

NAME: ESHIET MFONOBONG UDO

MATRIC NO: 19/MHS01/161

DEPARTMENT: MBBS

COLLEGE: MHS

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REVIEW OF CITIZENS ROLE IN A DEMOCRACY, 'IN SALIENT ISSUES IN GOVERNMENT AND NIGERIA'S POLITICS

Sovereignty resides in and flows from the people in a democracy. They have a collective right to choose their governmental, political and electoral systems as part of self-determination. The authority of government likewise derives from will of the people in their choice of these systems, and the people have a right to take part in their government, including through genuine elections to determine who will legitimately occupy governmental offices.

Citizen engagement is not an abstraction; it takes tangible forms and serves particular purposes to improve peoples' lives. Citizen engagement pursues economic, social, cultural and political development.

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 government accountable.

Barriers to citizen participation are multiple in every country. They are subtle and obvious, small and formidable, 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.

In order to enhance their meanings as used within the context of this paper, it is important to clarify a few concepts; the term citizen has an inherently political meaning that implies a certain type of relationship between the people and government. 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. Citizenship of a state may be acquired either by birth or by naturalism. Citizenship determined by the place of birth is fundamental in the laws of most countries.

Chapter 111, section 25: 1(a) of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria defines citizenship as;

- (a) Every person born in Nigeria before the date of independence, either of whose parents or any of whose grandparents 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.
- (b) Every person born in Nigeria after the date independence either of whose parents or any of whose grandparent is a citizen of Nigeria; and

(c) Every person born outside Nigeria either of whose parents is a citizen of Nigeria.

Citizenship can be perceived to be made up of, or be divided into civil citizenship, political citizenship, and social citizenship.

However, as with many other concepts, citizenship does not have just one definition, it means different things to different people.

Citizens' rights; individuals and liberties are the groundwork of the state since it exists to enable men to live and develop fully. These rights are not absolute since they are limited by the rights of other citizens in the state. A right may therefore be defined as a privilege or prerogative conferred by law upon a person or a group.

Democracy; it has been etymologically established that 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 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.

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 people's culture.

Due to numerous definitions of democracy, what can be deduced are the following features; (i) the fundamental rights of the citizens is guaranteed, (ii) independent and impartial judiciary, (iii) existence of rule of law, (iv) freedom of press, (v) periodic election that is free and fair.

Therefore, while the state provides rights and liberties, all citizens have duties to the state. Democratic citizens recognize that democracy requires they have responsibilities. Some of the responsibilities include duty to vote, willingness to pay taxes to fund a democratic government, duty to the law, refrain from uttering destructive criticism but be prepared to offer constructive alternatives to government policies, and so on.

Citizens play an important role in democracy. Besides the rights, citizens must be critical of what the government does. A positive attitude should be maintained with development of the state being the priority.