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CHAPTER 8 – CITIZENS ROLES IN DEMOCRACY

Sovereignty resides in the hands of the citizens in a democratic state. They have rights to participate in the decision making of their country. These principles are incorporated in the universal declaration of human rights and in modern constitutions all over the world. They justify the definition of democracy by Abraham Lincoln which means the government, governmental processes and election belong to the people. Democracy thrives on the involvement of citizens in government. They must be informed about the issues affect them; they must be allowed to express their views as well as criticize the government constructively.

A citizen is an individual who has full constitutional rights and responsibilities, including the right to participate in decisions that affect public welfare. Non-citizens do not enjoy these rights.

Citizenship is the position or status of being a citizen. It is the relationship between an individual and a state to which the individual owes allegiance and in turn is entitled to its protection. Citizenship may be acquired either by birth or naturalization. A man becomes a citizen of a state if he is born within the territories of that state. When a man voluntarily changes his citizenship of a state it is known as naturalization. Citizenship by naturalization differs from one country to another. S.25 of the 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria defines 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 parents 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.

s.26 to s.32 stipulates the conditions a person must fulfill in order to become a naturalized citizen. According to Brannan, citizenship is about being willing to contribute to social action as well as to political debates, to be willing to get involved. To glover, there are three dimensions of active citizenship which include 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. According to Dagger, it is the process that develops a moral, practical and intellectual sense of self in individuals when the practice their citizenship. Kenny, a community development practitioner argues that contemporary constructions of citizenship can be understood by differentiating passive from active citizenship.

Right into some duties and responsibilities on the parts of every citizen. A right may be seen as a privilege conferred by the law upon a person. When a privilege is expressed within the framework of the constitution of the state, it becomes a civil right. If the civil rights of the Citizen are invaded by another citizen or the government, he is entitled to seek redress in the court of law. Examples of rights entrenched into the Nigerian constitution are:

* Right to life
* Right to work
* Right to freedom of religion
* Right to education
* Right of association and freedom of speech ETC

Etymologically, Democracy is gotten from the Greek word “demos” meaning people and “kratos ” meaning rule, altogether it means rule by the people. The concept of democracy originated from Ancient Greece where in the cities, citizens were free to meet frequently in assemblies which had the power to make laws. Every citizen was expected to participate in running the government. This method is called direct democracy. The Greeks excluded noncitizens like the laborers, slaves and aliens from exercising political rights. The idea was that all citizens no matter how low or high were entitled to participate in the decision making of the country. Abraham Lincoln the former president of the united states of America defined democracy as the “government of the people for the people by the people”. He stated that in a democracy the rights, freedoms and the value of individuals counts more than those of the states. The States exists to serve the individual and provide the conditions which make a full and happy life possible.

The following are the features of democracy:

* Freedom of press
* Fundamental human rights of citizens is guaranteed
* Existence of rule of law
* Periodic election
* Independence and impartial judiciary

Citizens have their responsibilities according to the provisions of the constitution. Democratic citizens recognize that they do not only have rights, they 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 of their society if they must benefit from its protection of the rights. For Democracy to succeed, citizens must be active, not passive. Also, government officials understand that all citizens must be treated equally. The following are responsibilities of citizens:

* Citizens have a duty to vote during elections
* Citizen should be willing to pay taxes
* A good citizen has a duty to obey the law
* A good citizen must refrain from uttering destructive criticism against government
* A good citizen must not trample on the rights of other citizens
* A good citizen must support public education in every way possible through payments of taxes.

Democracy is a system of government where the citizens directly elect the government by voting. Democracy is considered as the best form of government in this modern era.