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CHAPTER EIGHT: CITIZENS ROLE IN A DEMOCRACY.

Democracy is a system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives. There is no democracy without the engagement of citizens. Engagement is thus both a right and responsibility of citizens in establishing, developing and sustaining democracy. 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. Barriers to citizens participation are multiple in every country. They are both subtle and obvious, small and fordable, and based on numerous factors. For full citizenship to be achieved, we must remove these barriers, whether they are based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age or another status. The term Citizen is an inherently political meaning that implies a certain type of relationship between the people and government. Citizens have a set of right and responsibilities, including the right to participate in decisions that affect public welfare. In ancient Rome, it was considered a privileged status to be called a 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 is about being willing to contribute to social actions as well as to political debate, to be willing to get involved. Citizenship of a state may be acquired by either birth or by naturalization. The process by which an individual may voluntarily change his/her citizenship of a state to another state is known as naturalization. Citizenship can be perceived to be made up of, or be divided into civil citizenship, political citizenship and social citizenship. There are broader definitions and perceptions of citizenship as well as shown by Glover (2004:18), who argues that there are three dimensions of active citizenship: ethical citizenship, integrative citizenship 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 on its part, 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. Active participation aims to expose individuals diverse "views and beliefs and deepen their sense of interconnectedness with their fellow community members, including people unknown to them. Individuals' rights and liberties are the groundwork of the state since it exists to enable men to live and develop fully. In order to let the citizen have a share in the running of his/her government, a group of rights is very essential. These rights are not absolute since they are limited by the rights of other citizens in the states. A right may therefore be defined as a privilege or prerogative conferred by law upon a person or group.

The word democracy is derived from the Greek word “demos” meaning people and “kratos” meaning rule, that is “rule by the people” (Emiri 2003, cited in Ojo, 2015). The concept of democracy, like many other political concepts first originated from Ancient Greece where in the city states, 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 laborers, slaves and aliens from exercising political rights. The idea that all citizens, high or low, within the state are entitled to take part in the running of the affairs of their state was first advocated in England after the great Civil War of the seventeenth century (Olaniyan: 1982: 43). 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 of 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. According to him, democracy is a government of the people when it is designed to represent the common will of the citizenry within a state and that it is a government by the people when its ideological undercurrents is grounded in the peoples’ culture, also it is a government which is for the people when the power employed by the custodian of state emanates from, and resides in the collective mandate of the people (Dajibo, 2012 cited in Ojo, 2015: 166).

Since there is no single definition of democracy however, what can be deduce from the various definitions of democracy are the following features: the fundamental rights of the citizens is guaranteed, independent and impartial judiciary, existence of rule of law, freedom of press, periodic election that is free and fair. While the state provides rights and liberties, all citizens have duties to the state. Citizens are therefore expected to perform the following responsibilities in a democracy: a citizen should be willing to pay taxes, since without taxes to fund democratic government, there would be no democracy. A good citizen must have a duty to obey the law. A good citizen must refrain from uttering destructive criticisms but must be prepared to offer constructive alternatives to government politics. A citizen in a democracy should have the duty to vote. A good citizen must refrain from interference with the rights of other members of the community. He must not interfere with the properties of other persons. He should be honest, just in his personal dealings and hard working. Citizens must make their contributions to the advancement of the nation. He must appear before the courts as a witness when called upon to do so and serve in the army when military service is compulsory and defend the country when there’s war. He/she must support public education in every way possible, through the payment of taxes, through local volunteer efforts, through according the system the respect when it should be entitled. Public education is the foundation of democracy, meant to educate children to be responsible and knowledgeable participants in the democratic process. Education is power in a democracy because it strengthens citizens to be better informed and situated to interrogate policies.

Citizens play an important role in democracy. There would probably be no democracy without the co-operation and commitment of citizens. So therefore, citizens must be aware of their rights and responsibilities as without the awareness of among citizens, a government may turn into tyranny. Democracy assures fundamental rights for citizens like the right to vote, right to liberty, etc. citizens also have the duty in a democracy of ensuring that their rights are preserved by challenging government when it errs. Citizens must not lose sight of the pursuit of public interest. A positive attitude should be maintained with development of the state being the priority.