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CHAPTER 8

### CITIZENS ROLES IN DEMOCRACY

Citizens have the right to take part in their government by choosing their systems through genuine elections to determine who will legitimately occupy governmental offices. It also captures the foundation for the famous formulation that democratic government is of the people, by the people and for the people which means governments purposes belong to the people and the elections belong to the people, there is no democracy without the engagement of the citizens. For democracy to deliver, citizens must become informed about issues that can improve their lives, for them to be informed they need accurate and timely information, particularly government held information. Access to information is essential to an informed citizenry, this is why transparency is a necessity for democracy.

Barriers to citizen participation are multiple in every country for full citizenship to be achieved, we must remove these barriers if not universal and equal suffrage is essentially denied and government credibility is undetermined. Citizens therefore need knowledge to make decisions about policy choices and the proper use of authority. Thus, there is a symbiotic relationship between democracy, the citizens and state development.

Citizen/Citizenship- The term citizen has an inherently political meaning that implies a certain relationship between the people and the government. Citizens have a set of rights and responsibilities including the right to participate in decisions that affect public welfare. In Rome the privilege to be called a citizen was not given to anyone but in the modern states confer citizens on practically their whole residents or populations. Citizenship of a state may be required either by birth or naturalization. A man who becomes a citizen of a particular state if his parents are citizens of that state. On the other hand, the process whereby the citizen voluntarily changes his/her citizenship of a state to another state is known as naturalization. Section 26(1) to section 32 also stipulates the conditions which any person that is trying to naturalise must fulfil before he or she can be registered as a citizen of Nigeria.

Citizenship can be divided into civil, political and social citizenship, Civil citizenship refers to the rights necessary to protect individual rights, necessary to protect individual liberty, political citizenship is associated with the participation in the democratic exercise of political power, either as a member of a political community and social



citizenship embodies that claim that citizens ought to have access to those resources that allow them live a civilized existence. Citizenship means different things to different people. For example, Brannan et .al (2006:55) argues that citizenship is not solely comprised of passive membership but being active is a an essential of being a citizen. For them active citizenship is someone who volunteers in public service provision. Glover (2007:18) who argues that there are three dimensions of active citizenship; ethical, integrative and educative. Ethical citizenship understands that active participation as a strive towards the public good as a an essential feature of citizenship. Integrative citizenship needs engagement in a wide sphere of participation that can go beyond formal political parties and institutions. Educative citizenship refers to the process that develops moral, practical and intellectual sense of self in individuals when they practice their citizenship.

**Citizen rights-** A right may therefore be defined as a privilege or prerogative conferred by law upon a person or group. when a privilege is expressed within the framework of the constitution or state it becomes a civil right. If the civil right are invaded by any other person or the government, he is entitled to seek redress in the court of law.

**Democracy-** The word democracy is derived from the greek word "demos" meaning people and "kratos" meaning rule that is "rule by the people". Abraham Lincoln, former president perceived democracy as the government of the people by the people and for the people. Some features of democracy are:

- The fundamental rights of the citizens is guaranteed
- Independent and impartial judiciary
- Existence of the rule of law
- Freedom of press
- Periodic election that is free and fair

Duties and responsibilities of citizens in a democracy

- A citizen in a democracy must have the right to vote
- A citizen should be willing to pay taxes and be able to fund the government
- A good citizen must have the duty to obey the law
- A good citizen must refrain from interference with the rights of other members of the community
- He or she must support public education in every way possible

In conclusion, Democracy is a system of government where the citizens elect their



government by voting. It is considered as the best form of government in this modern era. Citizens must do everything to save democracy as it is a plus for citizens that are born in a democratic country. Citizens play an important role in democracy and a positive attitude should be maintained with development of the state being the priority.

