

Unit 10

Active Community Participation

Introduction

In Grade 10, you studied different ways in which you can actively participate in your community. You have also discussed political and social participation. In this unit, you will discuss how civic participation can voluntarily enhance societal development and support the democratic process. Furthermore, you will see how the active participation of citizens can monitor and influence the actions of governments.

Lessons

1. Civic Participation
2. Monitoring and Influencing Actions of Government Bodies

What you will learn

You will:

- recognize the importance of monitoring and influencing the actions of the government.
- appreciate citizens civic participation.

Key words and concepts

- Civic participation
- Election campaign
- Peaceful demonstration
- Political participation
- Public agenda
- Public opinion
- Voluntarism



Citizens involved in community activities

1

LESSON

Civic Participation

By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

- describe the importance of civic participation.
- participate in civic societies.

Do you think a citizen should be forced to participate in civic activities? Explain your answer using examples.

Civil means related to citizens or to the public. Civil actions are outside of politics, religion, military etc. Civil actions do not have any interest other than cooperating and working to promote the common good and welfare of the people.

Civil societies are formed by the free will of their members. Participating in civil society is performed voluntarily in order to enhance social development and support the democratic process. Examples from

around the world indicate that civic participation is one of the most significant efforts towards government reforms in order to attain social development goals. Therefore, citizens should be encouraged to participate as they are better informed about the needs and problems of members of their community. Citizens can exercise their rights of participation in a democratic system through civil societies which empower them in various affairs.

Form a group to discuss development activities in your school

- What is the role of civil societies in your school's development activities?
- Are you involved voluntarily in the development activities of your school?

Let the group leader present the ideas to a class for further discussion.

CASE STUDY

Ethiopian Women Lawyers' Association (EWLA)

The Ethiopian Women Lawyers' Association (EWLA) is a non-profit and non-partisan voluntary organization. It was founded by a group of Ethiopian women lawyers in 1995 following the ratification of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

The association, at its onset, defined its objectives in its Articles of Association. EWLA's specific objectives are:

- To eliminate all forms of legal and traditionally

sanctioned discrimination against women.

- To ensure the equal treatment of women and men in education, employment and access to public services and benefits.
- To advocate for remedial and affirmative measures for women to redress the accumulated consequences of discrimination.

On October 3, 2002 the association lobbied the House of Peoples' Representative, Office of the Speaker, Women's Standing Committee, Legal

Civic Participation


Standing Committee and the Women’s Affairs Office at the Prime Minister’s Office.

EWLA’s main concerns are on penal law. What it advocates and lobbies for are:

- The liberalization of the law on abortion;
- The outlawing of the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) and domestic violence;
- The revision of the provisions dealing with rape, abduction and other sexual offences;
- The repeal of provisions with regard to the non-prosecution of crimes in cases of subsequent marriage after rape and abduction;
- The amendment of the criminal procedure code so as to review the procedures and put criminal liability on the offenders of crimes such as rape and domestic violence;

- The provision of a closed trial for cases that might have psychological impact on the victims, like child rape and domestic violence.

➤ Do you think that the work of organizations like EWLA has had an impact on the promotion of women’s rights? Explain your answer.

 ➤ Does your community need the support of a group like EWLA to help the rights of women? In which areas might women in your community need support?

➤ Are there any other groups in your community who need civic participation for support?

As you have seen, it is important to participate in civic issues. Civic participation requires a number of things: commitment, dedication, team spirit, readiness to work with others for the common good. Civic participation should be performed within the framework of the Constitution and laws of the land.

Commitment and dedication mean having the strength to maintain the effort to achieve certain goals. When you do your studies you have to have the commitment to accomplish the tasks required to enable you to become successful in your exams, and the same is true for public participation. You need the commitment to participate in public and civic issues until they are solved and the commitment to impress your ideas onto others.

While working together you also need to understand that team spirit is very important. Team spirit is the belief that, in working together for a

common good, you will be successful; by coming together you will solve problems. Most of the problems we are facing today are common problems, such as sanitation, crime and the like. These can only be solved if there is a concerted effort that includes the participation of community members. Some people just think about their own benefits rather than the good of all, involving themselves in activities that benefit them but could hurt others. When a person commits a crime, for example, he or she is thinking of benefiting himself or herself through hurting others.

