

**Trends of Civic and Ethical Education for Democratic Consolidation:  
Implicating the Possibility of Mainstreaming African Charter on Democracy,  
Election and Governance (ACDEG)**

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***Abstract:** This article discusses the trends of Civic Education as a way to help consolidating post-cold war emerging democracies. Capitalizing on the commonality of the subject matter which premised the shared heritage of democratic ideals, so far, the curricula is helped by the triumph of liberal democracy. Hence, the trend and the subject area created 'tolerant citizen for diversity' in Ethiopia and unintentionally, students are found, albeit sometimes, to be 'regional conscious', 'ethnic conscious', and 'self-assertive'. Arguably enough, this was proved in the recent 'popular protests'. Irrespective of the local commitments to embrace democracy as per the constitution, this article deduced, after employing qualitative desk review of regional and international instruments, African nations progressively mainstreamed democratic ideals such as African Charter on Democracy, Election and Governance (ACDEG) and African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), and in the manner of mainstreaming, also Pan-African sentiment to uphold democratic ideal with wide coverage of Africa. Also, the change in Civic and Ethical Education subject matter has to overcome proactively undesirable unintended function.*

**Key Words:** Civics, Curricula, Democracy, ACDEG and Pan Africanism

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## **Introduction**

Civic and Ethical Education curricula, attributable to its virtue, became ubiquitous to educate the primary and secondary school enrolled students within the African soil (Peterson 2011). Sometimes the discipline goes to the extent of educating students enrolled in higher learning institutions. Genealogically, the subject Civic Education, as it is thought today, is the order of post-cold war's liberal order. However, globally literature has dealt with the variance among various Civic Education curricula towards discourses of citizenship (Peterson 2011). Perhaps, this article will address the rare question of how the curriculum can best fit expectations of African Charter on Democracy, Election and Governance (ACDEG) after snapshots of its trends.

## **Objectives**

The objective of this paper is to examine how the trends of Civic and Ethical Education (CEE) curricula implicated democratic consolidation. Qualitative approach was used to analyze the functions of the curricula.

## **Methods**

With the objective above, data were collected through desk review of document analysis, NEWS analysis and observation of student engagement in the post 2016 popular protests. The findings of this study were validated at the National

Conference at its later stage. In sum, this article critically assesses the possibilities of the existing Civic and Ethical Education curricula for consolidating democracy through fitting the expectations of ACDEG.

## **Scope and Significance**

This article encompassed the Ethiopian CEE curriculum from Grade 5-12 within the temporal range of 2000-2016 with deliberate comparison made to some African countries. The results of this intellectual challenge are drawn to chart out the modus operandi of entertaining Pan-African identity, tolerance, continental solidarity for democratic exercise and building sense of ownership of regional instruments through CEE curriculum.

## **The Role of Civic Education for Democratic Consolidation: Global Overview**

Through the lenses of Rousseau, Aristotle and Cicero, "It is not enough to say that citizens 'be good'; they must be taught to be so" (Peterson 2011). Similarly, one can remark that tolerant citizens are neither naturally given nor self-made; rather nurtured through teaching. In a similar resonance, Peterson (2011, p. 13) argued that communitarian disposition as opposed to liberal conception of Civic Education determines the eventual tolerance limits of citizens and their respect for equality with others. Also the contemporary

political philosopher, Sandel (1996), underscored the essence that a civic approach to plurality determines the rapture from ethno-centrism to global citizenship. Particularly the civic engagement at various levels of political system and the discourse on citizenship underplayed is undoubtedly correlated with degree of tolerance.

Thus far, the proliferation of ‘liberal democracy’ heralded its triumph over its counterpart of ‘socialist authoritarianism’. Fukuyama’s (1992) historic argument dubbed ‘the end of history’ gives a way to the last man to live in a world of today, baptized as a full-fledged ‘liberal democracy’. Mamdani (1996) further reckoned that ‘the liberal solution locates politics among civil society; perhaps African solution was to put age old African community at its heart place’. The transitory corridor from African communitarianism to civil society does not result in a vacuum. Hence the precondition of liberal democracy, i.e. civil society, was brought about by inference on the social psychology of the society (Lipset 1959). The third wave of democratization, according to the noble argument of Samuel Huntington (1991), also convinced us about the mandatory pre-requisites of cultural attitudes, values, beliefs, and related behavior pattern so as to create favorable environment for democracy.

