

# Human Rights Education in Schools in Azerbaijan

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Since its reestablishment in 30 August 1991, independent Republic of Azerbaijan has been undergoing political, economic, and social reform and shifted from a command to a market economy. Azerbaijan lies between Russia and Iran, and is populated mainly by Azeris, who are mainly Muslims. The country is part of the Caucasus region, which borders between Europe and Asia. A number of human rights education projects have been supported by several organizations since late 90s.

## Open Society Institute–Assistance Foundation

The Open Society Institute–Assistance Foundation Azerbaijan (OSI-AF/Azerbaijan) was established in 1997 as a nongovernmental, non-profit organization to develop and promote the concept of an open society.

An open society is

based on the recognition that people act on imperfect knowledge and that no one is in possession of the ultimate truth. In practice, an open society is characterized by the rule of law; respect for human rights, minorities, and minority opinions; the division of power; and a market economy. A closed society expends most of its energies in preserving the existing order, whereas an open society takes law and respect for rights of others as a starting point and creates progress and prosperity from that base. Broadly speaking, open society is a way to describe the positive aspects of democracy. The term “open society” was popularized by the philosopher Karl Popper in his 1945 book *Open Society and Its Enemies*.<sup>1</sup>

From 1997, when OSI-AF/Azerbaijan was formed, to 1999, the country saw the incredible expansion in the promotion of an open society. During its first year, OSI-AF/Azerbaijan established programs to promote an open society by making information widely available through libraries, the Internet, and a variety of education initiatives. OSI-AF/Azerbaijan implements several major programs on free flow of information, education, and civil society development.

With the foundation’s support, more than 100 people attended international conferences, seminars, and short-term study programs; thousands of Azeri-language children’s books in the Latin script were produced; and new legislation strengthening the nongovernmental sector was drafted. A national information network for independent media was created, and operational support was established for an education information center in Baku.

OSI-AF/Azerbaijan developed a program of activity based on a needs assessment and visits from experts at the Education Support Unit and the Higher Education Support Program (HESP).

HESP promotes higher education in the humanities and social sciences through support to institutions and regional and international initiatives. HESP provides financial and technical assistance to a network of institutions within the region, from undergraduate universities and colleges to doctoral programs and advanced studies centers. HESP institutional support is structured to help institutions develop curriculum and faculty and improve teaching and learning methods. Through carefully structured support and the creation of a network of institutions, HESP is furthering reform efforts within higher education throughout the region.

HESP assists faculty development through intensive summer schools for junior university faculty from Central and Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and Mongolia. The program promotes continuing education, encourages new methods of teaching, and provides a forum for exchange of ideas on course development and research methods. The program aims to facilitate interaction among global and regional academic communities.

Efforts focused on beginning a national dialogue on education reform with a core group of individuals and organizations that would serve as partners, trainers, and consultants for OSI-AF/Azerbaijan education programs.

OSI-AF/Azerbaijan's first year of operation was spent learning about the realities and possibilities of work in the country and laying the framework for future activities. 1998 was a year of challenges. Setbacks in Caspian Sea oil exploration efforts and fluctuations in world oil prices revealed Azerbaijan's economic vulnerability, as did the economic crisis in Russia. The unresolved conflict in Karabakh and the long-term refugee population exerted economic, social, and political pressures on society. Finally, the continuing influence of centralized control hampered the emergence of a competent and active nongovernmental organization (NGO) sector.

OSI-AF/Azerbaijan's Executive Board, established in May 1998, developed a series of

programs dedicated to fostering an educated and independent-minded citizenry with the skills to analyze their environment, and the energy and optimism to try to improve it. OSI-AF/Azerbaijan did this by focusing its efforts in information and education.

To speed the free flow of information, and promote an active and well-informed citizenry, OSI-AF/Azerbaijan established an Internet center that has offered more than 25,000 hours of public access and training since opening in early 1998.

In 1999, the Internet center provided more than 37,000 hours of training to nearly 4,000 users. OSI-AF/Azerbaijan and the United States Information Agency (USIA) both operate public-access Internet training centers and have co-funded the development of an academic network in Baku and in the provinces. The Baku network now includes Azerbaijan's major universities and institutes, as well as the national library.

