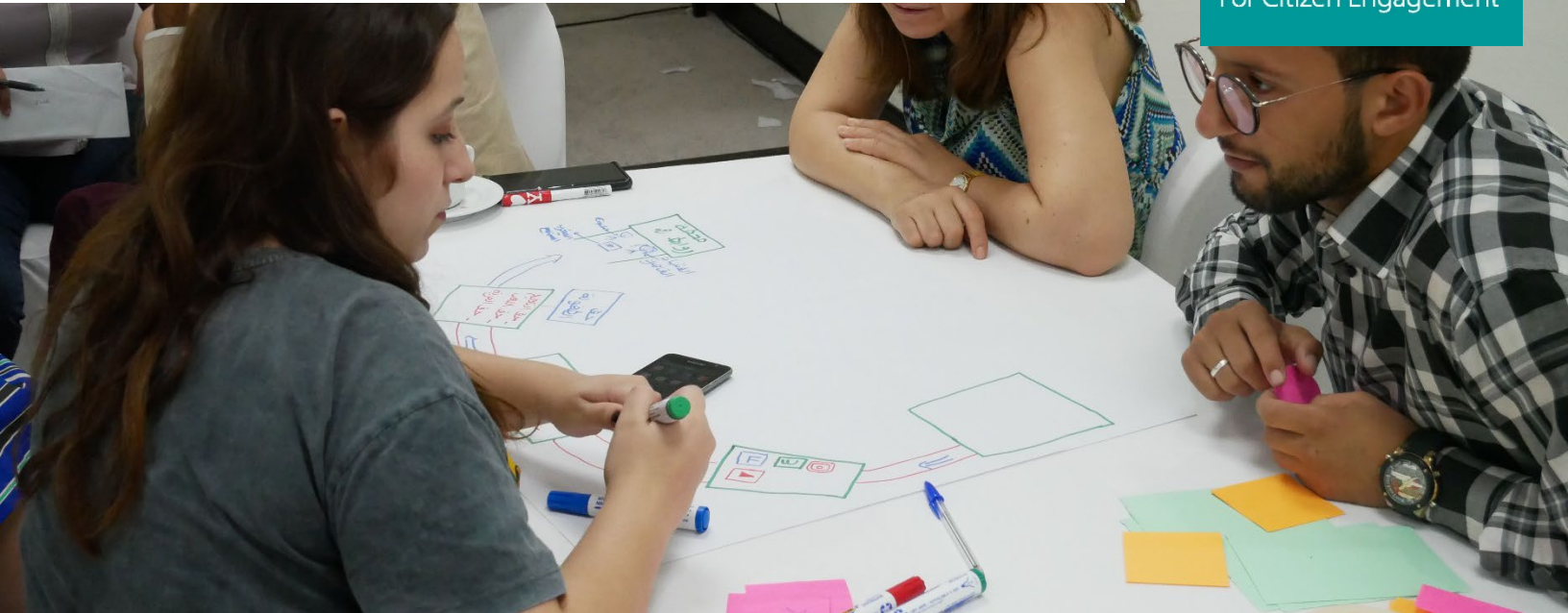


CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT



What is Participation ?

Participation is a fundamental right recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The concept of participation is implicit in Article 3 (Right to life, freedom, personal security), Article 18 (Right of belief and religion), Article 20 (Right to peaceful assembly and association), Article 21 (Right to participate in public affairs and elections), and article 27 (Right to participate in a community's cultural life). The right to participation is guaranteed in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 25). It is also implicit in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; Articles 8 (on freedom of association), 13 (on education), and 15 (on cultural life).

What is Civic Participation and Engagement ?

Civic participation and engagement involves individuals, groups and/or community organizations willing to take part in social, economic and political life in a meaningful way in order to address issues of common concern. Civic participation can take many forms, including: volunteering in the community, active membership in a group or association, expressing one's views and opinions at public forums and consultations, voting in referendums and elections, as well as celebrating cultural and religious holidays with community members, and advocating for gender equality.

Civic participation entails a sense of personal responsibility to do one's part as a member of a community or country by incorporating human rights values such as cooperation, respect, inclusion, fairness, acceptance, respect for diversity and responsibility into one's everyday actions and interactions with others. The political, economic and social situation of a country or community impact how and to what extent people participate.

Civic participation may be initiated by the community, by individual members of the community, or by local or national authorities. What is important is that there is shared decision-making at the different levels of society, which includes people at grassroots, civil society organizations, government officials, private corporations, professional associations and others.

How can Civic Participation and Engagement lead to Social Change?