Terrence Mason (2009) also underscored that the United States

partnered via USAID with almost 70 emerging democracies across the world, ever since the project birth in 1995 to its life time. The partnership was basically to help civic-education curricula to create an informed citizenry and was a *modus operandi* for empowering the citizen for active participation and democracy. Similarly, British consultants once shuttled between the UK and Ethiopia, just to help the revision of the civics textbook, by forwarding feedbacks and comments (Yamada 2011, p. 104). Henceforth, it is worthy to note that partnering non-local agency emanates from the global nature of the curriculum itself.

Content-wise, the curriculum of ‘Civic Education’ was not filled entirely with local contents such as History. However, the ideal of democracy, equality, rule of law, constitutionalism, etc. make the subject universal, as they also appeared to compose the central themes of democratic values. Ever since post-socialist democracies was experimented elsewhere within the globe, it was found that the curricula of ‘Civic Education’ was a kind of rigorous education accorded as a panacea whereas ‘good citizenry’ was considered the viable way to liberal democracy, notwithstanding the unclear terms of what constitutes and how to contest and treat the good citizenry. Clearly, according to Bardakci, Genç and Hekimci (2014), post-authoritarian regimes remain with

evolutionary steps to ladder up from ‘electoral democracy’, ‘liberal democracy’ to the climax of ‘advanced democracy’, successively. The possible justification for the *raison detre* of civic education might also be to feed the democracy consolidation process, to the desired level of ‘advanced democracy’ at least partly.

For instance, the Ethiopian curriculum for Civic Education is actually inter-mixed with ‘Ethical Education’ which was anticipated to also play out some vital ethical values and principles to be acquired. Of course, the ethical components first appeared upon the second phases of the curricular reform in 2000. These are namely responsibility, industriousness, self-reliance, saving, participation and pursuit of wisdom which are an outright themes incorporated from Ethics and Morality of the discipline ‘Philosophy’ (Yamada, 2011). In fact, the ethical concepts also go in line with creating responsible citizen, and were seconded by the sorts of pupil and the alumni who need to mediate professional and environmental ethics awhile of executing their knowledge and skills to solve the problem of the community. Perhaps all of these assumptions are another dimension of ‘creating an informed citizenry’, yet they implicitly affirm common assumptions with the bundle component of the curriculum for civic education.

### **Discourses and Function of School-level Civic Education Curricula**

Function wise, the sociologist of the contemporary world, Merton (1957), identified two functions of education. Especially his notion of ‘manifest’ and ‘unintended’ function imperatively explains the discipline ‘Civic and Ethical Education’; since it perfectly works for the formal education sector, just as part of social institution. Arguably enough, the Civic Education served to play the cords of unintended functions, despite its significance might be so marginal. The finding was ‘Civic and Ethical Education’ served to the extent of contributing to the deepening of ‘ethnic identity’ over ‘Pan-Ethiopian Identity’, as revealed by Mekonnen and Hindeya (2012). Arguably enough, Civic Education informs the localities to also embrace ‘regionalism’.

To bolster the above mentioned argument, we can fetch a snapshot from the turmoil of ‘mass protests’ in Ethiopia instigated by the integrated master plan of Addis Ababa and Surrounding towns of Oromia Regional State. Over all, the mass protest of 2015-2018 held in, *inter alia*, Oromia, Amhara and Konso, killed at least 1000 (Amnesty International 2018). Without going further into the *nitty gritty* of the protest, it is *sine qua none* to underscore that those student protesters are the co-product of Civic Education who are activated for

‘regionally conscious’ cause of protests.

Apart from the role of the alleged spoiler, the rank and file student mass seems assertive enough to take the benefit of challenging the master plan. Here it is important to give the benefit of hindsight for the fact that those students had civics lessons of civil disobedience along with the icons of Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Park. Significantly, many school and university students across Oromia participated, whether they are found at the front line of the protest or provoked to protest.

In contrary, sub-national identities were unintentionally overvalued, which also stands as anti-thesis to ‘national identity’ subdued for democracy consolidation. Needless to say, that resulted as contrary to the intention of the education policy crafters. Furthermore, to the dismay of those policy makers, their roster to check the success rate of the curricula contains to bring an informed Ethiopian Citizenry as opposed to sub-national identity.

