



Amanda Kalumba, a teenager (second left in backrow) held a charity concert to help children at Esezza Foundation. PHOTO/ PROMSE TWINAMUKYE.

# How parents can raise citizens not just children

**Civically-conscious children.** It begins with a broom, a question, and a parent who stops to explain. In villages and living rooms across Africa, civic duty is born when parents teach children that loving your country is not loud talk or politics. It is care, courage and the willingness to act for the common good.

BY MICHAEL AGABA

In the small village of Kisoro, the old mango tree stood at the heart of the market square. Everyone passed it, but few truly saw it anymore, its roots gnarled, its bark carved with fading initials of long-forgotten promises.

One hot afternoon, 12-year-old Buchanayandi walked beside his father, Kwizera, as they watched men dumping rubbish near the tree. The air smelled of smoke and decay.

"Why do they keep doing that?" Buchanayandi frowned.

"It makes the whole village ugly."

Kwizera stopped and looked at his son.

"Because they have forgotten that this place belongs to all of us," he replied.

"When people forget that, they stop caring."

The next morning, Kwizera (who doubled as the LC1 chairman of the same village) gave Buchanayandi a broom, a

sack, and a shy smile.

"Let us remind them."

Together, they swept away the litter around the tree. Curious children joined. Then the nearby mineral water depot offered them water for refreshment. By afternoon, laughter and chatter filled the square.

The following week, Buchanayandi painted a small wooden sign:

"*Tiki nicyaro cyacu reka tukirende ubukyafu*," loosely translated in English as "This is our village. Let us keep it clean."

Months later, the town clerk noticed. The council provided two huge bins for the market. Buchanayandi beamed when his father said: "You see, son, civic duty is not just voting or talking. It is loving where you live enough to act."

That evening, as the sun set behind the mango tree, Buchanayandi whispered to his father: "Mzee, when I grow up, I want to help the whole country."

Kwizera smiled.

In a rapidly changing world where so-

## Two cents...



### Foster volunteerism.

Civic consciousness must be practiced. Parents can encourage children to take part in social initiatives such as environmental clean-ups, charity drives, and youth forums.

These experiences teach practical citizenship, empathy, leadership, and teamwork. When young people see themselves as agents of change, they are less likely to be indifferent to societal problems and more inclined to contribute to their community's development.

cial, political, and economic systems are increasingly interconnected, the need for civically conscious citizens has never been greater. In Africa, a continent marked by vibrant youth potential and persistent challenges, raising civically aware children is vital to building societies grounded in justice, accountability, and collective progress.

Parents, as the first educators and moral guides of their children, play a crucial role in shaping this consciousness. And keeping in mind that we are going to the polls on January 15 (this week on Thursday), a time to exercise our rights to choose our leaders from the President to local council leaders, this how parents can raise civic consciousness in their children.

### Model integrity and responsibility

Children learn more from what their parents do than from what they say. The foundation of civic consciousness is integrity, doing what is right even when no one is watching. African parents should demonstrate honesty, respect for laws, and social responsibility in their daily lives.

For instance, a parent who refuses to pay or accept bribes, respects public property, and fulfills civic duties such as voting, sets a powerful example for their children. By witnessing ethical behaviour at home, children internalise these values as the norm.

In societies where corruption and civic apathy are often normalised, modelling integrity is an act of quiet revolution.

## Instil community values and cultural awareness

African cultures have long emphasised communal living, *Ubuntu*, *Har- ambee*, and similar philosophies teach that "a person is a person through other people." Parents can draw from these traditional values to foster empathy, cooperation, and a sense of shared destiny in their children.

Encouraging children to participate in community service, helping neighbours, or taking part in local cultural events can nurture a sense of belonging and responsibility toward others. Understanding their cultural roots also helps children appreciate diversity and develop respect for different perspectives, key traits of civic-minded citizens.

## Encouraging critical thinking and open dialogue

Civic consciousness thrives where questioning and dialogue are encouraged. African parents should create an environment where children feel free to express their opinions, ask questions, and discuss social issues.

This approach develops critical thinking and helps children analyse injustices and societal challenges. For instance, discussing current events at home or watching the news together can help children understand governance, rights, and responsibilities.

When parents guide children to think beyond themselves. To consider how their actions affect others, they are building future citizens capable of independent thought and moral judgment.

## Promote education and awareness about rights

Education is one of the most powerful tools for civic empowerment. Parents should encourage their children not only to pursue academic excellence but also to learn about civic rights and responsibilities.

Teaching them about the constitution, human rights, environmental stewardship, and the importance of voting prepares them to engage meaningfully in society.

Moreover, exposing children to books, documentaries, and political and economic discussions about their country's history, African heroes and change-makers can inspire them to see civic engagement as both a duty and a privilege.

## Foster volunteerism and social participation

Civic consciousness is not merely theoretical it must be practiced. Parents can encourage children to take part in social initiatives such as environmental clean-ups, charity drives, and youth forums.

These experiences teach practical citizenship, empathy, leadership, and teamwork. When young people see themselves as agents of change, they are less likely to be indifferent to societal problems and more inclined to contribute to their community's development.

In conclusion, raising civically conscious children in Africa is an investment in the continent's future. It begins in the home, with parents who model integrity, nurture empathy, and inspire active participation in society. In an age where moral indifference and social fragmentation threaten progress, the family must serve as the first school of civic virtue.

By raising children who are informed, responsible, and community-minded, African parents can help shape a generation capable of transforming their societies with integrity.



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