The changes you want to see start with each individual. **The way we interact, react and work together influences our perceptions and the types of actions we undertake. Reinforcing positive human rights values is an important step in thinking about social interactions and changes.**

Civic participation and engagement are powerful actions that can lead to significant social change. **The activities you undertake with your target group should aim at building necessary skills for effective and informed action.** These skills include: critical thinking, analysis of community issues and problem solving, conflict resolution, and networking. **Each individual involved in the process becomes a more engaged citizen and ultimately an agent of change.**

Types of actions that can lead to change include: awareness raising, advocacy actions directed at local and national government and law-makers, research and monitoring, report writing and dissemination of information, including through Internet and social media. **Every action is important in favouring the promotion and protection of human rights.**

Keep in mind that **you are part of a broader movement and that your actions are related to actions undertaken by other individuals, groups, and organizations.** Also remember that **social change takes time.** The active participation of you and your group will contribute to building a better society in which human rights are promoted and respected by the authorities and by citizens alike.

How can we promote the Participation of Women ?

Women have a strong willingness to participate in public life, become more engaged in their communities and address issues that affect them. Women often face challenges and obstacles when they want to get involved in their community. Here are a few tips to consider for facilitating women's participation and their continued involvement:

- Make sure you create a welcoming and safe environment for women to have access to and be able to fully participate in activities or youth human rights projects. For example, ensure dates and times selected for activities do not conflict with women's other responsibilities and commitments.
- Select issues with your group of women that are of interest to them.
- Enable the empowerment of women by providing opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge through program activities.
- Respect your group's privacy, be discreet and respect confidential information.
- Be prepared to provide references to your group of additional resources to help them deal with issues related to physical and psychological health and issues related to personal finances.
- Be conscious of the fact that most women have a lot of personal responsibilities, time is often an issue. Be flexible in your schedule and accommodate women who cannot participate in each session.
- Maintain an open and respectful atmosphere, fostering inclusion and respect for differences.
- Recognize your group's accomplishments.

For more details on gender equality, see [Reference Sheet – Gender Equality](#)

How can we promote the Participation of Marginalized Groups ?

A number of people from marginalized groups might be part of initiatives you undertake, or you might want to involve them in the initiatives. Some groups to take into consideration include: people living with disabilities, religious, ethnic and linguistic minorities, refugees, and migrant workers. Reach out to different groups of marginalized people and try to facilitate their involvement in your action. Here are some tips that might help you when trying to reach out to marginalized groups or when you implement an initiative that includes people from different groups:

- Invite people from a diversity of backgrounds to participate in your group's actions. Invite them through informal channels and reach out to people in different communities.
- Keep dates of religious and cultural celebrations in mind when planning activities.
- Hold your meetings in locations close to the community you are trying to reach.
- Make sure you create a welcoming and safe environment for your group to participate in activities or youth human rights projects.
- Respect your group's privacy, be discreet and respect confidential information.
- Acknowledge the discrimination group members and their community may face and enable the empowerment of your group to take action by strengthening their skills and knowledge.
- Maintain an open and respectful atmosphere, fostering inclusion and respect for differences.
- Recognize your group's accomplishments.

How can we promote Civic Participation of Youth ?

Youth have a lot of ideas, but often lack the space and resources to present them and put them into action. Therefore, it is important to involve them at different levels of the decision-making process. Here are a few tips to consider for facilitating youth participation and encouraging their continued involvement:

- Select issues to be addressed collaboratively with the youth you are working with. It is important that issues raised are ones that directly affect youth and spark their interest. Subjects of interest to youth might include: democracy, equality, social justice, environmental protection, community development, social media, etc.
- Encourage youth groups to launch their own initiatives with support from your organization.
- Provide safe spaces for discussions, debates, critiques, where youth feel comfortable stating their opinions and speaking freely.
- Provide youth the opportunity to enhance knowledge and skills through training and practice. Coach youth and support them in their endeavors.
- Use social media throughout the process.
- Make sure there is an opportunity for concrete actions, not just discussion.
- Have confidence in youth and see them as the driving force of the action.
- Respect your group's privacy, be discreet and respect confidential information.
- Recognize the accomplishments of youth.

For more information see [Youth Participation in Community Life](#)

How does the Rawabet Initiative help promote Civic Participation and Engagement ?

The Rawabet's educational approach builds on the experience of the target groups and is intended to engage them in a process where they will realize that they have not only the right to participate in their community, but also the responsibility to do so. Individuals and groups are empowered with knowledge and skills to take action to claim and defend their own human rights and the rights of others. The goal is that the target groups will become more committed and active citizens as well as agents of change (not mere recipients). The Rawabet's online educational platform provides learning tools and modules to help individuals and groups to work together to bring about the changes they want to see in their communities. The increased and more widespread availability of Internet-based resources, such as "Rawabet Resources", offers effective and flexible means to hear the voices of local community initiatives, to connect people with common goals, and to disseminate tools that expand community action.