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CHAPTER EIGHT**: CITIZENS ROLES IN A DEMOCRACY**

The people in democracy determines sovereignty as it resides in and flow from them. They have collective rights to be able to choose their government, political and electoral systems as part of self-determination. Likewise, the authority of the government derives from the will of the people in their choice of these systems.

These precepts are embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in modern constitutions in the world over. They capture the foundation for the famous formulation that democratic government is “of the people, by the people and for the people”. There is no democracy without the engagement of citizens. Engagement is thus both a right and responsibility of citizens in establishing, developing, and sustaining democracy.

For democracy to deliver, citizens must be informed about issues that can improve their lives. To be informed, citizens need accurate and timely info ration, particularly government-held information. That is why transparency is a necessity for democracy. Barriers to citizen participation are multiple in every country and are based on numerous factors. For full citizenship to be achieved, these barriers must be removed whether it is based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age or other various factors.

**Conceptual Clarifications**

Citizen/Citizenship

This term has an inherent political meaning that implies a certain type of relationship between the people and government. All citizens have a set of rights and responsibilities including the right to participate in decisions that affect public welfare.

It was considered a privileged status to be called a citizen because the status was not accorded to all inhabitants of the Roman Empire in Rome. Slaves, serfs, and some alien residents were deprived of citizenship for racial, political, and religious reasons.

Citizenship of a state may be acquired either by birth or by naturalization. Citizenship by birth is fundamental in the laws of most countries while the process by which an individual may involuntarily change his/her citizenship of a state to another state is known as naturalisation .

Citizenship can be divided into civil citizenship, political citizenship, and social citizenship. Citizenship is about being willing to contribute to social action as well as political debate. To ensure full citizenship, people must be empowered to participate in the continual process of shaping their society, their communities and their identities

Citizen’s Rights

A right can be referred to as a privilege or prerogative conferred by law upon a person or a group. Rights enable citizen to live and develop fully as they are the groundwork of the state. Rights entails some duties and responsibilities on the part of every citizen. These rights are not absolute since they are limited by the rights of other citizens in the state.

Democracy

Democracy is derived from the greek word “demos” meaning people and “kratos” meaning rule that is “rule by the people”. Democratic citizens know that they not only have rights, they have responsibilities. For democracy to succeed, citizens must be active because the success or failure of the government is their responsibility. Citizens have to do their part for things to be successful.

Citizens play an important role in democracy. There would probably be no democracy without the co-operation and commitment of citizens. Democracy ensures basic fundamental rights for citizens. This can be achieved by citizens ensuring rulers are accountable. Citizens also have a duty in democracy of ensuring that their rights are preserved by challenging government when it errs.