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CHAPTER 8

CITIZENS ROLES IN A DEMOCRACY

Introduction

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

For democracy to deliver, citizens must become informed about issues that can improve their life. They must be free to come together to express their views and preferences and work to see that government responds to citizens view, thus holding those in government accountable. To be informed citizens need accurate and timely information, including government-held information.

Barriers to citizen participation are multiple in every country. They are both 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.

Conceptual clarifications

In order to enhance their meaning as used within the context of this paper, it is important to clarify a few concepts.

Citizen/ citizenship

The term citizen has an inherently political meaning that implies a certain type of relationship between the people and government. Citizens have a set of rights and responsibilities, including the right to participate in decisions that affect public welfare. Citizens of a state may be either by birth or naturalization. A man becomes a citizen of a particular state if his parents are citizens of that state or if he is born within the territory of that state. On the other hand, the process in which an individual may voluntarily change his/her citizenship of a state to another state is known as naturalization. Chapter 111, section 25: 1(a) of the Constitution of the federal Republic of Nigeria define citizenship as:

- (a) Every person born in Nigeria before the date of independence, either of whose parents or any of those grandparents belong/belonged to a community indigenous to Nigeria 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;
- (b) Every person born in Nigeria after the date of independence either of whose parents or any of whose grandparents is a citizenship of Nigeria.
- (c) Every person born outside Nigeria either of whose parents is a citizenship of Nigeria.

However, there are broader definitions and perceptions of citizenship as well, as shown by Glover (2004:18) who argues that there are three dimensions of active citizenship: ethnical citizenship, integrative citizenship, and educative citizenship.

Citizen's Rights

Individual's rights and liberties are the groundwork of the state since it exists to enable men to live and develop fully. In order to let the citizen have a share in the running of his/her government, a group of right is very essential. These rights are not absolute since they are limited by the rights of other citizens in the state. A right may be defined as a privilege or prerogative conferred by law upon a person or a group. Important civil rights accorded Nigerian citizens in its constitution include: the right to life, the right to work, right to freedom of religion, right to education, right of association and right to freedom of speech, writing and publication among others.

Democracy

It has been etymology established that the word democracy is derived from the Greek word "demos meaning people and kratos meaning rule, that is 'rule by people' (Emiri, 2003, cited in Ojo, 2015). The concept of democracy like many other political concepts first originated from Ancient Greece. Johnston (2000:23) classified direct democracy as a system that enables people exercise authority themselves. Abraham Lincoln, former American president also 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 repeat the common will of the citizens within a state and that it is a government by the people when its ideological undercurrents is grounded in the peoples culture, also, it is a government which is for the people when the power employed by the custodians of state business emanates from, and resides in the collective mandate of the people (Dajibo, 2012 cited in Ojo, 2015: 166). since there is no single definition of democracy however, what can be deduce form the various definitions of democracy are the followings features:

- i. The fundamentals 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.

Duties and Responsibilities of Citizens in a democracy

Citizens are expected to perform the following responsibilities in a democracy.

- a. A citizen in a democracy should have the duty to vote.
- b. A citizen should be willing to pay taxes, since without taxes to fund a democratic government, there will be no democracy.
- c. A good citizen must have a duty to obey the law.
- d. A good citizen must refrain from uttering destructive criticisms but must be prepared to offer constructive alternatives to government policies.
- e. A good citizen must refrain from the interference with the rights of other members of the community.
- f. He/she must support public education in every way possible.