The foundation is cooperating with USIA to establish an academic Internet consortium by sharing the high cost of international connectivity and providing access to institutions that otherwise could not afford it. A major boost to these efforts came from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Science Program, which awarded a grant in the fall of 1999 to co-fund connectivity for the OSI/USIA network.

Two other programs working to reduce Azerbaijan's information vacuum are the Baku Education Information Center (BEIC) and the library program. Partly sponsored by USIA, BEIC provides 1,500 visitors per month with information on scholarship programs, grant competitions, and English-language materials. In the same space, donated by the Baku Music Academy, OSI-AF/Azerbaijan has established an arts information center, which allows Azeri artists and students to learn more about the international art world. The library program has focused on training, automation management, and English. Small grants to several key libraries have laid the framework for a national

electronic cataloguing system. Much more training is necessary, but real progress was made in 1999.

During the presidential elections in October 1998, OSI-AF/Azerbaijan worked to educate voters and assist in election monitoring, and gave a grant to For Civil Society, an NGO that worked to enhance communication and monitoring of the election.

To provide information and other assistance to some of Azerbaijan's 600,000 internally displaced persons, OSI-AF/Azerbaijan began a pilot project in 1998 to develop small libraries in 14 refugee camps. Several humanitarian organizations helped provide library space and transportation for this project.

A second group of programs focused on education to provide a new generation of open-minded young people with the skills to think and make decisions independently. The programs included Step by Step, Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking (RWCT), and the OSI-AF/Azerbaijan economic summer school at Khazar University. OSI-AF/Azerbaijan also established a scholarship program at Baku State University to help the needs of students among the rural, refugee, and internally displaced populations.

Step by Step is part of an early childhood education reform. Over the past 5 years, a team of Azerbaijani education experts, with the support of the OSI and the International Step by Step Association (an NGO established in the Netherlands), has implemented this project in nearly 250 classrooms in 53 kindergartens and 37 primary schools. The project provides ongoing training and technical assistance, teacher manuals, and small educational materials. The project has piloted innovative approaches to involve parents and the community in preschools and schools and to include children with disabilities in mainstream classes. The project has also been working with faculty members from nine preservice and two in-service training institutions to reform teacher training systems.

OSI's Step by Step Program is developing the capacity of a team of national experts. With support from international experts, this Azerbaijani team is engaged in the following:

- training educators and administrators from kindergartens and primary schools;
- introducing new course content and interactive teaching methods in institutions that train teachers;
- establishing national associations for parents, teachers, and faculty; and
- cooperating with educational ministries and other government agencies on educational policies and curriculum development.

Step by Step Azerbaijan's child-centered philosophy is supported by a variety of written materials, which are adapted to local conditions by early childhood professionals in participating countries. The program encourages children to make choices, take responsibility for their decisions, express their ideas creatively, help one another, develop critical thinking skills, and practice independent thinking. The Step by Step Primary Program in Azerbaijan promotes cooperative learning, integrated teaching based on themes, and development of communication and critical thinking skills. The teacher learns to share responsibility for learning with the children in a caring environment. Written materials, teacher training courses, and training manuals support developmentally appropriate methods for teaching literacy, mathematics, visual arts, science, and social studies in classrooms where democracy is practiced and families actively involved.

OSI-AF/Azerbaijan has another project in cooperation with the International Reading Association (IRA) to develop and pilot new curriculum and training methods for grades 5–11. IRA is a professional development organization with experience in teacher training and curriculum development. IRA was founded in 1956 and has been cooperating with OSI since 1997 to develop teaching methods to promote critical thinking and independent learning. The IRA

program, known as the RWCT, has been used successfully in 20 countries in Eastern and Central Europe, Central Asia, and Russia, including Azerbaijan. The program is not a curriculum but a set of strategies organized into a three-step process.

The evocation stage is a preliminary step to motivate students and tap into their prior knowledge. In the second stage, realization of meaning, children learn new information through reading for understanding, observing, experimentation, discussion, and other active learning strategies. In the final stage, reflection, children use the new information to solve a problem, create new information, and write about substantive issues.

