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MATRIC NUMBER: 19/MHS01/373

**REVIEW OF CHAPTER 8: CITIZENS ROLES IN A DEMOCRACY**

People in a democracy have a collective right to choose their governmental, political and electoral systems as part of self-determination. The authority of government likewise derives from the 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. For democracy to deliver, citizens must become informed about issues that can improve their lives. To be informed, citizens need accurate and timely information, particularly government-held information. Access to information is essential to an informed citizenry.

Barriers to citizen participation are multiple in every country. For full citizenship to be achieved, we must remove these barriers, whether they are based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age or another status. If not, universal and equal suffrage is essentially denied, and governmental credibility is undermined. Citizens must, therefore, understand ideas about citizenship, politics and government.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

**Citizen/Citizenship**: The term citizen has an inherently political meaning that implies a certain type of 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. Citizenship of a state may be acquired either by birth or by 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. Citizenship determined by the place of birth is fundamental in the laws of most countries. On the other hand, the process by which an individual may voluntarily change his/her citizenship of a state to another state is known as naturalization.

Chapter III, section 25: 1(a) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria define citizenship as:

1. Every person born in Nigeria before the date of independence, either whose parents or any of whose grandparents belongs or 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 was born in Nigeria;
2. Every person born in Nigeria after the date of independence either of whose parents or any of whose grandparents is a citizen of Nigeria; and
3. 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. Civil citizenship refers to the rights necessary to protect individual liberty (e.g., freedom of speech); political citizenship is associated with participation in the democratic exercise of political power, either as a member of a political community (e.g., voter) or as an individual elected by the members of such a community (e.g., a politician); and 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 society. Citizenship is about being willing to contribute to social action as well as to political debate, to be willing to get involved.

**Citizen’s Rights:** In order to let the citizen have a share in the running of his/her government, a group of rights is very essential. 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 group. When a privilege is expressed within the framework of the constitution of the state, it becomes a civil right. If the civil rights of a citizen are invaded by another citizen or the government, he is entitled to seek redress in the court of law. Important civil rights accorded Nigerian citizens in its constitution include: the right to life, right to work, right of freedom of religion, among others.

**Democracy**: Etymologically, the word democracy is derived from the Greek word “demos” meaning people and “kratos” meaning rule, that is “rule by the people.” Former American President, Abraham Lincoln, 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, 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.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CITIZENS IN A DEMOCRACY

While the state provides rights and liberties, all citizens have duties to the state. Democratic citizens recognize that they not only have rights, they have responsibilities. Citizens are therefore expected to perform the following responsibilities in a democracy:

1. A citizen in a democracy should have the duty to vote.
2. A citizen should be willing to pay taxes, since without taxes to fund a democratic government, there will be no democracy.
3. A good citizen must have a duty to obey the law.
4. A good citizen must refrain from uttering destructive criticisms but must be prepared to offer constructive alternatives to government policies.
5. A good citizen must refrain from interference with the rights of other members of the community.
6. A good citizen must support public education in every way possible, through according this system the respect to which it should be entitled.

Citizens play an important role in democracy. There would probably be no democracy without the co-operation and commitment of citizens. Citizens must be aware of their rights and responsibilities as without the awareness among the citizens, a government may turn into a tyranny.