Finally, it is important to understand that public or civic participation has to be in the framework of the Constitution and law of the land. Without respecting the Constitution and law of the land, public participation would not be helpful. This is because the Constitution and other laws of the land set boundaries in order to make public participation peaceful.

Civic Participation

CASE STUDY

Campaign Rallies to Stop Violence against Women (VAW)

The Gender-Based Violence Campaign in Ethiopia was established by ten different civil society organizations and UN agencies in October 2006. On March 24, the Campaign held a candlelight vigil to draw public attention to stop the increasing rate of violence against women. The vigil was held at the Yekaktit 12 Hospital where Kamilat Mehdi was receiving medical treatment for acid burns she suffered in early January. Hundreds of people gathered to show their solidarity to Kamilat and her family and to express their opposition to gender-based violence.

On Ethiopian Christmas Eve, as Kamilat and her two sisters were walking home, a stalker and his accomplices splashed sulphuric acid on their bodies and faces. Kamilat suffered life-threatening and disfiguring facial and chest burns. Though less severe compared to what Kamilat suffered, her sisters also

sustained burns on their bodies.

The vigil condemned attacks against young girls and women in general and the campaign resolved to double its efforts in working against gender-based violence. In addition, the campaign called on the government to “spell out directions for clear legislative intervention and appropriate punishment against sexual violence offenders.”

In groups, discuss the issue of gender-based violence in relation to your school and village.



- What are the problems?
- What do you think your role is as a student to reduce the problem?

Present a summary of your ideas in class for further discussion.

REMEMBER

- ❑ Civil associations are interested in cooperating and working together to promote the common good and welfare of the people.
- ❑ Participating in civil society can be done voluntarily to enhance social development and support the democratic process.
- ❑ Through civil societies, citizens can exercise their rights of participation in a democratic system.
- ❑ Commitment and dedication mean having the strength to maintain an effort to achieve certain goals.

LESSON 2

Monitoring and Influencing Actions of Government Bodies

By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

- explain how to monitor and influence the actions of the government.

Why do you need to monitor and influence the actions of government bodies?

Community participation is one of the keys to the empowerment of a community. It creates the conditions for success. Studies have documented that communities that engage their citizens and partners in community development, raise more resources, achieve more results and develop in a more holistic and, ultimately, more beneficial way. Community participation is crucial for community success.

Community participation requires the active involvement of citizens in the social, economic and political realms at all levels and in all forms.

One example of community participations is political participation, by which citizens make their voices heard and get involved in political issues. Involvement in political parties is designed to influence elections and policy making. This has a positive effect both for the people and the government. Active community political participation serves as a bridge between the people and the government. Interest groups are usually formed to promote specific public concern.

Such participation involves:

- Voting in elections;

- Encouraging citizens to become involved in running for office;
- Financing campaigns;
- Drafting and implementing election laws;
- Taking part in political campaigning;
- Demonstrations and petitions.

During election campaigns, you will be able to establish the positions of political parties on different issues. Clarity of the party policy, their financial status and other areas can make a significant contribution to their success or failure. Political parties will have to spend large sums of money on organizing and publicizing their programs and policies. They require good financial backup in order to be competent and successful.

Demonstrations are public displays by groups showing approval, sympathy or disapproval towards a cause. When a demonstration is performed legally it follows the governing laws and is done without violence. For demonstrations to be legal they must be peaceful. When groups of people who have similar interest believe that they have to reflect their concern or opinion on certain issues, a peaceful demonstration is one activity people can participate in. Responsible citizens with active community participation become involved in demonstrations to influence the political decisions of officials and, as a result, to protect their interests and those of others.

Democracy itself encourages people to discuss the problems around them. This can lead to the formation of discussion groups or interest groups,

Monitoring and Influencing Actions of Government Bodies

which examine different issues. In the case of political issues, parties usually raise concerns and frame the agenda. These groups of common interest, or political parties, decide the most important issues to be addressed. For instance, if the well-being of citizens is a prevailing problem, it should be framed and discussed in a way that promotes the interests of the people. In framing a public agenda, these groups discuss the facts at hand and decide how to deal with the issue.