The aforementioned instance can be dubbed as an ‘objective consequences’ of the Civic Education curricula, in light of Robert Merton’s functionalism theory. In order to typify it as an intended/latent function, it has to be borne outside of the intentional boxes of the policy makers. On the other account, the ‘Technical Publication

Series’ of USAID’s (2002, p. 26) indicated that the community shall be mobilized since the desire for attitudinal change outweighs the need for knowledge transfer, by virtue of Civic Education peculiarity. Even then, ultra-skeptics yet saw Civic Education as altogether weak way of political socialization of the citizen for competency and active participation (Mason 2012, p. 5).

### **Towards Mainstreaming ‘African Charter on Democracy, Election and Governance’ into Civics and Ethics Curricula**

The initiative of African Union, along with its partners, embarks on enhancement of Education sector, including Civic Education, to mainstream the African Charter on Democracy, Election and Governance (African Union 2007). The charter triggers to render some glimpses on the discourses, function of Civic Education as well as the exponential shift in the nature of the subject matter itself. Actually, the adoption of the charter by African countries was a portrayal and a means to demonstrate the determination of the African Union and its Member States to promote and strengthen good governance through institutionalizing transparency, accountability and democracy. Perhaps, the Charter entered into force so late, after lagging for some seven years, in February 2012. By virtue of Article 48 of the charter, entering into force were

pending the ratification of additional 15 AU members. By now, only 24 Member States have ratified and domesticated the Charter and other 23 Member States have signed but not ratified and the remaining 7 have neither signed nor ratified<sup>1</sup>. In light of this charter, the AU has been in constant battle against unconstitutional means of power transfer, including coup. However, the initiative of mainstreaming the tenets of Democracy, Election and Governance, is so novel, if it is reaped, its successful implementation on many counts. Precisely, the plausible reason might be member states that adhere to emerging democracies, at least, took the baseline ‘civic education’ in schools, by way of nurturing ‘informed and responsible citizenry’ compatible with democracy consolidation. The discipline, perceived globally as one of the means of democracy support, big partners even from mature democracies, including the United States, take it as part of their intents of the metro-curricula disseminating democratic ideals for the concerned citizen from post-cold war order.

Pan-Africanism, as a typical trait of pan-regionalism, would have been unparalleled to any of the global trends of civic education. The global trend of Civic Education is so segregated by ‘sovereign nationalism’, albeit faced ‘multiple parallel citizenship’ in the global order whereas the African Union prescribes

mainstream African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance into Civic Education curricula of the countries within the continent (AUDPA *et. al.*, 2015). Exceptionally, the trend is so inspiring that it amalgamated new set of owners for the civic education. We can possibly predict that, with reserving enough room for drawing analogy, bringing up ‘informed African Citizenry’ is emplaced. Indeed, that is a manifest and pragmatic move from localized understanding of democracy towards continent-wide democracy. In other words, national democracy gives way to a new brand of ‘African Democracy’ along with its aspiration of creating an ‘informed and responsible African Citizenry’. Though it is unintended, we can preliminarily register that it may bring the long awaited African identity nobility. In line with the aforementioned argument, the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs underscores boldly enough that “the Africa we dream of cannot be built without basing ourselves on fundamental norms, values”. Imperatively, African Union’s Forum, daring to showcase the mainstreaming of the African Charter on Democracy, Election and Governance (ACDEG), identified and recognized the new educational syllabuses in Zambia which almost mainstreamed all regional and continental normative frameworks. That is, indeed, a budding experience from which

African Union's move to mainstream ACDEG may spring with enough room to capitalize on the already identified baseline of Zambian lessons. Perfectly, the Zambian syllabi rendered enormous content space for international and regional human rights instruments, which included the famous International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights-ICCPR, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights-ICESCR, United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Child-UNCRC, family law, and African Charter on Human and Peoples' rights (Ministry of Education, 2012). Possibly, Civic Education is one of the lucrative disciplines to entertain the cause of mainstreaming ACDEG in school curricula more than any other single discipline, what so ever. However, the exception among the discourses of the contending Civic Education, might be the impracticality of holding 'African Single Democracy' to be drawn from single descent of 'African citizenry', at least within the framework of ACDEG. Hereunder, it is imperative to underscore Namibia's case which is the sole country that moved forward to the extent of reserving official pride for AU Pan-Africanist anthem (Gawanas 2014). Regardless of their civics curriculum, Namibian schools, police and military tribute for pan-Africanist anthem and salute officially AU flag, in every turn after tributing for their own national anthem and national flag. This success story

