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(2). CITIZEN ROLES IN A DEMOCRACY

INTRODUCTION

Sovereignty resides in and flows from the people in a democracy. They have the collective right to choose their governmental, political and electoral system as part of self-determination. For democracy to deliver, citizens must become informed about issues that can improve their lives and see that government respond to their views. For full citizenship to be achieved we should remove the barriers of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age or another status. It is the active participation of the people in government that brings about development.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

CITIZEN/CITIZENSHIP: Citizen has an inherent political meaning that implies a certain type of relationship between the people and the government. Citizens have rights and duties, including the right to participate in decision that affects public welfare. In ancient Rome, it was a privilege to be called a citizen because not every inhabitants of the Roman Empire were citizens e.g., slaves and serfs and some aliens were deprived citizenship

Citizenship of a state may be acquired either by birth or naturalization.

Citizenship can be divided into civil citizenship, political citizenship and social citizenship. Civil citizenship refers to the rights necessary to protect individual liberty. Political citizenship is associated with participation in the democratic exercise of political power either as a member of political community or an individual elected by the members of such a community. Social citizenship embodies the claim that citizens ought to have access to those resources that allow them to live a civilized existence in accordance with the standards prevailing in society.

Citizenship does not have just one definition; it means different things to different people. Citizenship is about being willing to contribute to social action as well as political debate, to be willing to get involved. Glover argues that there are three dimensions of active citizenship: ethical citizenship, integrative citizenship and educative citizenship. Ethical citizenship understands active participation in a collective strive towards the public good as an essential feature of citizenship. Integrative citizenship involves the belief that every individual plays an assortment of roles, and that this form of citizenship enables the individual to integrate their various roles, and to immerse themselves into the community, hence causing them to have a greater appreciation of the collective. Educative citizenship refers to the process that develops a moral, practical, and intellectual sense of self in individuals when they practice their citizenship. Active citizenship develops important capacities by exposing citizens to the connection between their private interests and the public interest.

Kenny a community development practitioner argues that contemporary construction of citizenship can be understood by differentiating passive from active citizenship. The former refers to the rights and duties given to the citizen from the state and is based on notions of social justice. However, to ensure full citizenship, people must be empowered to participate in the continual process of shaping their societies, communities and identities.

CITIZENS' RIGHTS

In order to let the citizen have a share in the running of his/her government, a group of rights is very essential. A right may be defined as a privilege or prerogative conferred by law upon a person or a group. When a privilege is within the framework of the constitution it becomes a civil right and if these civil rights of a citizen is invaded upon any another citizen or the government, he is entitled to seek redress in the court of law. Important civil rights include: the right to life, right to work, right to freedom of speech, right to education, right to religion, etc.

DEMOCRACY

Etymologically, democracy is derived from the Greek word *demos* meaning people and *kratos* meaning rule, which is "rule by the people." Democracies originated in ancient Greece where in the city states, citizens were free to meet frequently in assemblies which had the power to make laws and citizens were free to discuss state affairs, take decisions and exercise their political rights. However it excluded labourers, slaves and aliens from exercising political rights. The Americans having revolted against England successfully developed democratic ideas and institutions as a way of life which spread to other countries of the world in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Today democracy or representative/indirect government is associated with the free discussion of political views, the right to differ concerning them and the settlement of differences by counting of votes. Moreover, it is a way of determining who shall govern and to what ends they shall rule.

Abraham Lincoln perceived democracy as the government of the people, by the people and for the people. According Maxey, the states and countries where the arrangements from the various definitions of democracy are the following features: (i). the fundamental rights of the citizen are guaranteed (ii). Independence and impartial judiciary (iii). Existence of rule of law (iv). Freedom of press (v). Periodic election that is free and fair.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CITIZENS IN A DEMOCRACY

- a. A citizen in a democracy should have the responsibility to vote
- b. A citizen should be willing to pay taxes, since without taxes to fund a democratic government, there would be no democracy
- c. A good democratic citizen must have a duty to obey the law.
- d. A good citizen must refrain from uttering destructive criticism but must be prepared to offer constructive alternatives to government policies.
- e. A good citizen must refrain from interference with the rights of other members of the community.
- f. He must support public education in every way possible, through the payment of taxes through local volunteer efforts, through according this system the respect to which it should be entitled

CONCLUSION

Citizens play an important role in democracy as there probably would not be democracy without the co-operation and commitment of citizens. Citizens must be aware of their rights and duties to avoid a government of tyranny. Also citizens must avoid being too critical of government to avoid losing sight of the pursuit of public interest.