Teachers learn these new skills from experienced teachers and university faculty who conduct workshops and seminars modeling the strategies to be introduced to teachers. The project is supported by eight teacher guidebooks, introduced to teachers through four workshops. Between workshops, teachers apply their growing repertoire of new skills and strategies in their own classrooms, with visits, observations, and any additional assistance required from their trainers, and meet with their colleagues periodically to discuss successes, concerns, and ideas to adapt the program.

RWCT strategies are used in following language and literature (Azeri, Russian, English, and other foreign languages); natural and physical sciences; mathematics; history and social sciences, and other academic areas of the secondary school curriculum. RWCT trains teachers to apply RWCT principles and strategies and to train other teachers.

OSI-AF/Azerbaijan begin implementing RWCT in September 1999. A leadership team was developed and participants recruited from secondary schools and higher education as potential teacher trainers. The 30 participants enrolled in the program represent virtually all subject areas. These participants attended workshops led by technical experts representing IRA: each of the four teacher trainers assigned to

Azerbaijan is an experienced leader and teacher reform expert and has worked elsewhere in the region. Each also has experience in teacher training and curriculum development, and published in both areas.

RWCT guidebooks and additional resources are available in Azeri and English. *The Thinking Classroom*, an international journal in English and Azeri, is a teacher resource, which will be available as a source of information and a forum on critical thinking and higher-order cognitive behaviors in 20 former Newly-independent States (NIS) countries where RWCT operates, including Azerbaijan. RWCT has also established high-level standards to assess and certify teachers, using portfolios, rubrics, and classroom observations. These standards are suitable for project assessment of the outcomes of preservice or in-service teacher training. RWCT has also prepared student standards and rubrics to assess active learning and critical thinking, which reflect stages of student behavior.

On the basis of its experience in preschool and elementary education through Step by Step and RWCT, OSI-AF/Azerbaijan was invited to submit a proposal to the World Bank for a 2-year technical assistance program for teacher training and curriculum development. At the high school and university level, other education programs focused on debate, history textbook development, curriculum reform, and teacher training.

In 1998, OSI-AF/Azerbaijan gave the Child Rights Protection League US\$5,000. The project included training sessions based on practical guide to the Convention on the Rights of the Child—*It's Only Right!* written by Susan Fountain. Teachers of 40 secondary schools participated in these training sessions over 3 months.

Civil society development is the third main program area for OSI-AF/Azerbaijan. The main focus in 1999 was on law: legal education, access to justice, and legal information. Khazar University opened Azerbaijan's first university law clinic in the fall. A grant to Azer-

baijan's Democracy Development Foundation funded a legal aid center providing legal advice for NGOs. In cooperation with the Initiative for Social Action and Renewal in Eurasia and many local NGO leaders, a series of NGO information and legal advice bulletins were published as inserts in two major Azeri- and Russian-language newspapers.

Due to the small number of NGOs in Azerbaijan, OSI-AF/Azerbaijan has worked in several areas to encourage creation and development of NGOs that will promote an open society. In 1999, OSI-AF/Azerbaijan helped create a history teachers' association, Azerbaijan Library Development Association, and Junior Achievement Azerbaijan. OSI-AF/Azerbaijan also provided training and small grants to public health and education NGOs. These efforts continued in 2000, focusing on establishing an academic Internet consortium, a national debate NGO, the Azerbaijan Reading Association, and an early childhood education NGO.

### Citizenship Education Program

The program aims to make human rights education a priority in the region's schools. It has the following objectives:

- Develop human rights education teaching materials.
- Increase knowledge and skills on human rights among school children and teachers.
- Distribute materials to school libraries and education regional departments.
- Promote the involvement of human rights NGOs in school educational activities.
- Incorporate these materials in the curricula of in-service and preservice teacher training institutes.

The program focuses on developing educational materials on human rights and increasing knowledge and skills not only of teachers but also of the education administration (school principals, school inspectors, etc.). An OSI-AF/Azerbaijan grant enabled teachers to attend a

workshop in Moscow on human rights in schools so they could train other teachers and participate in OSI's program in Azerbaijan. Activities in 1998 and 1999 included the development and printing of human rights education materials, several 3-day seminars for teachers, and workshops for educational authorities, as well as many training-the-trainer classes.

