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**MATRIC NO: 19/MHS01/147**

**COURSE: GOVERNMENT**

**COURSE CODE: GST 203**

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **CITIZENS ROLES IN A DEMOCRACY**

Every citizen in a democracy has a right in choosing who occupies governmental offices through genuine elections. These percepts or rights possessed by the citizens are embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in modern constitutions. There is no democracy without the engagement of citizens. Citizen engagement serves a particular purpose to improve peoples' lives. Therefore for democracy to occur, citizens must become informed about issues that can improve their lives. They need to also know how politicians can employ that information for the good of the population. Citizens must also be free to express their views and work to see that government responds to them, thus holding those in government accountable. For full citizenship to be achieved, the barrier to citizen participation whether they are based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age or another status must be removed. Citizens must, therefore, gain knowledge 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 officials accountable. Therefore, democracy is the citizens and state's development to the effect that citizen's government, made by the citizens for the citizenry. It is the involvement or active participations of the people in governance that brings about development.

Some important concepts used in this context include:

- **Citizen/Citizenship:** To be citizens means to enjoy certain liberties and rights as opposed to the slaves who could not enjoy them. In reality, the essence of a state is to provide opportunities to enable citizens to live a good life. Citizens have a set of rights and responsibilities, including the right to participate in decisions that affect public welfare. The citizenship of a state may be acquired either by birth or by naturalization. That is if he or she is born in the state or his or her parents are citizens of the state. The conditions under which naturalization are conferred vary from country to country. According to the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, citizenship is acquired by every person born in Nigeria:
  - a. Before the date of independence either of whose parents or any of whose grandparents belongs or belonged to a community indigeneous to Nigeria; provided that a person shall become a citizen of Nigeria by virtue of this section if neither of his parents nor any of his grandparents was born in Nigeria.
  - b. After the date of independence either of whose parents or any of whose grandparents is a citizen of Nigeria; and
  - c. Born outside Nigeria either of whose parents is a citizen of Nigeria.

Citizenship can be divided into civil citizenship which is the right to protect individual liberty; political citizenship which 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 a community and lastly; social citizenship which embodies the claim that citizens ought to have access to those resources that allow them to live in a civilized existence in accordance with the standards prevailing in society. However, one of the

many definitions of citizenship is that it is not solely comprised of passive membership of a political entity, but that being active is an essential role of being a citizen.

According to Glover, there are three dimensions of active citizenship. They are:

- i. Ethical citizenship which understand active participation in a collective strive towards the public good as an essential feature of citizenship;
  - ii. Integrative citizenship which needs engagement in a wide sphere of participation that can go beyond formal political practices and institutions;
  - iii. Educative citizenship which is 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. These rights are absolute since they are limited by the rights of other citizens in the state but if by any chance the civil rights of a citizen are invaded by another citizen or government, he is entitled to seek redress in the court of law. A right may therefore be defined as a privilege or prerogative conferred by law upon a person or a group. When a privilege is expressed within the framework of the constitution of the state, it becomes a civil right. Examples of civil rights in the Nigerian constitution are: right to life, right to freedom of speech, right to work and many others.
  - **Democracy:** The word democracy is derived from the Greek word "demos" meaning people and "kratos" meaning rule. That is "rule of the people". The concept of democracy 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. In these assemblies, citizens were free to discuss state affairs, take decisions and exercise their political rights. Labourers, slaves and aliens were excluded from exercising political rights. Every citizen was expected to participate in the running of government. This is what is classified as a direct democracy, a system that enables people exercise authority themselves. 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.

There are various definitions of democracy for instance; according to Abraham Lincoln, democracy is the government of the people, by the people and for the people. Also, according to Maxey, the states and countries where the arrangements, constitutions and practices and the workings of the government are such that the individuals and his rights, freedoms and worth are ensured and guaranteed are usually referred to as democracies. Therefore there is no single definition of democracy, 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 and; periodic election that is free and fair.

Democratic citizens recognize that they not only have rights, they also have responsibilities to the state. Citizens are therefore expected to perform the following responsibilities in a democracy:

- a. A citizen in a democracy should have the duty to vote.
- b. A citizen should pay taxes.
- c. A good citizen must have a duty to obey the law.
- d. A good citizen refrain from uttering destructive criticisms but must be prepared to offer constructive alternatives to government policies.
- e. A good citizen must refrain from interference with the rights of the other members of the community.
- f. He or she 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.