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19/MHS01/009  
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Chapter 8: Citizens role in a Democracy

Sovereignty resides and flows in from people in a democracy. They have a collective right to choose their governmental, political and electoral systems as part of self determination. The people have a right to take part in governmental decisions and the authority of the government depends on the will of the people to partake in governmental elections.

These precepts are mentioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights(UDHR). They capture the foundation for the famous formulation that government is “for the people, of the people and by the people .” This just means that government, governmental processes and elections belong to the people. In short , everything regarding the government belongs to the people. There is no democracy without the engagement of citizens.

Thus, engagement is a right and a responsibility of all citizens to in establishing, developing and maintaining democracy.

Citizen engagement pursues the economic, social, cultural and political development, including the provision of opportunity, resources, security, and services. (Albright, 2012). Thus, citizen engagement in the government and its processes, most importantly elections will help greatly in improving the lives of the citizens.

For citizens to be informed, they need accurate and timely information, particularly government held information. Thus, transparency is a necessity for democracy.

Barriers to citizens participation are multiple in every country, subtle and obvious, small and formidable, and other numerous factors. For full citizenship to be achieved, all these barriers need to be overcome whether they are based on gender, race, age, ethnicity, and so on.

#### Conceptual clarification

Citizenship: This entails a certain type of relationship between the government and the people. Every citizen of a country has a set of rights and responsibilities.

Citizenship of a country can be acquired by birth or by nationalization.

Chapter 111, section 25(a) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria define citizenship as:

- a) Every person in Nigeria born before Independence Day either of whose parents or any grandparents belongs or belonged to a community indigenous to Nigeria is not a citizen of the country.
- b) Every person born after the Independence Day either of whose parents or any of the grandparents is a citizen of Nigeria.
- c) Every citizen born outside Nigeria of whose parents is a citizen.

Section 26 – 32 also stipulates the conditions which any person trying to naturalize must fulfill before becoming a citizen of Nigeria.

Citizenship is regarded to be made up of civil citizenship, social citizenship and political citizenship.

Civil citizenship refers to the rights necessary to protect individual liberty (eg freedom of speech, justice, the freedom to conclude valid contracts). Political citizenship is associated with participation in the democratic exercise of political power, either as a member of a political party (eg voter) or an individual elected by members of the said political community (eg 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 the society.

#### Citizens right

A right can be defined as a privilege conferred by law upon a person or group. Important civil rights accorded to persons or groups include right to life, right to fair hearing, right to public opinions, right to freedom of speech, right to freedom of association.

#### Democracy

Democracy is derived from the Greek word "demos" meaning people and "kratos" meaning that is "rule by the people".

Democracy is government for the people, by the people and for the people. According to Abraham Lincoln, former American president, defined it as government of the people in which the will of the people is expressed.

Since there is no single definition of democracy, however which can be deduced from The definition of democracy are

- 1) Freedom of press
- 2) Periodic elections
- 3) Independent and partial judiciary
- 4) Existence of rule of law
- 5) Fundamental rights of the citizens

#### Duties and responsibilities of citizens in a democracy

Democratic citizens not only have rights, they have responsibilities. For democracy to succeed, citizens must be active and positive.

#### Responsibilities of citizens in a democracy

- 1) A citizen is expected to vote.
- 2) A citizen should be willing to pay taxes
- 3) A good citizen must have a duty to obey the law
- 4) A good citizen should not interfere in the rights of other citizens