OSI-AF/Azerbaijan is working to get Ministry of Education approval of the citizenship education syllabus and textbooks, and to develop civic education standards for Azerbaijan.

With its partner organizations, OSI and The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), OSI-AF/Azerbaijan created a working group on human rights education, which included local NGO representatives with human rights education experience.

Several projects to support the civic education program have been developed.

### Human rights education project

In partnership with NRC, a human rights education project was started in 1998. It is part of the civic education program of OSI-AF/Azerbaijan. Human rights is considered part of civic education. This program is conducted in the framework of United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995–2004).

The project aims to encourage democratic changes by familiarizing the young generation with the *human rights culture*. This aim is attained through

- development of relevant literature for teachers and children; and
- training for teachers to familiarize them with basic concepts of human rights, interactive methodology, and teaching human rights in class.

Since the transformation of any culture takes a long time, the course on human rights is taught at the primary, secondary, and high school levels. The teacher does not only give knowledge but also transfers skills and, most impor-

tantly, transfers values of human rights. This is only possible under democratic conditions, which are created through interactive lessons.

The project uses several materials such as the following:

- *Resource Book for Teachers*, (a general outline of the concept of human rights education) developed by Scandinavian authors, and later adapted to the Azeri situation and translated into the Azeri language by the League for Children's Rights Defense with NRC support;
- *Human Rights Education Resource Book for Primary School Teachers*, developed by NRC trainers; and
- *This is Me*, a textbook for primary school.

Materials developed by Center of Civic Education (NUR) trainers are also used.

A human rights education resource book for high school teachers is being developed as well as a teachers' manual, which will comprise various methodological guidelines on training in human rights in primary school. High school human rights textbooks are also being prepared. A book (*Civic Education Manual*) for the 8th grade, for students, teachers, and parents, written by Georgian authors as part of the NRC program in Georgia, is to be adapted and translated. *Children's Book*, on human rights and children's rights, for grades 1–4 is also being prepared.

A booklet containing general information about the NRC human rights education program is to be produced to familiarize parents with their children's new subject.

NRC has implemented the human rights education program in three countries of the Caucasus since 1996. In Azerbaijan, 49 training sessions have been conducted in Baku and in 14 other regions. About 1,000 teachers participated in these trainings.

Trainings are held with the consent of the Ministry of Education. Regional education departments help organize the trainings. Each training is calculated for 12–16 hours (depend-

ing on the group involved). In the city, it is conducted 2 hours per week for 1.5–2 months; in the regions, for 3 days. Trainings are conducted by teachers who passed special NRC trainings for trainers.

The main target groups for the human rights education program for 2000–2001 are teachers and teacher trainers, but headmasters, regional education officials, and decision makers are important to ensure that sufficient concern is given to the subject. The ultimate target groups are students. Parents are also regarded as an important target group for information sharing to secure their understanding and cooperation in program implementation.

In 2000–2001, it was planned to shift the focus from ordinary schools in Baku to the internally displaced person schools where NRC public building rehabilitation project sites are located. Human rights education trainings should also take place in the regions where other NRC programs have been or are being implemented. The Teachers' In-service Training Institute is one of the most important locations for human rights education trainings for 2003.

In 2000–2001, the program aimed at the following:

- Develop training materials and methodology. The methodology shall be based on active involvement and interaction between teacher and student, school and community. The passive lecture format will be kept to a minimum. Instead, the methodology will be based on engagement in a variety of active methods: small group projects, one-to-one discussions, and active learning situations where teachers, like their pupils, are out of their chairs and physically involved in problem solving and self-expression. At one point or another, every participant should play a leadership role, perhaps teaching a model lesson, demonstrating how human rights concepts might be introduced into a particular subject, or analyzing a conflict of rights at school and how it might be resolved.

- Develop valid and reliable evaluation tools to assess the outcomes of the human rights education program.
- Incorporate into the human rights education program elements of similar or overlapping areas: development education, multicultural/intercultural education, peace education, and education for international understanding.
- Integrate elements of human rights education into other NRC programs and, by doing so, design a more comprehensive work approach.

Aside from the NRC-supported training activities, several trainings are held with the support of the Save the Children Fund.

