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 **CITIZENS ROLES IN A DEMOCRACY**

**Introduction**

Sovereignity resides in and flows from the people in a democracy. They have collective rights to choose their governmental, political and electoral systems as part of self-determination. The authority of government derives from the will of the people in their choice of these systems, and the people have a right to partake in their government to determine who will legitimately occupy government 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, preferences and work to see that government responds to citizens views, thus holding those in government accountable.

**Conceptual Clarifications**

**Citizens/Citizenship:** the term citizen has a political meaning that implies a certain type of relationship between the people and government. Citizens have set of rights and responsibilities, including the rights to participate in decisions that affect public welfare. In ancient Rome, it was considered to be called citizen because the status was not accorded to all inhabitants of the Roman Empire. Slaves, serfs, and some alien residents were deprived of citizenship for racial, political and religious reasons. Citizenship of a state may be acquired either by birth or by naturalization. Chapter 111, section 25: 1(a) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria define citizenship as:

1. Every person born in Nigeria 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;
2. Every person born in Nigeria after the date of independence either of whose parents or any of whose grandparents is a citizen of Nigeria
3. Every person born outside Nigeria either of whose parents is a citizen of Nigeria.

Section 26(1) to section 32 also stipulates the condition which any person that is trying to naturalise must fulfill before he or she can be registered as a citizen of Nigeria. Citizenship can be perceived to be made of up civil, political and social citizenship. Civil citizenship refers to the rights necessary to protect individual liberty (e.g. freedom of speech, justice); 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 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. There are also 2 types of citizenship: active and passive citizenship. The former refers to rights and duties given to the citizens from the state and is hence based on notions of social justice, while the latter is an integral part of citizenship, it is not enough by itself. There are also other perceptions that argues that there are 3 dimension 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 practices and institutions. 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 their citizenship.

**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 conferred by law upon a person a person or a group. When a privilege is expressed within the framework of the constitution of the state, it become a civil right. Important civil right accorded Nigerian citizens in its constitution include: the right to life, right to work, right to freedom of religion, right to education, right to association, and right to freedom of speech, writing and publication among others.

**Democracy**

It is derived from the Greek word “demos” meaning people and “kratos” meaning rule, that is ‘rule by the people’. Abraham Lincoln, former America president, perceived democracy as the government of the people, by the people and for the people. Since there is no single definition, what has been deduce from various definitions are the following features:

1. The fundamental rights of the citizen 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.

**Duties and Responsibilities of Citizens in a Democracy.**

1. A citizen in a democracy should have the duty to vote.
2. A citizen should be willing to pay taxes.
3. A good citizen must have a duty to obey the law.
4. A good citizen must refrain from uttering destructive criticisms and offer constructive alternatives to government policies.
5. A good citizen should not interfere with the rights of other members of the society.
6. A good citizen must support public education in every way possible.

Citizens play an important role in democracy. So citizens need to carry out their duties and responsibility and co-operate with the government for democracy to be achieved.