

Maahara digest

ISSUE 04

POLITICAL AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH



Transparency Maldives, the National Chapter of Transparency International in The Maldives, is a non-partisan organization that promotes collaboration, awareness and undertakes other initiatives to improve governance and eliminate corruption from the daily lives of people. Transparency Maldives views corruption as a systemic issue and advocates for institutional changes that will punish and prevent corruption.



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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the Maldives has seen a decline in civic involvement among young people. In the larger political landscape, there is an increasing disillusionment in the role of the government, government officials, political appointees, and public institutions among young people. Civic education plays a critical role in encouraging the meaningful participation of young people and increasing their agency in the social and political processes.

Fostering democratic values, an understanding of the democratic processes, political and historical knowledge at an early age through civic education is crucial to sustaining a socially integrated and democratic society. The fourth issue of the Maahara Digest focuses on the decreasing civic involvement of young people and the role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in creating avenues for civic and political participation among young people.

Transparency Maldives (TM) has over the course of 15 years, conducted research on political and civic participation, developed different mediums and tools to engage young people, and worked towards systemic change in civic education. Exchanging such research findings, tools, and knowledge among peer organisations is an essential aspect of this publication.

“Civic education is programming that aims to strengthen an individual’s democratic attitudes, values, and behaviours, equipping them with the knowledge and tools to encourage active and informed participation in civic and political processes”.^[1]

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines Civic Education as “learning which enables an individual to effectively participate in democratic and developmental processes at both local and national levels”.^[2]



[1] Law, A. and Atkinson, V., 2021. Positive Youth Development: A bridge to connect civic education and sustainable development. *Journal of Youth Development*, 16(2-3), pp.363-378.

[2] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)., 2004. *Civic Education: Practical Guidance Note*: UNDP.. Available at <http://www.comminit.com/democracy-governance /content/civic-education-practicalguidance-note>.

DECREASING CIVIC INVOLVEMENT AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

The general trend in civic and political participation has been in decline over the past ten years. According to the Democracy Survey conducted by Transparency Maldives in 2015, the activities participated in or actions taken by people in order to engage in their political and civic life has decreased, especially by the younger age group. “Younger Maldivians tend to exhibit less interest in politics than older Maldivians. Among Maldivians between ages 18 and 34, only 41% express interest, compared to 57% of Maldivians between the ages of 35 and 54.”[3]

In the report published by UNDP Maldives on Youth Vulnerability in the Maldives, corruption was noted by interviewees as the biggest challenge young people face in the Maldives.[4] The Democracy Survey states that a large majority of the respondents (72%) reported that the level of corruption has increased in the country. In the Pre-Election Assessment conducted by Transparency Maldives ahead of the Presidential Elections 2023, similar sentiments were shared during the focus group discussion with young people. Some participants stated corruption, weak institutions, and nepotism as key issues faced by young people. Such prolonged shortcomings in society discourages youth and creates feelings of frustration in their political and civic participation.



[3] Transparency Maldives (TM)., 2015. A Troubled Future for Democracy: The Results of the Maldives Democracy Survey. Available at: <https://transparency.mv/files/media/b64f58f6f145339ffdcef1e74d929c80.pdf>.

[4] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)., 2019. Youth vulnerability in the Maldives: United Nations Development Programme, UNDP. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/publications/youth-vulnerability-maldives>.

CHALLENGES IN PROMOTING CIVIC EDUCATION

LACK OF SEPARATE CIVIC EDUCATION SUBJECT IN THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

A key challenge in the promotion civic education includes the lack of a separate civic education subject that is taught in schools. While components of civic education are included in the national social studies curriculum, more information is needed on the concepts of civic education as well as the role of young people in society.

“Schools don't often teach or inform students about issues in the society. Instead a leader centric and a very sheltered approach is used [and] most students are not aware of how to navigate their lives after graduation.”

Participant from Youth Camp 2023, Male' City

“(There is a) lack of support from our elders, parents and the society. They would say you are too young for this conversation”.