#### Regional centers

For sustainable development of the human rights education program in the regions, a network of training and resource centers on human rights education was established. Five centers in Baku, Ganja, Goychay, Agcabedi, and Fizuli operated until the end of the year and received books on human rights. The program could also use these centers to implement OSI's Step by Step program. NRC acted as an agent to rehabilitate nine regional centers—two in Baku and one each in Guba, Shamakhi, Mingachevir, Sumgait, Nakchivan, Sheki, and Lenkoran.

#### Center of Civic Education (NUR)

NUR is an NGO established in August 2000. Its staff consists of the first batch of trainees on civic education sponsored by the Polish Foundation for Education for Democracy with assistance from OSI-AF/Azerbaijan.

NUR's mission is to help establish and develop civil society through education in all regions.

NUR has the following objectives:

- Prepare students to live in a market economy and democratic society.

- Develop a strategy and programs to teach civic education and human rights.
- Train and retrain secondary school teachers under the framework of the Development of Civic Education in Azerbaijan Program.
- Develop partnerships between Azeri society and the democratic societies of developed countries.

NUR supports the teaching of civics and democracy by developing a civic education syllabus with schools from Baku, Sumgayit, Ganja, and Lenkeran. Six teachers participated at the Democracy Education Exchange Program, an American Forum initiative to teach democracy with the support of the United States Department of Education.

NUR trainers are members of the International Trainers Network Education for Democracy—International Network, founded in September 2002.

NUR trainer teams have run 27 seminars in Baku, Ganja, Sheki, Sumgayit, Lenkoran, and Mingachevir with the support of OSI-AF/Azerbaijan and under the program "Methods of Teaching Democracy in Schools" of the Polish Foundation for Education for Democracy. Seven hundred teachers were covered by these seminars.

Under the project to develop a civic education course in Azeri schools, NUR trainers developed a module for a civic education course for grades 5–6 of secondary schools. Lesson plans on civic education were also developed and included in a manual, *Civic Education at Schools*, which was developed by NGO trainers with the support of OSI-AF/Azerbaijan. The manual aims to familiarize school teachers with the concept of civic education, as well as interactive methods of teaching, evaluation of the courses, and model lessons on civic education with recommended teaching methods.

A program on civic education was tested for the first time in Azerbaijan in a seminar. Then in July-August 2002, the program was pilot-

tested in eight schools in Baku, Ganja, and Lenkoran. Nine training seminars were held for selected teachers. NUR trainers trained in several related programs such as Student Self-Government and Parents' Councils, which will be implemented and developed in schools.

NUR trainers have participated in the following international seminars: Women—Leaders in the Caucasus seminars on methods of teaching democracy in schools (Georgia, July 2001); Central Asia: Civic Bridges (Tashkent, March 2002); XI International Session on Human Rights, Culture of Peace and Democracy (presentation on teaching democracy in schools) (Moscow, December 2001); International Conference on Civic Education (Rostov, May 1999); International Conference on Multicultural Components in Education (Almaty, May 2000); and International Seminar on Parents' Councils (Crimea, December 2001).

One trainer was invited to the internship in the US, organized by the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe (IDEE) under Women—Leaders in the Caucasus. The head of NUR had internship in Poland, organized by the Federation for Education for Democracy (FED) to become familiar with the system of education, how Poland is developing various programs for civic education, and how NGOs and governmental bodies are involved in education.

Since 2000, one trainer has been participating in the Ministry of Education's project with Montana State University to develop curriculum and prepare textbooks on people and society for grade 10.

### Next Tasks

The OSI Civic Education Project for the period 1999–2003 was evaluated through a Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats (SWOT) exercise in 2003. The exercise helped in identifying ways of improving the programs and activities being undertaken. Below are the strengths and weaknesses that have been identified:

<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weakness</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiative group of Civic Education teachers established</li> <li>• Partnership with US NGO Forum established</li> <li>• Introduction of Extra-curriculum course on Civic Education</li> <li>• Publication of Civic Education teaching materials in Azeri language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absence of registration of the group with the government to gain legal personality</li> <li>• Lack of organizational experience among teachers group</li> <li>• Absence of Civic Education policy vision at ministerial level</li> <li>• Weak coordination among stakeholders and donors</li> <li>• Undeveloped concept of Civic Education</li> <li>• Terminological confusion of innovative teaching methodology and Civic Education content teaching</li> </ul>

A more detailed report on the evaluation of the civic education program is in Annex.

