



EMBRACING CITIZENSHIP

Civic and Political Education for Ex-Combatants during Demobilisation and Reintegration

A Primer



About this Primer

To achieve sustainable peace, it is crucial for ex-combatants to be able to support their communities, or even pursue their wartime claims, through non-violent ways. Depending on the nature of these claims, different reintegration trajectories and skillsets need to be applied. If their claims are linked to political or social grievances, attractive pathways may include joining a political party, running for office, or becoming active in a social movement, a veteran association, or a local civil society organisation. All of these avenues require ex-combatants to be fully aware of their rights and duties as active citizen, informed about the governance system of their country, and knowledgeable about ways to manage conflict constructively. This Primer provides DDR practitioners with a brief overview on civic and political education as an enabler for ex-combatants and their communities to become peacebuilding agents.

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Civic and political education: A necessary vehicle for ex-combatants to become agents for peace



Members of non-state armed groups (NSAGs) fulfil a variety of functions during conflict as commanders, fighters, or in non-combatant capacities. Following their demobilisation, they transition into new roles. While only few of those get a chance to become civilian leaders in a peaceful environment, rank-and-file combatants also aspire to serve their communities and contribute to peacebuilding and governance. Therefore, DDR processes should not only include support measures for economic livelihood and reinsertion into the job market, but also provide ex-combatants with knowledge

and skills to (re)establish themselves as full citizens, conscious of their political and social rights and responsibilities, and able to pursue political engagement in a peaceful manner. This is crucial for fostering a conducive environment for constructive state-society relationships and peaceful negotiations of disagreements. Civic and political education promotes loyalty to the state, motivating citizens to seek the common good and societal solidarity. This makes citizenship a valuable peacebuilding concept. Successful peacebuilding requires both state building (creating effective

governance institutions) and nation building (fostering a shared social identity).¹

Understanding the governance system, spanning from the national to the local level, is essential for ex-combatants to engage in non-violent political activities within the legal framework of their country. Political and civic education curricula serve to raise awareness of civic rights, duties, and avenues for formal or informal socio-political engagement, through political parties, state

bureaucracy or civil society. Additionally, soft skills such as critical thinking and non-violent communication, as well as knowledge about the history and root causes of conflict, and values like peaceful coexistence and tolerance, can position ex-combatants as peacebuilding agents in their communities, preventing a relapse into violence and promoting active participation in the political and public arena.

Example: Civic and political education in the Philippines

In the context of the normalisation process in Mindanao, various support schemes have been designed to support combatants from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in their transition to civilian roles and leadership positions within the post-war governance system of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Among those are livelihood and vocational trainings, as well as capacity-building activities related to Social Cohesion, Values Transformation, Culture of Peace, Conflict Sensitivity and Peace Promotion. While some trainings are mandatory, other courses and activities can be pursued by the ex-combatants according to their personal choice and interests. The trainings take place either in parallel to weapons decommissioning, or subsequently.

As the MILF prepared itself for running for office through regional and local elections, several educational programs were put in place to train its members for engaging in the political arena. One of those is the Bangsamoro School of Peace and Democracy (SPD) with the purpose of enhancing governance and administration capabilities of the leadership and supporting the combatants' socio-political inclusion and participation. The curriculum comprised three phases focused on personal and community resilience, conflict resolution and mediation, leadership, and social movement building. This initiative was implemented by UNDP with support from the Australian Government. The SPD curriculum is aligned with the MILF's vision of moral governance for the Bangsamoro region and has been developed by a consortium comprised of various regional and national development and educational entities, in addition to the MILF armed forces.²

1 Levine, Daniel H. and Linda S Bishai (2010): Civic Education and Peacebuilding. Examples from Iraq and Sudan. Special Report 254, United States Institute of Peace.

2 For more information, see Bangsamoro School of Peace and Democracy launched | United Nations Development Programme <https://www.undp.org/philippines/press-releases/bangsamoro-school-peace-and-democracy-launched>

Options for designing civic and political education as part of an integrated DDR process

WHEN?

During an integrated DDR process, the provision of basic or advanced civic and political education activities for ex-combatants can be included in various ways. They should be built in from the onset, while designing the DDR process, and can support both Demobilisation and Reintegration phases of DDR. They can take the shape of trainings, workshops, mentorships, and should ideally not be a one-off endeavour. This engagement – which may be offered on a compulsory or voluntary basis – can complement vocational and livelihood activities aimed at paving ex-combatants' pathway to socio-economic independence and the job market.

