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CITIZENS ROLES IN A DEMOCRACY

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. These concepts are embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Right. They capture the foundation for the famous formulation that democratic government is “of the people, by the people and for the people”. In essence they mean governmental process belongs to the people and elections belong to the people. There is no democracy without the engagement of citizens. Citizens engagement pursues economic, social, cultural and political development including the provision of opportunity, resources, services and security. For democracy to deliver, citizens must be informed about issues that can improve their lives and that is why transparency is a necessity for democracy. For full citizenship to be achieved barriers must be removed whether they are based on gender race, religion, age or another status.

To be a citizen means to enjoy certain liberties and rights. Citizens have set of rights and responsibilities, including the right to participate in decisions that affect the welfare public. Citizenship of a state may be acquired by either birth or naturalization. Citizenship can also be perceived to be made up of civil citizenship, political citizenship and social citizenship. Glover (2004:18) argues that there are three dimensions of active citizenship which are; Ethical citizenship, Integrative citizenship and Educative citizenship.

Right entails some duties and responsibilities on the part of every citizen. A right may therefore be defined as a privilege or prerogative conferred by the law upon a person or group. Individual rights and liberties are the groundwork of the state since it exists to enable men to live and fully develop. Important civil rights accorded Nigerian citizens in its constitution include: the right to life, the right to work, the right to freedom of religion, right to education, right to association and right to freedom of speech.

Democracy is a system of government where the citizens directly elect the government by voting. Abraham Lincoln, former American president, perceived democracy as the government of the people, by the people and for the people. It has been etymology established the word democracy is derived from the Greek word “demos meaning people and kartos meaning rule that is ‘rule by the people’. Democracy is a government of the people when it is designed to represent the common will of the citizenry within a state and it is a government by the people when its ideological undercurrents is grounded in the people’s culture. In democracy, the rights, freedoms and the value of individuals count more than those of the state.

While the state provides rights and liberties, all citizens have duties to the state. Citizens are therefore expected to perform the following responsibility in democracy:

- A citizen in democracy should have the duty to vote
- A citizen should be willing to pay taxes
- A good citizen must have a duty to obey the law
- A good citizen must refrain from interference with the rights of other members of the community