translated even into Namibia's registering the highest tolerant level of index 3.7, across Africa (Dulani, B., Sambo, G. and Dionne, K.Y. 2016)<sup>1</sup>. Without due concern for charting out the direction of causality between tolerance and Pan-Africanism, the success rate NEWS of African tolerance is significant enough since tolerance makes up the body politic of democracy. By and large, democracy needs its own loyal and real citizen, whereas at other times, embracing Africa-wide identity and values are seldom realistic, even more difficult to attain. Citizenship under 'sovereign nationalities', in fact, is not an easily breakable web to be enlarged to the extent of continent-wide identity. Precisely, democracy cannot be consolidated without 'informed citizenry' and that citizenry shall not be built upon unreliable basis. As well, it can be built neither upon 'supra-national identity' nor 'sub-national identities'. Rather, it seems pragmatic enough to dwell on 'sovereign nationalism', as it shall not practically give way to 'African Citizenry', though the latter seems easy to be romanticized and enthusiastic enough for the champions of Pan-Africanism. Reminiscing the aftermath of Africa under colonialism, Ali Mazrui, eloquently grasped as 'the greatest friend of African nationalism was race consciousness and the greatest enemy of Africa nationhood was ethnic consciousness' (Mazrui 2016). Perhaps, on the other hand, the



effect of ‘ethnic consciousness’, by Civic Education, fairly led to the necessity to recognize and embrace the equality of other ethnic groups (Mekonnen *et al*, 2012).

Furthermore Civic and Ethical education can be tuned to fit the expectation of ACDEG by considering the following ways;

- Nurturing multi-layered citizenship through scaling up identity to the level of Nobility of ‘African Citizenry’.
- Rehearsing Ethiopian student of Pan-African anthem and Observance of hoisting Pan-African flag.
- Informing the Pan-African instruments of democracy consolidation. As a consequence, there would be no way for an authoritarian resurgence to suppress the tenets of democracy and would be less likely to arrive on deaf ears for African fellow citizens.
- Nurturing regional norms of pan African solidarity for zero-tolerance against unconstitutional change of power and its probable sanction by African Union bodies.
- Simulation exercise on major African Union bodies (such as AU Assembly, AU Peace and Security Council)

## Conclusions

In a nutshell, to get out of the democracy deficit of the emerging democracies in Africa, it is a commendable fact to see the

ratification of 31 states out of the total 46 signatory parties of the charter (ACDEG). School-based Civic Education is found to be the order of post-cold war regime for third wave of democratization, by way of harnessing an ‘informed citizenry’ needful for the democracy maturity. The Ethiopian experience showcased to play out both intended function and unintended function of the education. Thus far, the discourses inform us the fact that students are cultivated to be informed citizenry and ‘tolerant for diversity’. At the same time, though unintentionally, students are found to be ‘regional-conscious’, ‘ethnic-conscious’, and ‘self-assertive’. Those were, partly, albeit debatable enough, demonstrated in the ‘young protest’.

Indeed, it is also vital to underscore the discourse of ‘sovereign identity’ to negotiate ‘African Identity’, though awaiting the contested continent-wide metro-curricula for Civic Education, by virtue of its implementation. Perhaps, the discussion was still on budding stage, the end-output which yields road map of civic education for continent-wide democracy consolidation remain to address the latent function of the curriculum, beyond all the polished manifest function in which the stakeholders are so far contemplating. The findings on Zambian experience on mainstreaming ACDEG and ACHPR along its Civics curricula, draw the good analogy from which to capitalize on the baseline for the desired agenda of mainstreaming



the democracy tenets. Being the initiative an outright move towards shift in the subject matter of the ongoing curricula, unintended functions are yet not forecasted as there was no any prior experience where multi-lateral organization orchestrates for adjustment to curricula's, which has protracted implication for civic education. The point is Civic and Ethical education in Ethiopia may also optimize democratic ideals by mainstreaming regional instruments. By virtue of AU's instruments, Ethiopian Civic and Ethical Education may also harness Pan-African sentiment.

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