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**CITIZENS ROLES IN A DEMOCRACY**

Sovereignty dwells in and flows from the people in a democracy, also giving them the right to choose their governmental, political and electoral systems. Firstly, governmental authorities are being derived from the will of the citizens. Also, the people have rightful participation in government which includes genuine election for those who will occupy governmental offices legitimately.

These principles are included in the **“Universal Declaration of Human Rights”** {UDHR} and in modern constitutions of the world. They also capture the famous doctrine that democracy is **“of the people, by the people, and for the people”.** This emphasizes that there cannot be democracy without the engagement of the citizens. It has been established that for democracy to be effective, citizens have to be aware of the issues and information that can change their lives; they need accurate and timely information particularly government-held information.

There are however several barriers to citizens’ participation which are based on various factors. These barriers must be discarded for the achievement of full citizenship irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age, or status. Also, the citizens must understand the ideas about citizenship, politics and government because this knowledge will help them make the right decisions about policy making, the appropriate use of power, voicing out their concerns, and the ability to hold public officials accountable.

**CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS**

It is crucial to clarify a few concepts which include;

* Citizen/Citizenship
* Citizen’s Right
* Democracy
* Duties and Responsibilities of Citizens in a democracy

**CITIZEN/CITIZENSHIP**

The term “citizen” has a political meaning which refers to a certain type of relationship between the people and government. Citizen’s participation in government is seen as an instrumental driver of democratic and socio-economic change, and also as an empowerment. Citizenship of a state may be acquired through “birth” or by “naturalization”. Chapter 111, section 25: 1(a) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Section 26(1) to Section 32 defines what citizenship is and also stipulates the conditions for people to become citizens through naturalization. Citizenship can also be divided into; **“civil citizenship, political citizenship and social citizenship”.** It is also important to note that there are many definitions of citizenship as there are many definers of it. Examples of some of them are:

* Brannan et al., (2006:55) – argued that the concept of citizenship holds that it is not solely comprised of passive membership of a political entity, but being willing active is essential to being a citizen.
* Glover (2004:18) – definitions and perceptions of citizenship
* Dagger (1997)- educative citizenship
* Kenny (a community development practitioner) argued that contemporary constructions of citizenship can be understood by differentiating passive from active from passive citizens.

**CITIZENS’ RIGHTS**

Individual’s rights and liberties are the groundwork of the state because it enables men to live and develop. Rights entail some duties and responsibilities on the part of every citizen. Rights are the privilege or prerogative conferred by law upon a person or a group. However, a citizen whose right has been invaded by another citizen can seek redress in the court of law. Important civil rights accorded Nigerian citizens in its constitution include: **“right to life, 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**

Etymologically, democracy is derived from the Greek word **“demos”** meaning people and **“kratos”** meaning rule (rule by the people). The concept of democracy originated from Ancient Greece where in city states, citizens were free to meet frequently in assemblies which had the power to make law. These citizens were free to discuss matters concerning the states, take decisions and also exercise their political rights. However, since there is no single definition of democracy, the various definitions of democracy have the following features which are;

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

**DUTIES AND RESPNSIBILITIES OF CITIZENS IN A DEMOCRACY**

While the state provides rights and liberties, so do citizens have duties to the state. Democratic citizens do not only have rights but also have responsibilities and they also are aware that democracy requires an investment of time and hard work. They also must bear the burdens of responsibilities for the society if they are to benefit for the protection of their rights. Citizens must not be passive but active for democracy to succeed knowing fully well that the success or failure of their government lies with them. Some of the various responsibilities which citizens are expected to perform include; **“duty to vote, payment of taxes, obedience to the law, refraining from uttering destructive criticism but must offer constructive alternatives to government policies, refraining from interfering with the rights of other members of the community and supporting public education in every way possible”.**

Conclusively, the citizens play an important role in democracy and there would probably be no democracy without the co-operation and commitment of citizens. Therefore, a positive attitude should be maintained with the development of the state being the priority.