

very easy for us not to bother trying to understand."

Citizen 3:

"Well, it was different in our country: We tried but people who had power wouldn't let us get involved and we were threatened if we did try. So finally we gave up trying to participate."

Citizen 4:

"In my country we had elections and our leaders promised us good government. But it never turned out that way. The leaders used government to get rich. all leaders are corrupt.

PROBLEM ONE

Some questions on participation

1. Role-play the above conversation.
2. What are the four main views expressed by the citizens about participation? Do you agree? Why or why not?
3. What will the four citizens lose by not participating? What benefits do you think individuals will receive from participating?
4. What benefits do you think the new country would receive from individuals participating?
5. What are the possible risks or losses involved if one chooses to participate?
6. Weighing benefits and risks, do you think it is worthwhile participating?

Government affects people's lives in lot of ways. By participating in government people can have a voice in decisions made by the government. In every society someone is going to make the decisions. If people choose not to participate, they will not have a say in those decisions. These decisions can include such things as:

1. how much people will have to pay in taxes,
2. whether the society will get involved in a war,
3. who is going to own and control the country's natural resources.

Depending on how the government is structured, decisions can be made at different levels, including national, regional and local. Some decisions, such as those about military power, are often made nationally, while others, such as those concerning transport and roads, are often made regionally. Still others, such as those about rubbish collection, are frequently made locally.

Problem Two

How does the Government affect your Life?

1. Tell the story of a recent day in your life: Where you went, what you wore,

saw, ate, said, learned and did. List whether each thing that you mentioned was affected by government, including national, regional and/or local government.

2. Assume your that government is a democracy where all citizens are given an equal opportunity to participate without their human rights being violated. Which of the items in your daily life, which you listed as being affected by government, do you think would have to change? Explain your thinking.

How can people participate in democratic government?

Many people believe that the greatest opportunity to participate in government is available in a free and open democracy. This type of government means that the people themselves gain power and govern usually by the rule of the majority. Some countries are democracies in name only and people are not really allowed to participate. If a democracy is created, the people can choose to participate.

Problem Three

Ways of Participating in Democracy.

Before reading the list on the next page, write down all the ways you think people can use to participate in democracy.

Participation may take many forms including:

1. reading about issues and leaders.
2. writing about issues and leaders.
3. debating issues.
4. working in the community in support of a particular cause or in protest against government action.
5. forming or joining political parties or other community or grass roots organizations.
6. attending political or community meetings.
7. becoming a leader of a political party, a labor organization or community organization.
8. voting in elections.
9. campaigning for those standing for office.
10. standing for office and serving if elected.
11. paying taxes.
12. lobbying.
13. serving in the military.
14. using existing legal channels such as contacting government officials, taking cases to court, etc.
15. protesting by demonstrations, boycotts, strikes, etc.

Problem Four

Political Participation and Human Rights

1. Do you believe that any or all of the above forms of political participation are human rights?
Should they all be protected by law? Why or why not?
2. Which forms can you now use in your country to participate? Which forms

can you not use?

Explain.

3. Should laws also protect the right not to participate? Explain.

Problem Five

The Case of the School Boycott

In one country, schools for one ethnic group are much worse than those for all the others. Their schools have no libraries, laboratories, gymnasiums or playgrounds, while schools for the other ethnic groups have all these things. They have no school buses, so even the youngest children usually have to walk as much as several kilometers. Old textbooks are shared among children sitting on wooden benches. Class sizes are as big as 50 pupils and more. Teachers may teach five or six classes in a single subject, and have time only to read and correct one composition a month from each student.

Because of these conditions, students of the less privileged ethnic group decide to boycott their schools. They believe boycotts are the only way to get what they want. There are some students of the same ethnic group, however, whose parents do not agree with the boycott. They demand that their children continue to attend school. Many see education as the ladder to a higher standard of living, and as the freedom road itself. Therefore, some of the students choose not to participate in the boycott.

1. Assume students in each group wished to convince others to agree with them. Role-play a discussion between the students.
2. Why did some students want to boycott their schools?
3. Why did some students oppose the boycott? Is their refusal to participate a violation of the rights of the students who wish to boycott?
4. Was the method used to convince the students to boycott a violation of their human rights? If so, are there any methods you think would have been better to use? Describe them.
5. Should laws and the government protect this small number of parents and their children against threats and the use of force if these children choose not to participate in the school boycott? Why or why not? Explain your thinking.
6. Assume students who are against the boycott wish to convince other students not to boycott. If the boycotting students do not allow them to speak to others, have their human rights been violated? If yes, how?

Human Rights Documents and Political Participation

The UDHR as well as other international and regional human rights documents state that people have the right to political participation. According to Article 21 of the UDHR: "You have the right to take part in your country's political affairs either by belonging to the government yourself or by choosing politicians who have the ideas you most agree with. Governments should be voted for regularly, you should get a vote and all votes should be equal." The African Charter, in Article 13, states: "Every citizen has the right to take part in the government of his or her country."

Both the UDHR and the African Charter protect the basic right to take part in peaceful meetings. They specifically say that it is wrong to force someone to belong to a group. And, while the UDHR, the African Charter and other human

rights documents do not use the word "democracy," many people argue that the rights and freedoms they protect are actually what democracy is all about.

Problem Six

Are Equal Votes Required?

Assume that in a country the majority of people (75 percent) are of one ethnic group and the minority (25 percent), are of another. A law is passed which states that each person's vote will be equally counted in every election.

1. Do you agree with this law? Explain.
2. Assume that most of the minority groups lives in certain areas. Should they be able to make laws for their own areas or should the majority make laws for all?
3. The minority proposes that the parliament be made up of 20 people from each of the five areas. Two of the five are areas in which the minority group live and will control in an election. If the proposal is passed, will it violate anyone's human rights?

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