Participant from Youth Camp 2023, Kulhudhuffushi City

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL BARRIERS

While the lead up to the first ever multi-party elections of Maldives in 2008 saw a lot of young activists taking to the streets to raise their concerns and bring about systemic change, youth today note that the perceptions around young people in politics have been changing. During the pre-election assessment of the Presidential Elections 2023, participants noted that there is a cultural barrier to civic and political participation as generally, people believe that young people should not be involved in politics (even if the issue is directly related to them).

WHAT CAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS DO

Since the beginning of its operations in 2008, civic education has been an integral part of TM's organisational work; activities such as conducting human rights art exhibitions, youth camps, career guidance fairs, developing research, informative videos and card games. In addition to this, TM has worked with sub-grantees in creating avenues for young people to partake in more social activities in their communities as well.

DEVELOPING SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS FOR TEACHERS

As part of TM's current civic education project, which is being carried out in collaboration with National Institute for Education, TM has reviewed the current civic education curriculum in the Maldives. Although there is no separate subject for civic education, civic education related components are covered in Strand 5 - Governance and Citizenship of the Social Studies Syllabus.

TM 's project is focused on the curriculum of grades 7 & 8 (Key Stage 3). TM carried out a review of the Strand 5 - Governance and Citizenship of the Key Stage 3 to identify areas where support can be provided for teachers and students. This was followed by school visits to consult with social studies teachers in 2022.

Support and supplementary materials were developed by TM based on the findings from the curriculum review, as well as feedback received from social studies teachers and the observations. One of the issues which was identified by social studies teachers was the lack of resources for teachers related to the topics in Strand 5, especially resources which are relevant to the Maldivian context. In this regard, a teacher guide on Key Stage 3 for Social Studies teachers has been developed by TM. The main objective of the teacher guide is to provide additional resources relevant to the units in Strand 5 which can be used by teachers to incorporate into their lesson plans. The teacher guide is also complemented by additional resources for students. Teaching aids and supplementary tools can increase the effectiveness of how civic education components are taught and assist teachers to deliver the content in a creative and engaging manner.

YOUTH CAMPS

TM's Youth Camps aim to create awareness on past and current social issues in the local context, promote civic rights and greater participation of young people in decision-making and policy-making and equip young people with the knowledge of accountability tools against corruption. TM conducted Youth Camps in Th. Madifushi, L. Gan, Fuvahmulah, Kulhudhufushi, Addu and Male', focused on areas such as human rights, climate, social studies and governance in 2022. Youth Camp programs conducted by TM from 2021 - 2023 have reached 195 young people between the ages 16- 25.

The Youth Camps content vary depending on the focus area but mainly include topics such as Democracy, Decentralization, Human Rights, Corruption & Integrity and Elections as key areas. The sessions are designed to include extensive knowledge-based content and activities to thoroughly engage the participants.

Youth Camps provide an opportunity for young people to learn positive values, tackle social anxiety, improve peer relationships and change young people's attitudes towards social issues. It also creates a safe environment for young people to discuss issues and express their concerns surrounding their communities. It is important for CSOs to create such spaces when young people are feeling marginalised and feel as though their voices are not being heard at decision-making and policy-making levels.

“The best thing the camp did was reaffirm that there are still people out there that cared about what was going on. And that we all have a voice, no matter how small.”

2016 Youth Integrity Camp participant



CAREER GUIDANCE

Employability is an important factor in ensuring the civic and political participation of youth as this gives young people the time and resources to fully engage in society. While many describe the barriers to employability especially related to forms of corruption to be a huge risk to youth, tackling this issue is key to ensuring their participation at the decision-making and policy-making level.

While TM works closely with state and non-state stakeholders to tackle systemic issues that perpetuate corruption through the promotion of good governance, advocacy for institutional change, improving transparency and accountability. It is also crucial to inform and provide young people with career related information catered to the opportunities available to them.

TM has organised five Career Guidance fairs with the support of different stakeholders in the past two years to provide young people with information on further education opportunities and employment opportunities especially focused on the vocational areas.[1]

Through this program TM has reached 948 young people between the ages of 12-17 and 58 people between 18-35.

