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**CITIZENS ROLES IN A DEMOCRACY**

In a democratic system of government, the people have a right to take part in their government through periodical elections to determine who will legitimately occupy governmental offices in order to represent their interests when they get into power. There is no democracy without the engagement of the people as it is both a right and a responsibility of the citizens in establishing, developing and sustaining democracy. For citizens to be able to carry out this responsibility that is expected of them, they have to be duly informed about issues that can improve each other’s lives and be enlightened about what goes on in the public office so that they can hold the government accountable. They must be free to impart their views about governmental processes and public affairs, otherwise citizens cannot be truly informed nor can they freely make their choices. Citizens must be well knowledgeable on issues concerning citizenship, politics and government so that they will be able to make decisions about policy choices and the proper use of authority, along with the skills to voice their concerns, act collectively and hold public officers accountable.

Who is a Citizen? A Citizen is a legal member of a state or society with full constitutional rights. Citizenship is a status of a person recognized under the custom or law of a sovereign state. Citizenship of any state can be acquired either by birth or by naturalization. Citizenship by birth is gotten when one’s parents are citizens of that particular state or one is born within the territories of that state even if his parents are not from there. Citizenship by naturalization is gotten when one decides to voluntarily change one’s citizenship of a state to another state. There are some conditions stipulated in the constitution of Nigeria regarding those who wish to acquire citizenship by naturalization and can be found in section26 [1] to section32. These conditions differ 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 for example; freedom of speech. Political citizenship is associated with participation in the democratic exercise of political power either as a member of a political community, for example; a voter or as an individual elected by the members of such a community, for example; a politician. 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. Citizenship is about being willing to contribute to social action as well as to political debate, to be willing to get involved. This is active citizenship and the public involvement of the citizens makes it differ from passive citizenship. According to Glover [2004; 18] there are three dimensions of active citizenship which are; ethical citizenship, integrative citizenship and educative citizenship. In addition to the responsibilities that citizens are expected to perform they still possess their individual rights. A right is defined as a privilege or prerogative conferred by law on a person or group. Rights of citizens expressed within the framework of the constitution of a state is called a civil right and when these rights are invaded by another citizen, the individual is entitled to seek redress in the court of law. Examples of civil rights include; the right to life, the right to work, right to freedom of religion, right to education, right of association, right to freedom of speech among others.

What is democracy? Etymologically, democracy is derived from two Greek words “demos” meaning people and “kratos” meaning rule, that is ‘rule by the people’. The concept of democracy first originated in the ancient Greek city states, where citizens met freely to discuss the state of affairs, take decisions and exercise their political rights. This is known as direct democracy, a system that allows people exercise authority themselves. This is no longer efficient as it was a limited institution in that it excluded laborers, slaves and aliens [foreigners] from exercising political rights. Today, representative democracy, also known as indirect democracy is associated with the free discussion of political views. Representative democracy is a system of government whereby the citizens exercise their governing power directly or through representatives who are periodically elected by the majority of the people. Abraham Lincoln, former American president perceived democracy as the government of the people, by the people and for the people. The features of democracy of a democratic society includes; the fundamental rights of the citizens are guaranteed, the presence of an independent and impartial judiciary, the existence of the rule of law, the freedom of the press and a periodic election that is free and fair.

As the state provides rights and liberties to its citizens, all citizens also have duties they owe to the state. In order for the state to function efficiently, it requires constant vigilance and support from its people. First of all, a citizen in a democracy has a duty to vote in order to remove bad government and ensure the development of the society. Secondly, a citizen should be willing to pay taxes, since without taxes to fund a democratic government there would be no basic amenities and no proper infrastructure. Also, a citizen must refrain from uttering destructive criticisms but must be prepared to offer constructive alternatives to government policies. A good citizen has a duty to obey the law as a democracy cannot exist in a lawless society in order to avoid anarchy and chaos, the citizen must also be ready to assist the law enforcement agencies by reporting breaches of the law and giving them any useful information. In addition, a good citizen must refrain from interfering with the rights of other members of the community. A citizen must also be honest, just, hardworking and disciplined in his dealings with others. A citizen must be ab le to appear before the court of law as a witness when called upon to do so and serve in the army when military service is compulsory and defend the country when it is at war.

In conclusion, citizens play an important role in democracy. There would be no democracy without the participation and commitment of the citizens. Citizens must be fully enlightened on their privileges and duties as without their awareness, a government may turn into a tyranny. Citizens should avoid any form of apathetic behavior towards their government but should participate with enthusiasm to ensure the survival of democracy and peaceful change of government. While being critical, citizens must not forget the public interest as this is important in maintaining development within the state.