

## Chapter Eight: Citizens Role in A Democracy

Citizens have a right to be involved in their government, including through free and fair election to determine who will legitimately occupy government offices. These precepts are found in the universal declaration of human rights and in modern constitutions all over the world. It captures the famous foundation of democracy as “government of the people by the people and for the people”, making the citizens the custodians of the governmental process and elections. therefore, the engagement of citizens is both right and a responsibility. Albright, 2012 states that “citizens engagement pursues economic, social, cultural and political development, including the provision of opportunity, resources, services and security funds.

For democracy to deliver citizens must be informed about issues that can improve lives, hold the government accountable when needed, have access to information about the government. For full citizenship to be achieved, barriers based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age must be removed. Citizens need knowledge to make decisions about policy choices and proper use of authority, skills to voice their concerns, act collectively and hold public officials accountable.

Conceptual clarifications.

In order to enhance the meaning of words used within the context of this topic, few concepts need to be clarified:

**Citizenship:** the term citizenship has a political meaning which implies a certain kind of relationship between people and government. Citizens have a set of rights and responsibilities, including the right to participate in decisions affecting the public welfare.

Citizenship of a state may be acquired by birth or by naturalization. A person becomes a citizen of a particular state if his or her parents are citizens of that state or if he or she is born within the territory of the state. Turner (1997: 1996) is of the opinion that citizenship is a formal legal identity that the individual person inherits through a collection of legal rights and obligations, controlled access to the scarce political, economic and cultural resources of the society. On the other hand, the process by which an individual may voluntarily change his or her citizenship from a state to another state is naturalization. The condition under which naturalization are conferred vary from country to country.

Citizenship can be divided into: civil citizenship, political citizenship and social citizenship. Civil citizenship refers to the rights necessary to protect individual liberty (e.g. freedom of speech). Political citizenship is the participation in democratic exercise of political power, either as a member of political community(voter) or an individual selected by the members of such

community(politician). Social citizenship embraces the claim that citizens ought to have access to those resources that allow them to live a civilized existence according to the standards prevailing the society (Marshall, 1992, cited by glover 2004:65). Citizenship has different definitions, for example Brannan Etat (2006:55) argue that citizenship is not solely comprised of passive membership but being active is an essential of being a citizen glover (2004:18) argue that there are there are 3 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 believes that every Individual plays an assortment of roles, enabling the individual to integrate their various roles and to immerse themselves into the community hence causing them to have grater appreciation of the collective work.

Educative citizenship, according to dagger (1997) refers to the process that develops a moral, practical and intellectual sense of self in individuals when they practice citizenship. active participation helps to foster a sense of being part of the community, citizen participation works to overcome individualism and self-interest.

Citizens right: 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 with the framework of the constitutions of the state, it is a civil right and when invaded by another citizen, punishment by the court of law is inevitable. Some civil rights accorded to a Nigerian citizen include: right to life, right to work, right to freedom of religion etc.

Democracy: it is derived from a Greek word “demo” meaning people and “karats” meaning rule, that is rule by the people. The concept of democracy originated from ancient Greece where in states, citizens where free to meet frequently in assemblies which had power to make laws.

Abraham Lincoln, former American president, perceived democracy as government for the people, of the people and by the people. When it is designed to represent the common will of the citizenry within a state and that is a government by the people when it is ideologically undercurrents is grounded in the people’s culture, also is a government for the people when the power employed by the custodians of state business emanates from and resides in the collective mandate of the people.

Features of democracy include: fundamental rights of citizens 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.

1. A citizen has the duty to vote.
2. A citizen should be willing to pay tax.
3. A good citizen must have a duty to obey the law.
4. A good citizen must refrain from uttering destructive criticism but must be prepared to offer constructive alternatives to government policies.
5. A good citizen must refrain from interference with the rights of other members of the community.
6. He or she must support public education in every way possible.