These framed agendas are then communicated to the public. Once a public issue is identified, certain groups of people will begin to form views on the subject. If the attitudes expressed on the area under discussion are strong, then public opinion on the topic emerges. Not all people develop strong views on public issues; some may be interested and others not. The attitudes and opinions that are formed are held for different reasons. Background factors such

as family, friends, neighbours, work, religion, school and education, play a significant role in forming individual opinions. In order to let the public know of the issues and form opinions, the framed agendas are communicated to them through mass media and word of mouth.

- Form your own discussion groups on one issue that is a concern in your community, for example inflation, education, health care, food, clean water, the treatment of women etc.
- ? ➤ How can you include the views of everyone? Does everyone care about the issue?
- After you have identified the issue, you then need to find out public opinion by asking the views of others in your class.
- Feed this information back to the rest of the class.

CASE STUDY

Barack Obama's presidential primary campaign 2008

In 2008, Barack Obama, a member of the Democratic Party, campaigned to be elected as the President of the United States. He made many speeches about his policies and beliefs. On disabilities he stated:

"We must build a world free of unnecessary barriers, stereotypes, and discrimination policies must be developed, attitudes must be shaped, and buildings and organizations must be designed to ensure that everyone has a chance to get the education they need and live independently as full citizens in their communities."

He regarded education as the ... 'vehicle for social and economic mobility, giving hope and opportunity to millions of young people. Our schools must prepare

students not only to meet the demands of the global economy, but also help students take their place as committed and engaged citizens. It must ensure that all students have a quality education regardless of race, class, or background.'

On women he says: *"... ordinary women have taken on extraordinary odds to give their daughters the chance for something else; for a life more equal, more free, and filled with more opportunity than they ever had. In so many ways we have succeeded, but in so many areas we have much work left to do."* - Barack Obama, Speech in Washington, DC, 11/10/05

Source: <http://www.barackobama.com/issues/>

Monitoring and Influencing Actions of Government Bodies



? What do citizens expect from the speeches of an election campaign? Form groups to discuss your expectations as a group and present your summary in a class.

REMEMBER

- ❑ Community participation requires the active involvement of citizens in social, economic and political spheres at all levels.
- ❑ Political participation is active participation whereby citizens make their voices heard and get involved in political issues.
- ❑ Political parties' positions on different matters will be known during an election campaign.
- ❑ Demonstrations are public displays by groups showing approval, sympathy or disapproval towards a cause.

UNIT SUMMARY

Community participation is one of the key ingredients to an empowered community and is a condition for success. Studies have documented that communities that engage their citizens and partners fully in the work of the community, raise more resources, achieve more results and develop in a more holistic, and ultimately, more beneficial way. Community participation is crucial to community success.

Community participation requires the active involvement of citizens in the social, economic and political spheres at all levels. One example of community participation is political participation, by which citizens make their voices heard and get involved in political issues.

Apart from political participation, citizens can engage in civic participation. Civil actions are outside politics, religion, military etc. Civil associations do not have any other interest than cooperating and working to promote the common good and welfare of the people. Civil societies are formed by the free will of their members. Participating in civil society can be performed voluntarily to enhance social development and support the democratic process.

Finally, it is important to understand that public or civic participation has to be in the framework of the Constitution and law of the land. Without respecting these, public participation would not work. This is because the Constitution and laws of the land set boundaries to make public participation peaceful and successful.

GLOSSARY

<i>Civic participation:</i>	Civil actions outside politics, church, military etc.
<i>Election campaign:</i>	Vote-seeking activities.
<i>Peaceful demonstration:</i>	A gathering of people to protest, support or create awareness of an issue.
<i>Political Participation:</i>	Involvement in political issues.

UNIT REVIEW EXERCISES

Do these review exercises in your exercise book.

Part I – True or false

1. A peaceful demonstration is the process of lawfully expressing the supporting views and encouragement to the government.
2. Civil societies help citizens to actively follow the political activities of the government.
3. Public agendas enable citizens to know the burning issues around them.

Part II – Short answers

1. Enumerate at least four methods of political participation.
2. Explain the advantages of public participation in terms of an individual and of a community.