EJUKONEMU BENITA AKPEVWOGHENE

OPTOMETRY

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CHAPTER 8

CITIZENS ROLES IN A 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 citizen’s views, thus holding those in government accountable.

Conceptual clarification

Citizen/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. Turner opens that citizenship is a formed legal identity that the individual person inherits through a collection of legal rights and obligations controlling access to the secure political, economic, and cultural resources of society. The process by which an individual may voluntarily change his/her citizenship of a state to another state is known as naturalization. The conditions under which naturalization are conferred vary from country to country.

Citizenship Is made up or can be divided into civil citizenship, political citizenship and social citizenship

*Civil citizenship* refers to the right necessary to protect individual liberty; *Political citizenship* is associated with participation in the democratic exercise of political power, either as a member of a political community or an individual elected by the members of such a community; *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 does not have just have one definition it means different things to different people. However, there are broader definitions and perceptions of citizenship as well, as shown by Glover (2004) who argues that there are three dimensions of active citizenship;

1. Ethical citizenship understands active participation in a collective strive towards the public good as an essential feature of citizenship
2. Integrative citizenship needs engagement in a wide sphere of participation that can go beyond formal political practices and institutions.
3. 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.

Citizen Rights

Individual’s rights and liberties are the ground work of the state since it exists to enable man to live and develop fully. Right entails some duties and responsibilities on the part of every citizen.

Democracy

Democracy derived its name from the Greek word “demos” meaning people and “kratos” meaning rule, that is “rule by the people”.

Features

1. The fundamental rights of the citizen is guaranteed
2. Independence 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 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 that must be prepared to offer constructive alternatives to government policies
5. A good citizen must refrain from interference with the right of other member of the community
6. He/she must support public education in every way possible, through the payment of taxes, through local volunteer efforts