WHO?

The approach and methodology for developing and implementing a civic and/or political education program for ex-combatants should be designed on a case-by-case basis, tailored to local needs and priorities, and based on comprehensive knowledge of the characteristics of the target group: for example, what age groups are represented in the cohort of ex-combatants? What is their level of literacy and education? Such data is often compiled as part of cantonment, registration and demobilisation schemes, and DDR commissions or other coordination bodies should ensure that it can be used for training development. The educational approach should also be connected to the overall DDR strategy. For instance, if the programme takes place as part of a community-based reintegration scheme, it may include not only ex-combatants, but also other members of their returning/host community. In addition, education activities may be conducted on a collective basis – e.g. to the whole movement undergoing demobilisation – or on an individual basis – e.g. to selected ex-combatants across one or various armed groups.

Gendered needs have to be reflected in the content of civic and political education activities, including by ensuring gender inclusive participation among instructors and participants. The program should be equally accessible for women and men, persons with disabilities, as well as different age groups, and the content and methodology should account for intersectional inequalities and diverging interests and opportunities for political participation. If the needs assessment identifies differentiated learning needs for different groups of ex-combatants, these need to be reflected in the activities.

Involving ex-combatants-turned-peacebuilders as role models and resource persons in civic education programmes for youth affected by conflict can be beneficial to emphasise the power of transitioning from violence to nonviolence and contribute to inter-generational dialogue and communication. This is an essential part of the Freedom School founded by the movement Combatants for Peace, which educates the next generation of nonviolent activists for peace and justice in Israel/Palestine.³

HOW?

Following the identification and screening of the target group, a needs assessment should be conducted. This could entail one or several workshops involving all relevant stakeholders in the conceptualisation and design of a tailored approach for civic and political education. It is vital to involve relevant stakeholders such as national and regional/local government authorities, political parties, civil society actors, community representatives (e.g. traditional authorities), as well as ex-combatants themselves in such a needs assessment, to promote the buy-in of all concerned actors and utilise their specific perspective and unique expertise.

3 See <https://cfpeace.org/> and <https://www.afcfp.org/education-and-empowerment>

Following the needs assessment, an activity plan should be co-developed by experienced trainers and local experts with intricate knowledge of the context, to ensure that it is rooted in home grown methodologies, and that potentially existing national curricula for civic education are considered, built on and complemented. To ensure its suitability, the program may be peer-reviewed, piloted, and then reviewed again, allowing for validation and iterative improvement before it can be scaled up to become part of regular demobilisation or social reintegration schemes. It is also useful to include mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the success of the program, collecting lessons learned for future endeavours.

Civic and political education activities in the absence of a DDR process

These activities are still valuable when there is no formal DDR process and can be conducted:

- As part of a reinsertion package for individual combatants disengaging from armed groups, to prepare them and/or their community for broader reintegration;
- As part of Community-Based Reintegration programs and other violence reduction programs conducted before, during, or after DDR processes, aimed at youth at risk of recruitment into armed groups, vulnerable and broader community members, or ex-combatants ineligible for DDR.

The principles and process of designing and delivering civic and political education activities remain the same. It is most important here that efforts are not seen as a one-off activity, but belong to a broader strategy, and support broader DDR or Pre DDR-efforts.

Example: Concepts for inclusion in civic education activities:

- Violent Conflict and Its Impacts
- Understanding Diversity and Overcoming Injustice
- Understanding Power Structures
- Civic Engagement
- Local Governance

Example: Methodologies and approaches for civic education activities:

- Training course/workshop
- Training of Trainers program
- Peer-learning
- Coaching and mentorship
- Self-directed Learning
- Experiential Learning

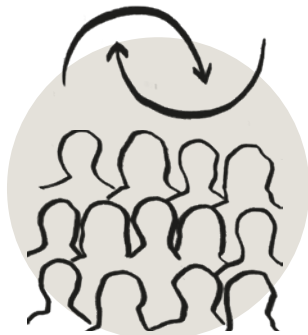
Checklist for DDR practitioners aiming to develop and implement civic education curricula for ex-combatants



Be specific: Understand what types of civic and political education activities are relevant for the specific context, and what the actual needs are. Are the armed groups and/or individuals you are targeting seeking to participate in a broader national political process and looking for a seat at the table? Do their interests lie in sub-national politics, or local/informal activism and engagement? Tailor the level of your engagement to the appropriate sphere of influence at the given time.