Considering the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the development of human rights/civic education programs in Azerbaijan, the following strategies need to be adopted:

- coalition building among international and national civic education organizations,
- introduction of civics as subject into the secondary education curriculum towards its future curricular institutionalization, and
- promotion of civil-society values through online project development among educational institutions.

As these strategies indicate, human rights education programs in Azerbaijan are still in the developing stage. Much work remains to be done over a long period of time. But with the partnerships developed among institutions within and outside the country, these tasks are not insurmountable.

### Endnote

1. Statement of Mr. Rauf Talyshinsky, OSI National Board Chairperson, summer of 1998.

## ANNEX

### Assessment of Civic Education in the Azerbaijan Republic

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments encourage more focus on civic and democratic education and require states to include human rights, democracy, and law issues in their national strategic education plans.
- Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) disseminate civic education in the country through various activities.
- The Ministry of Education realizes that civic education is important in the democratization of education, which serves as a solid foundation for the overall development in schooling.
- The first trend in curriculum change includes subjects that promote civic education and enjoys a wide range of content possibilities (Constitution, people and society, economic framework). These content areas have to be revised as they are more focused on theory and philosophy, and not appreciated by the students. These areas should be improved through the use of interactive teaching methods and practical activities that promote democracy and authentic learning.
- The second trend in curriculum change is the adoption of the so-called “courses on issues of current interest,” the teaching hours allocated for which can be used for civics classes.

#### Challenges

- Are school graduates able to protect their rights or aware of them at least? Are school graduates familiar with the economy and business? Are they cognizant of legal documents? Can they freely express their ideas? How do they see their active civic involvement?
- In one research, 25 urban and 25 rural students were asked the following questions: What is a business activity? How many types are there? How would you start your business activity? The Constitution guarantees the right to social protection (benefits) under Article 38. What do you think people should do to enjoy this right? What is a social environment? What type of social environment would you like to live in and how do you characterize the existing one?
- 20 urban and 22 rural students failed to completely answer the questions. However, they were familiar with the issues involved although they did not know how to act on them. The educational process should teach not only learning theories but also how to translate them into practice.

- In another study, nearly 95% of the students said they had experienced a passive learning process, i.e., passive listening and questions and answers. Interactive methods are not widely used by teachers.
- Promotion of legal and human rights education is weak. People, in general, do not know the laws or legal norms, not even, for instance, the rules on the use of electricity and gas, how to require a contract from an employer, whether to demand a receipt for some service or not, etc.
- There is no connection between school learning and reality. Laws and rights are grossly violated by public officers.

#### NGOs Promoting Civic Education in Azerbaijan

- Open Society Institute (OSI) is the leading donor in this field. It has run a series of workshops for teachers and established a local NGO named NUR (Light) that promotes civic education throughout the country.
- Five scholars attended the civics course offered by the Montana State University under joint project with Ministry of Education. Now they work on developing teaching materials and textbooks for grades 9 and 10.

#### Publications

- Publications produced were *Young Citizen's Passport*, *Electoral Involvement of the Azeri Youth*, *Democracy and Mass Media*, and *Basics of the Constitution*.
- These are of great importance to teachers willing to use active learning methods and teach democracy.

#### Open Society Institute–Assistance Foundation (OSI-AF)/ Azerbaijan's Program— Role and Recommendations

- OSI-AF/Azerbaijan's program has focused more on teacher training and material development. At the same time, the working group that it formed has run some activities for school administrators and students. These activities have been publicized via newspapers, radio, and television broadcast.
- Teachers should use interactive teaching methods in their classes more frequently; pilot schools and their teachers spend more time on understanding civic education, laws, and rights not only in civics classes but in other subjects, as well.

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- Civics should be taught in civic education, other social sciences and humanities subjects, and elective courses.
- The concept and standards of civic education in Azerbaijan should be developed. New social-economic, political-social, and moral-cultural values and conditions should be considered in developing the concept and standards.
- A coordination unit should be established to organize all efforts relating to civic education under one umbrella.