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Do a two-page review of Chapter 8, Citizens Role in a Democracy, In Salient issues in Governance and Nigeria’s politics.

ANSWER:

For democracy to deliver, citizens must be informed about the issues that can improve their lives. The citizens must be free to come together in order to express their views, rights and works to see that the government responds to their views, thus holding those in government accountable. To be informed, citizens need accurate and timely information, particularly government-held information. Access to information is important to an informed citizenry. This is why transparency is a necessity for democracy.

The term citizen has an inherently political meaning that implies a certain type of relationship between the people and government. A citizen is a legal member who possesses a set of rights and duties, including the right to participate in decisions that affect public welfare. In ancient Rome, it was seen as a privilege to be called citizen because the status was not accorded to all inhabitants of the Roman Empire. Slaves, serfs and some alien residents were deprived citizenship for racial, political or religious reasons. To be a citizen means to enjoy certain liberties and rights as opposed to the slaves who could not enjoy them.

Citizenship of a state may be acquired either by birth or naturalisation. 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 by which an individual voluntarily change his/her citizenship of a state to another state is known as naturalisation. Chapter 111, section 25:1(a) (b) and (c) of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria defined citizenship. Section 26(1) to section 32 stipulates the conditions which any person that is trying to naturalize must fulfil before he or she can be registered as a citizen of Nigeria. Citizenship is divided into:

* Civil citizenship: refers to rights necessary to protect individuals Liberty eg freedom of speech, justice
* Political citizenship: this is associated with the participation in the democratic exercise of political power, either as a member of a political community or as an individual elected by the members of the community
* Social citizenship: it embodies that citizens are meant to have access to resources that allows them to live a civilized life, in accordance with the standards prevailing in society

**Citizens’ Rights:** Citizen’s rights and liberties are the groundwork of the state since it exists to enable men to live and develop fully. In order to have the citizens to 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 the other citizens in the state. Rights entail some duties and responsibilities on the part of the citizens. A right is a privilege 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. Important civil rights in the Nigerian 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 is derived from the Greek word *demos* meaning people and *kratos* meaning rule, that is “rule by the people.” Democracy originated from ancient Greece. Direct democracy is a system that enables people exercise authority themselves. There is no single definition of democracy, what can be deduced from the other definitions are that the fundamental rights of citizens are guaranteed, there is an existence of an independent and impartial judiciary, there is existence of rule of law, freedom of press and the periodic elections that is free and fair. Abraham Lincoln conceived Democracy as government of the people, by the people and for the people. The state exists to serve the individual and provide the conditions which make a full and which make a full and happy life possible **(Maxey, 2010: 53).** Some features that can be deduced from the various definitions of democracy 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 responsibilities of Citizen in a Democracy**

All citizens have duties to the state. Democratic citizens recognize that not only do they have rights, but they also have responsibilities to the state if they are to benefit from its protection of their rights. In order for democracy to succeed, citizens of the state must be active, not passive. This is because they know that the success or failure of the government is their responsibility and no one else’s. Therefore, citizens are expected to perform the following responsibilities in a democracy:

* A citizen in a democracy should have the duty to vote
* A citizen should be willing to pay taxes
* A good citizen must have a duty to obey the law
* A good citizen must refrain from uttering destructive criticism but must be prepared to offer constructive alternatives to government policies
* A good citizen must refrain from interference with the rights of other members of the community