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Chapter 8: Citizens Roles in a Democracy.

There is no democracy without the engagement of citizens. Engagement is thus both a right and a responsibility of citizens in establishing, developing and sustaining democracy. Citizen engagement is not an abstraction; it takes tangible forms and serves particular purpose to improve peoples’ lives. Citizens engagement pursues economic, social, cultural and political development, including the provision of opportunity, resources, services, and security.

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. Citizens need to learn from those who compete in politics how politicians intend to employ that information for the good of the population. Access to information is essential to an informed citizenry. That is why transparency is a necessity for democracy.

Barriers to citizen participation are multiple in every country. For full citizenship to be achieved, we must remove these barriers, whether they are based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age or another status. Citizens must understand ideas about citizenship, politics and government. They need knowledge to make decisions about policy choices and proper use of authority, along with the skills to voice their concerns, act collectively and hold public officials accountable. Thus , a symbiotic relationship exists between democracy, the citizens and the state’s development to the effect that citizen’s government, made by the citizens for the citizenry is called democracy and it is the involvement of active participation’s of the people in governance that brings about development.

**Conceptual clarifications.**

**Citizens/citizenship:** 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 naturalization. Citizenship determined by place of birth is fundamental in the laws of most countries. On the other hand, the process by which an individual may voluntarily change his/her citizenship of a state is known as naturalizations. The conditions under which naturalizations are conferred vary from country to country.

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 parent 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; and
3. Every person born outside Nigeria either of whose parents is a citizen of Nigeria.

Citizenship can be perceived to be made up of, or be divided into civil citizenship, political citizenship and social citizenship. Civil citizenship refers to the rights necessary to protect individuals liberty; political citizenship is associated with participation in the Democratic exercise of political power, either as a member of a political community (a voter) or as an individual elected by the members of such a community(a politician); 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, as with so many other concepts, citizenship does not have just one definition, it means different things to different people. Citizenship is about being willing to contribute to social action as well as to political debate, to be willing to get involved. But whichever ways one look at the concept, citizenship is a privilege status conferred by states on its people either by birth or by naturalization i.e. voluntary change of citizenship from a state to another.

**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 citizens. A right may therefore be defined as a privilege or prerogative conferred by law upon a person or a group. If the civil rights of a citizen are invaded by another citizen or the government, he is entitled to seek redress in the court of law.

**Democracy**

The word democracy is derived from the Greek word “demos meaning people and kratos meaning rule, that is ‘rule by the people’. The concept of democracy, like many other political concepts first originated from Ancient Greece where in the city state, citizens were free to meet frequently in assemblies which had the power to make laws.

The Greek democracy was a limited institution in that it excluded laborer, slaves and aliens from exercising political rights. These ideas and institutions spread from country to country in the western world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Today, Democracy or representative government which is also known as indirect government is associated with the free discussion of political views, the right to differ concerning them and the settlement of differences by counting votes. Moreover, it is a way of determining who shall govern and to what ends they shall rule.

Abraham Lincoln, former American president, perceived democracy as the government of the people, by the people and for the people. He stated further that in a democracy, the rights, freedoms and the valued individuals count more than those of the state. The state exists to serve the individual and provide the conditions which make a full and happy life possible.

Since there is no single definition of democracy, what can be deduce from the various definition of democracy are the following features: (a) The fundamental rights of the citizens is guaranteed .

(b) Independent and impartial judiciary, (c) Existence of rule of law, (d) Freedom of press

(e) Periodic election that is free and fair

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

While the state provides rights and liberties, all citizens have duties to the state. Democratic citizens recognize that they not only have rights, they also have responsibilities. They recognize that democracy requires an investment of time and hard work. Democratic citizens know that they must bear the burden of responsibility for their society if they are to benefit from its protection of their rights. Citizens are therefore expected to perform the following responsibilities in a democracy:

1. A citizen in a democracy should have the duty to vote.
2. A citizen should be willing to pay taxes, since without taxes to fund a democratic government, there would be no democracy.
3. A good citizen must have a duty to obey the law
4. A good citizen must refrain from uttering destructive criticisms 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. (S)he must support public education in every way possible, through the payment of taxes, through local volunteer efforts, through according this system the respect to which it should be entitled.

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