“Career guidance equips young people with the knowledge, skills, and confidence they need to navigate life after school successfully. It provides a solid foundation for making informed decisions, setting, and achieving goals, and adapting to the challenges and opportunities they will encounter as they transition into adulthood and the world of work. It sets them on a path towards personal and professional growth, while also benefiting society as a whole by creating a more skilled and engaged workforce ”

Aishath Azdha [Co-organiser of Career Fair in Fuvahmulah City]



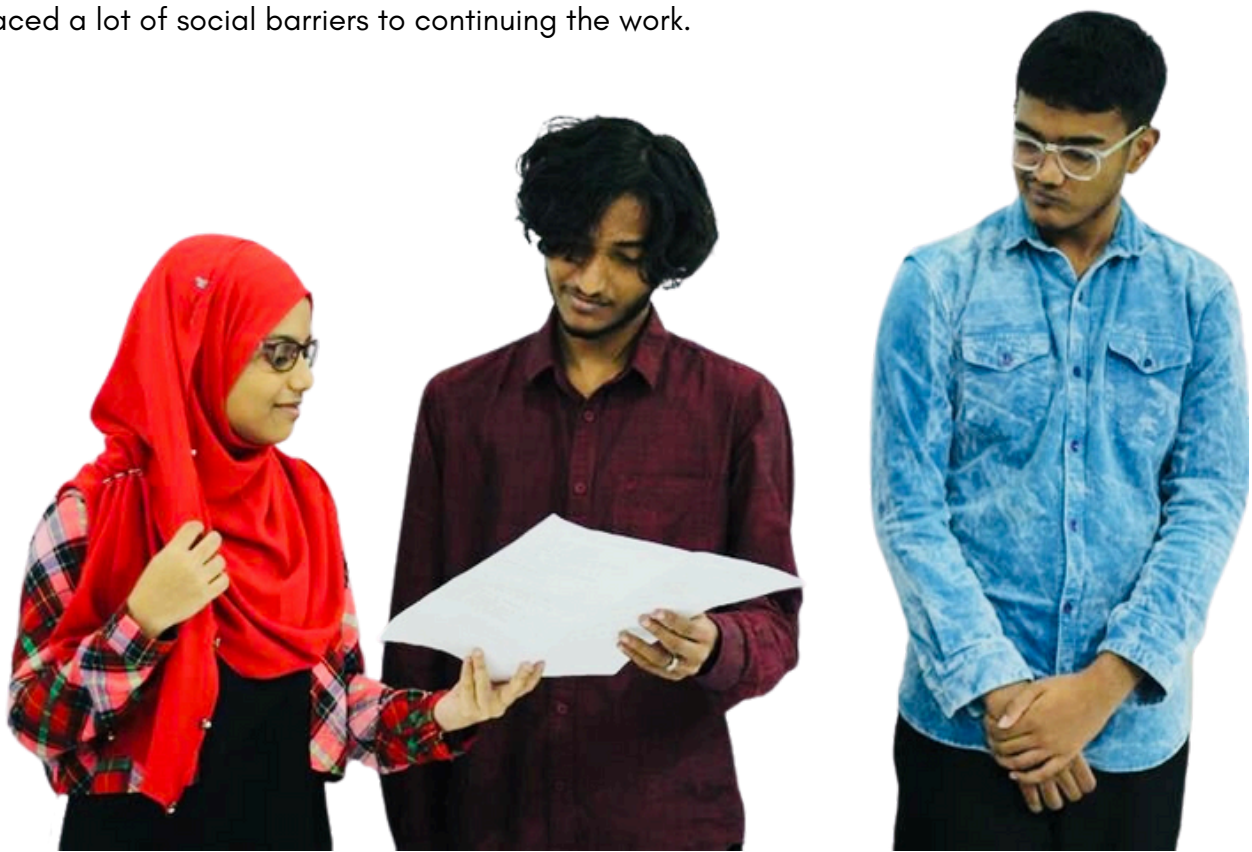
EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY TOOLS

CSOs can play an important role in disseminating information and creating a safe and reliable environment for young people. As corruption, social and cultural norms are key barriers for young people to meaningfully engage in society, CSOs can equip young people with the knowledge of social accountability tools to empower them to tackle these barriers.