Seek partnerships: There is a wealth of resources available on the topic of civic education. Many international organisations and NGOs are working on the topic. Map out whether such organisations are active in the country where you operate, to identify how existing curricula can be adapted to ex-combatants' needs.



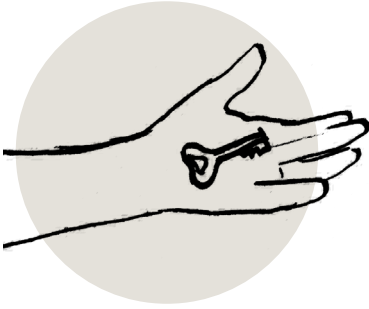
Coordinate with national stakeholders: Civic education can be an extremely sensitive topic in post-conflict environments. If not communicated well, equipping ex-combatants with the means to improve their political participation can be perceived as threatening by those in power. Priority should be given to involve national authorities in the process, to foster understanding and ownership on the government side. Oftentimes, civic education is already part of regular school curricula. Be aware of what these curricula include and make sure to not simply replicate their content. There may be cases where the government wants to include political propaganda activities into a DDR effort. While this can serve as a starting point for a conversation about the inclusion of civic and political education for ex-combatants, a curriculum should not simply align with the government's perspective but provide tools for political engagement. Potential sensitivities need to be managed carefully.



Be rooted in two-way learning: Instead of focusing on a top-down training approach, a level-headed learning environment is crucial to engage with participants as equals, creating a collaborative atmosphere to cater to the intricate relationship between content and pedagogy in the field of civic participation. An inclusive learning technique is necessary to demonstrate the balance between authority and citizen participation in democracy, showing that dissent and disagreement can coexist with legitimate authority.



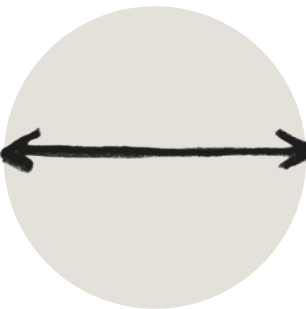
Tailor to interests: Assess the interests of combatants and potentially offer sequential advanced modules of the course for those who express an interest to gain a deeper knowledge or who want to get involved in (formal) party politics. Such add-on modules can for example include elements of political campaigning, financing campaigns and party activities, and public speaking, communication, and strategy. Make sure to cover avenues for informal political engagement, since women are often excluded from formal routes to political power.



Create ownership and sustainability: Activities need to be designed to create a self-sustaining cycle of learning and development, to foster ownership as recipients take responsibility for their community's growth and actively contribute to ongoing learning efforts. The program should aim to create a safe and supportive space where all participants feel valued and heard, enabling them to develop the skills and confidence needed to facilitate similar environments in the future.



Address psychosocial burdens: Be mindful of the target group's psychosocial hardship. Discussing certain topics can trigger painful memories of conflict. Incorporate trauma-informed practices to address the psychological impact of conflict and violence.



Look left and right: Not only existing curricula in the target context can be useful resources, but also practices and experiences from other countries. Inviting peers (e.g. ex-combatants from other contexts) to provide inputs on their comparable experience or specific topics can be inspiring and widen the horizon on what is considered possible.



Resources and examples of Civic Education Curricula:

Youth Democracy Academy course (Myanmar)

International IDEA

360° Civic Education - Value-based Concepts and Experiential Activities

Goethe Institute

Facilitators Toolkit for Inclusive Civic Engagement Training Curriculum (Lebanon)

National Democratic Institute

Training Guide for Global Citizenship Education

Asia-Pacific Center of Education for International Understanding

Training Resources on Local Engagement for Advocacy and Dialogue

Maktabat MEPI

Simulation Games in Civic Education

CRISP Berlin

Civic Education Practical Guidance Note

UNDP

Planning and implementation of civic education programs

Eastern European Network for Citizenship Education

This publication is part of a series of Primers offering brief insights and practical guidance on the political transformation of non-state armed groups as a core element of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), and as a contribution to sustainable peace. These Primers are produced in the context of a project that aims to operationalise Module 2.20 of the United Nations Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS): “The Politics of DDR” (<https://www.unddr.org/>). It is based on the collaboration between the United Nations Department of Peace Operations DDR Section (UNDPO DDR) and the Berghof Foundation. Through first-hand experience and on-site support, the project generates and disseminates concrete guidance on planning, designing and implementing politically sensitive DDR processes. It further develops training resources for DDR practitioners and other stakeholders involved in peace processes and post-war peacebuilding, with a focus on practical support for political transformation.

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