

Lesson 4

Civic Engagement

- A. Look at the pictures. What are the people doing? Have you ever seen people doing similar kinds of activities in your locality?**



- B. Work in pairs. Discuss how the pictures are related to the lesson title – Civic Engagement.**
- C. Read the texts below. When you have finished reading, use the grid and write in your own words how the three terms – *civic engagement*, *volunteerism*, and *service learning* are similar and dissimilar.**

Education aims to bring about positive changes in our behavior. It helps us try to change our lives as well as the society we live in. Education that does not illuminate our minds or does not inspire us to work for the community is not complete at all. Education is not all about getting grades or receiving certificates—we use education to make life better. We are expected to apply the knowledge, skills and values that we learn in a classroom in our engagement with the world that lies outside. And we can do so in many different ways. Let's have a look at how education works.

Learners' *civic engagement* is highly appreciated all over the world. Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life (the public life of the citizens as contrasted with private or personal life) of the community using knowledge, skills, values and motivation. Civic engagement promotes the quality of life in a community by contributing to the improvement of health and wellbeing of the people.

Civically engaged individuals recognize themselves as members of a larger social community and are concerned about civic issues. They consider themselves responsible citizens who take action or raise their voices against injustice, discrimination and other forms of social ills.

In civic engagement, issues of public concern are crucial. Civic engagement includes individual or group activities to protect public interests and change the way the community values itself. For example, if you are protesting against any unjust decision of the local municipality such as raising taxes or an act that might work against people's interests, you are civically engaged and your action is considered a civic engagement. This protest can be done in different ways such as organizing rallies, collecting signatures, making human chains, writing petitions, etc. You can also help control traffic in front of a school, help children to cross the roads, work in a team to clean a park or a sea beach. You can also give some services to elderly people. These are all examples of civic engagement as what you do directly affects the community.

When civic engagement is a part of an academic programme, and the learners' engagement is assessed following a scale, then it is called *service learning*. It involves the application of knowledge and skills learned in the classroom and then making a complete plan of action i.e. preparing a budget, starting the process of implementation, involving people and activating operational strategies. When civic engagement is spontaneous but irregular and not a part of any academic programme, it is considered *volunteerism*.

| Civic engagement | Volunteerism | Service learning |
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- D. Read the stories below. When you have finished reading, write on the blank space on the top of each story what the story is about— civic engagement, volunteerism, or service learning.**

Scenario 1: _____

A group of college students were watching television news in their hostel. They were touched by the plight of the flood affected people in Sunamgonj. All the rivers and water bodies there had overflowed their banks because of the onrush of flood water from the hills beyond our border. Their homes, haats, bazars, shops, and crop lands were under several feet of water. The local administration had rescued the people and accommodated them in schools that were on higher grounds. Villagers in the nearby areas were helping these people in all possible ways. Yet, ensuring drinking water, cleanliness and hygiene was a big challenge. The schools had toilets but these were clearly not enough. Seeing this situation, Ahmed, Swapan, Rakib, and Niladri quickly decided to go to Sunamgonj and work for the flood victims. But to do that they needed money which they did not have.

They began by pooling their own contributions and talked with their classmates, teachers and local law makers and civil society members for assistance. Everyone came forward to help them. Some guardians also contributed. Their collection was not bad – about Taka 3,00,000– with which they could provide some substantial help to the flood victims. They could buy dry food like high protein biscuits, gur (molasses), chira (beaten rice), drinking water, water purification tablets, toilet cleaners and liquid soaps. Their priority was senior citizens, who were over 70 years of age and children. They stayed there for more than a week and then came back after government agencies took over and some flood affected people started going back home. When the four friends were back in their town, they seemed to have lost some weight, but were happy and satisfied that their efforts had been immensely rewarded.

Scenario 2: _____

Alex, an eleven year old boy from California was watching TV at home with parents when he came across the news of severe winter weather conditions in a remote town in Romania. The news that many people in the town had no proper heating in their homes and were facing serious health hazards made the boy upset. He compared the comfort he was enjoying in his nicely heated house and the distressing condition the Romanian people were in, and felt ashamed. He thought their eyes looked so vacant and lifeless.

Alex was not an outgoing boy in his school and mostly kept to himself. Teachers were worried about how the introvert boy would do in the exams. The students were supposed to do something for the community in whatever ways possible and their involvement was to be continually monitored and assessed. So far, Alex hadn't been able to set any example of doing something for his community. So when he came to his teacher with a video clip of the news report and expressed his interest to do something for the winter affected people in the Romanian town, the teacher was surprised. How come! she thought. But she became increasingly attentive as Alex presented his case. The boy was very emotional when he said – “We must do something for these people. The kids are like us. We cannot live here in comfort leaving them in such distress.”

Alex's plea touched the teacher. She wanted to know what he had planned. He told her that he had talked to others in the class and they all would like to donate a month of their pocket money for these poor fellows to save their lives. The teacher then guided the class to take up a project. The boys, with the help of the teacher, worked it out. They contacted the local municipality in the Romanian town and expressed an interest to work for them. They also contacted their own lawmakers who also contributed to their fund. Then a small team led by the teacher went to Romania. They spent a couple of weeks with the people, helped them put heating in their houses, supply them with sufficient blankets and food. The school authority monitored the whole process from the first to last. They warmly welcomed them back. Everyone was proud of the students who had made and carried out their own plan, helped the people in their need, stood beside them to give mental and emotional support and came back home as young heroes.

E. Read the statements below. Some of them are true and some are false. Write T (for true) or F (for false) in the boxes beside the statements.

1. Both stories have one common point – civic engagement.
2. The story of college students is an example of service learning.
3. Alex proved that he was a global citizen.

F. Answer the questions.

1. What are the similarities among the stories?
2. How are the stories different from one another?

G. Work in groups. Think about a civic problem in your locality. Describe the problem and then make a complete plan on how you expect to solve the problem.