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REVIEW OF CHAPTER EIGHT: CITIZENS ROLES IN A DEMOCRACY

Sovereignty resides in and flows from the people in a democracy. They have a collective right to choose their governmental, political and electoral systems as part of self-determination. The authority of government likewise derives from the will of the people in their choice of these systems, and the people have a right to take part in their government, including through genuine elections to determine who will legitimately occupy governmental offices. For democracy to deliver, citizens must become informed about issues that can improve their lives. They must be free to come together to express their views and preferences and work to see that government responds to citizens' views, thus holding those in government accountable.

Barriers to citizen participation are multiple in every country. They are both subtle and obvious. Citizens must, therefore, understand ideas about citizenship, politics and government. They need knowledge to make decisions about policy choices and the proper use of authority, along with the skills to voice their concerns, cooperate, and hold public officials accountable.

Citizen/ Citizenship

The term citizen has an inherently political meaning that implies a certain type of relationship between the people and government.

Chapter 111, section 25: 1(a) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria define citizenship as every person born before the date of independence, either of whose parents or any of whose grandparents belongs or belonged to a community indigenous to Nigeria: provided that a person shall not become a citizen of Nigeria by virtue of this section if neither of his parents nor any of his grandparents was born in Nigeria; every person born in Nigeria after independence either of whose parents or grandparents is a citizen of Nigeria; and every person born outside Nigeria either of whose parents is a citizen of Nigeria.

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 a political community or as an individual elected by the members of such a community; and 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.

However, there are broader definitions and perceptions of citizenship as well, as shown by Glover (2004:18), who argues that there 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 needs engagement in a wide sphere of participation that can go beyond formal practices and institutions. Educative citizenship refers to the process that develops a moral, practical, and intellectual sense of self in individuals when they practice their citizenship.

Citizens' Rights

Individual's rights and liberties are the groundwork of the state since it exists to enable men to live and develop fully. Right entails some duties and responsibilities on the part of every citizen. A right may be defined as a privilege or prerogative conferred by law upon a person or a group. When a privilege is expressed within the framework of the constitution of the state, it becomes a civil right. Important civil rights of Nigerian citizens include: right to life, right to work, right to education amongst others.

Democracy

Various definitions of democracy has been put forward. Since there is no single definition of democracy however, what can be deduced from the various definitions of democracy are that the fundamental rights of the citizens is guaranteed, independent and impartial judiciary, existence of rule of law, freedom of press, periodic election that is free and fair.

Duties and Responsibilities of Citizens in a Democracy

Citizens are expected to perform certain responsibilities in a democracy such as a citizen should have the duty to vote, a citizen should be willing to pay taxes, since without taxes to fund a democratic government, there would be no democracy, a good citizen must have a duty to obey the law because a democracy cannot exist in a lawless society, and without the willingness of citizens to obey the law, no government has the wherewithal to police a nation of lawbreakers, and anarchy results. A good citizen must refrain from uttering destructive criticisms but must be prepared to offer constructive alternatives to government policies. A good citizen must refrain from interference with the rights of other members of the community and he/she must support public education on every way possible, through the payment of taxes, through local volunteer efforts, through according to this system the respect to which it should be entitled.

Citizens play a role in democracy. There would probably be no Democracy without the co-operation and commitment of citizens. Citizens must be aware of their rights and responsibilities as without the awareness amongst citizens, a government may turn into a tyranny.

Citizens should participate in every event in democracy with full enthusiasm to ensure the survival of democracy. Citizens also have the duty in a democracy of ensuring that their rights are preserved by challenging government when it errs. Citizens should also be critical of what government does. At the same time, while being critical, citizens must also not lose sight of the pursuit of public interest. A positive attitude should be maintained with development of the state being the priority.