -** through the consensus process, individuals and groups get to know each other better and, in a well-facilitated context, build long-lasting collaborative relationships
* **Making better decisions -** aiming towards win-win situations through collective decisions
* **Getting things done -** as the outcome is something that has been widely agreed upon, motivation may be higher to implement ideas and strategies
* **Protecting marginalised needs and opinions -** as everyone has the right to bloc a proposal if that proposal may affect the group

Consensus can contribute to social justice, and everyone present within community organising needs to share a common goal and be willing to work collectively towards it.

Identifying and revisiting a common goal can help to focus and unite the group. Consensus requires a lot of commitment and patience to make it work. Everyone must be willing to really give it a go. This means being honest with yourself and others about the difference between what *needs* to happen versus what you *prefer* to happen based upon your own experience. Consensus requires flexibility and being open to alternative solutions. It would be easy to call for a vote the first time you struggle to reach an agreement, but in the consensus model, differences help to build stronger and more creative final decisions.

The following link offers a great resource for learning more about the consensus model in decision-making and community organising: <https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/consensus#accountability>

**SUMMARY**

This section of the 'Protect Project' toolkit covers key elements related to generating, engaging and encouraging: Civic Awareness, Participation and associated roles and responsibilities. It outlines core considerations of citizenship and education pertaining to it, offering resources supporting the facilitation of sessions. It also covers inclusivity, community organising and the consensus-model of decision-making.

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