Apart from Youth Camps, TM has also held numerous workshops and trainings on social accountability and tools to address challenges to holding people in power to account.

One of the key accountability tools TM promotes among young people is the use of the Right to Information Act (RTI Act). While a lot of the younger population is aware of the RTI Act, the information on how to use the tool and how to hold people to account is lacking. Through workshops and trainings, TM has extensively trained individuals on how to use the RTI Act, framing the request and the processes of the RTI Act. Additionally, TM emphasises greatly on the use of petitions, advocacy campaigns and its successes in holding people in power to account throughout these workshops. Such tools allow young people to engage in social accountability, be heard and work towards addressing their concerns in the community, becoming engaged and empowered civic actors.

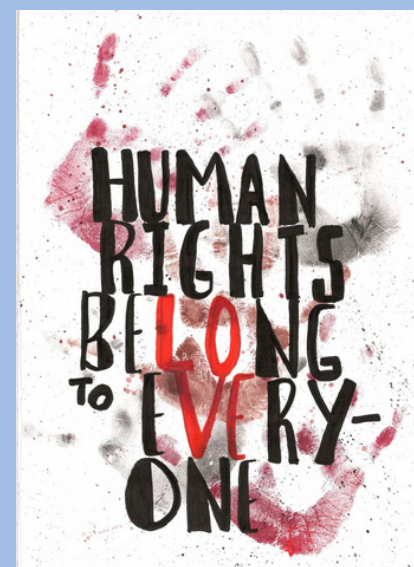
On one occasion, young people we engaged through the work, used RTI and held an RTI drive within their community, meeting people within the community and listening to their concerns, they submitted multiple requests regarding their own concerns and concerns from the people of the community. On another occasion, young people developed a petition to raise their concerns and while they reached a total 51 signatures among their peers, they faced a lot of social barriers to continuing the work.



ART COMPETITION

Art is an important medium through which young people can express their concerns and demands for the future. By organising a Human Rights Art Competition for students from grade 7 & 8, we aimed to create an avenue for the students to express their feelings, concerns and opinions on social issues related to them

The activity also helped to inform the supplementary materials developed in the civic education curriculum review by Transparency Maldives and helped build connections between human rights clubs at schools with the Human Rights Commission of Maldives and their work.



CHALLENGES IN PROMOTING CIVIC EDUCATION

DEVELOPING INTERACTIVE GAMES

Game-based learning can help young people build a foundation for understanding complex content and is a great tool for teaching civics.[5] TM developed a civic education card game, aimed at increasing the interest of young people in governance related issues. The card game focuses on the themes of good governance, the system of governance in the Maldives, civic duties and participation, among others. There is a need for mediums for facilitating discussions related to issues of governance or civic participation among young people in the Maldives, as the spaces for these discussions are usually limited in school settings since civic education is not comprehensively covered through the school curriculum. This civic education card game aims to engage young people in these discussions, and to create an avenue for them to talk about the problems in their community and the broader governance system in the Maldives.



[5] Blanchet, M. (2023) Game-based learning in Civics, Edutopia. Available at: <https://www.edutopia.org/article/using-game-based-learning-civics>.

DEVELOPING CIVIC EDUCATION VIDEOS

Two civic education related videos – one on youth participation and one on the governance system in the Maldives – were developed by TM. The videos aim to help students understand the concept of citizenry and question what it means to be a citizen. Through these videos TM also hopes to encourage students to think about decisions concerning their communities, how it affects them and the ways they can positively and constructively contribute to these decisions.



Civic participation is important. It is the most essential consideration for education. While the above list is not exhaustive, these are all mediums that tie together to foster civic and political participation of young people, empowering their voices at decision-making and policy-making in the community. While the Government needs to step-up and assume their role in civic and political participation, CSOs must effectively play their role in facilitating these learning programs as well.



