

The citizen engagement approach

What is citizen engagement?

Citizen engagement is defined as the active and democratic participation of community members in the development and well-being of their living environment. Namely, an engaged citizen:

- Is aware of her/his rights and duties to be actively involved in her/his community and country;
- Embeds Human rights values in her/his actions;
- Reflects in a critical and constructive way on her/his experiences and preconceptions;
- Identifies problems affecting her/his community and contributes to finding a solution;
- Actively and democratically participates in the implementation of concrete actions benefiting the whole community and the country.

What is the citizen engagement approach?

The citizen engagement approach consists of 6 key elements that stimulate the citizens' active involvement by inviting them to integrate human rights values in their life by the strengthening their knowledge, skills and abilities. It is a continuous process that involves the whole community. It aims to promote: positive values, human rights, and the engagement of the most marginalized citizens in the community. The approach helps communities foster a climate that allows for participation and citizen engagement, by strengthening strategies for: peaceful conflict resolution, inclusion, collaboration, solidarity and positive interactions with each other.

Success story

In Cité Soleil, Haiti, a group of young men and women met to discuss the main issues affecting their neighbourhood. After reflecting on the current situation, they imagined a neighbourhood where their youth could feel safe, have access to recreational and cultural infrastructures, have access to a quality education and live in a clean and healthy environment. Afterwards, the group started thinking about what they could do to improve the neighbourhood's situation. They then decided to organize a cleaning squad to pick up the garbage which was polluting public space. Indeed, the lack of health has always been a major issue in Cité Soleil. The garbage was clogging the sewers and canals which was causing sewers to back-up and causing floods on rainy days. This can lead to infectious diseases and skin infections. On a Saturday morning, about twenty boys and girls happily worked to clean the streets and squares. That action was well received and appreciated by the whole neighbourhood.

What are the key elements to the citizen engagement approach?

The pedagogy behind the citizen engagement approach involves the following 6 elements:



A Human right based approach (HRBA)

HRBA is a conceptual framework based on international human rights standards that sets the achievement of all human rights as the objective of social actions. Using this approach implies that all humans, including the most marginalized groups, should have equal opportunities to achieve their full potential without discrimination. Through the empowerment of rights holders and an increased accountability for duty bearers (governments and their agents), the human rights based approach advocates for the participation of all people seeking constructive solutions.



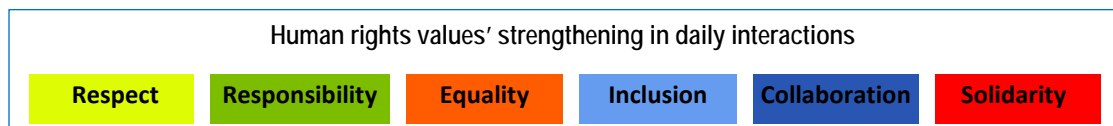
A participative approach to human rights education

The participatory approach is the way we implement HRBA in social actions. It encourages social analysis aimed at the empowerment of participants to develop concrete actions for social change that are in accordance with human rights values and standards. It enables us to address human rights issues from the perspective of participants lived experiences. There are three pillars to the participatory approach: 1) start with the participants' experiences 2) critically analyse and reflect; 3) develop strategies for action



The promotion of six values embedded in the UDHR


Human rights values are important for the respect of human rights on a daily basis. These must be incorporated into daily behaviours and interactions. Failure to comply with any of these values leads to discriminatory practices and attitudes and to marginalization. Human rights values are essential to support the principles of human dignity and equality that are core components of the Universal declaration of Human Rights. Incorporating these values is necessary for citizen engagement.



Inclusion on a gender-based perspective

A gender-based perspective involves understanding how gender impacts on opportunities, roles and interactions between people, while considering the various ways in which men and women participate, communicate and interact with one another. It also involves the implementation of measures to promote equal participation of men and women in decision-making processes. Furthermore, including a gender perspective enables women and girls to fully exercise their rights and reduces the gap between men and women with regards to access and control of resources.

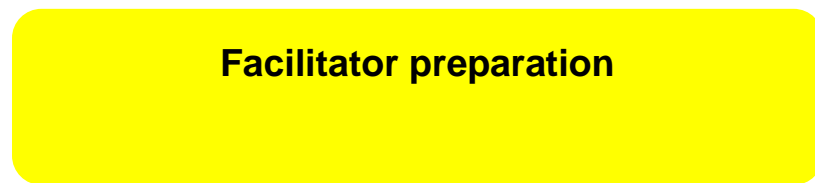


 **Community action facilitator**

A community action facilitator provides support, tools, techniques and strategies to support communities in their actions to: improve economic and social living conditions, end violence, develop democratic leadership, and protect the environment. The facilitators get involved with groups to support long lasting changes in the communities

The community action process in 5 steps

Once a facilitator has completed preparations, he/she is ready to undertake a 5 -step process with a community group. The diagram outlined below provides an overview of the process to develop a community action project.



5 step community action process



Step 1- Exploring motivation

The group explores how and why they want to get involved in a citizen engagement project.

Step 2 – Exploring the context

The group explores the human rights situation in their community and critically reflects on the human rights issue(s) they want to address.

Step 3 – Targeting changes and planning for action

The group determines what they perceive to be “the ideal” with respect to the specific human rights issue they will address and identify the necessary changes to achieve this ideal. The group will also decide on the action(s) they will undertake to promote the desired changes.

Step 4 – Taking action

The group carries out the action(s) in their community

Step 5 – Monitoring and evaluating

The group monitors their plan, measure changes, documents results and identifies the next steps.

For more information on the citizen engagement approach go to [la section Haïti](#) on Equitas’ website or write us at info@equitas.org.

Discover more tools and resources on our website: <https://equitas.org>

