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Chapter Eight: Citizens Roles in A Democracy

Democracy is a system of government where sovereignty resides in and flows from the people. According to Abraham Lincoln, it is the government by the people, of the people and for the people. Engagement of citizens is thus both a right and a responsibility of citizens in establishing, developing and sustaining democracy.

In simple words, a citizen is a legal member of a state or country. The term citizen has an inherently political meaning that implies a certain type of relationship between the people and government. Citizens have a set of rights and responsibilities, including the right to participate in decisions that affect public welfare. Citizenship of a state may be acquired either by birth or by naturalisation. A man becomes a citizen of a particular state if his parents are citizens of that state or if he is born within the territory of that state. On the other hand, the process by which an individual may voluntarily change his/her citizenship of a state to another state is known as naturalisation. The conditions under which naturalisation are conferred vary from country to country.

Section 26(1) to section 32 also stipulates the conditions which any person that is trying to naturalise must fulfil before he or she can be registered as 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 and social citizenship embodies the claim that citizens ought to have access to those resources that allow them to live a civilised existence in accordance with the standards prevailing in society (Marshall, 1992, cited by Glover, 2004: 65).

According to Glover (2004: 18), there are three dimensions of active citizenship: ethical, integrative 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 political parties 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.

Individual's rights and liberties are the groundwork of the state since it exists to enable men to live and develop fully. A right may be defined as a privilege or prerogative conferred by law upon a person or a group.

Since there is no single definition of democracy, the following features can be deduced from the various definitions:

- 1) The fundamental rights of the citizens is guaranteed
- 2) Independent and impartial judiciary
- 3) Existence of rule of law
- 4) Freedom of press
- 5) Periodic election that is free and fair

For democracy to succeed, citizens must be active, not passive, therefore there are certain responsibilities of citizens which includes;

- 1) Duty to vote
- 2) Willingness to pay taxes
- 3) Duty to obey the law
- 4) Refrain from uttering destructive criticisms
- 5) Refrain from interference with the rights of other members of the community
- 6) Support public education.