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**CITIZENS ROLES IN A DEMOCRACY**

The Universal Declaration of human rights and all modern constitutions all over the world represent the basis for the famous conception that democratic government is “of the people, by the people, and for the people.” Democracy cannot be possible without the involvement of citizens and it is a right and the responsibility of citizens to establish, develop and sustain democracy. The involvement of citizens in democracy promotes economic, social, cultural and political development as well as the provision of opportunity, resources, services and security.

In order for democracy to work, citizens must have access to certain information that involves matters that affect their lives and be able to freely express their views and opinions about said matter and ensure that government works according to those views as well as how government intends to use the information for the good of the citizens, hence the need for transparency in a democracy.

In every country there are several restrictions placed which prevent the realization of full citizenship and while some are subtle others are quite obvious and they are all brought on due to various aspects which might either be race, gender, age, ethnicity, religion or any other status. These barriers need to be eradicated, hence, citizens need to understand the ideas about citizenship, politics and government, in order for citizens to be well informed and be able to make proper decisions about policy choices and the proper use of authority as well as the skills to voice their opinions, act collectively and hold public officials accountable.

The word citizen has a naturally political meaning that suggests a particular type of relationship between the people and the government. Being a citizen involves having a set of rights and responsibilities which includes partaking in decisions that affect public welfare. In ancient Rome, it was a privilege to be called a citizen as it meant the ability to enjoy certain liberties and rights while other people such as slaves, serfs and some alien residents were denied this right due to racial, political or religious reasons. Modern states grant citizens on basically their entire residents or populations.

Citizenship of a state may be gained either by birth or by naturalisation. A man becomes a citizen of particular state if his parents are citizens of that state or if he is born within the boundaries of that state. Citizenship determined by the place of birth is fundamental in the laws of most countries and for that reason, citizenship, according to turner is a formal legal identity that the individual person inherits through a collection of legal rights and obligations, controlling access to the scarce political, economic and cultural resources of society. Citizenship by naturalisation on the other hand refers to the process by which an individual may voluntarily change his/her citizenship of a state to another.

Citizenship can as well be divided into three, these are; civil citizenship which refers to the rights necessary to protect individual liberty, political citizenship which involves engaging in the democratic exercise of political power either as a member of a political community or as an individual elected by the member of such a community and social citizenship which represents the case that citizens should have access to resources that allow them to live a civilised existence in accordance with the standards prevailing in the society. Although, the concept of citizenship has been awarded various definitions by different people as it has a different meaning to different people.

Citizens of a state have a set of individual rights and liberties which exist to enable men to live and develop fully, hence, a right may be defined as a privilege granted by law upon a person or group. A civil right is a privilege expressed within the framework of the constitution of a state. Some civil rights under the Nigerian constitution includes; right to life, right to freedom of speech, right to education, etc.

Democracy, etymologically is derived from the Greek word “demos” meaning people and “kratos” meaning rule, hence, it is a rule by the people. The concept of democracy was originated in ancient Greece where, in the city states citizens were free to meet frequently in assemblies which had the power to make laws and were free to discuss state affairs and exercise their political rights but the Greek democracy was limited as it prevented labourers, slaves and aliens from exercising their political rights. However, the concept that all citizens no matter their status, within the state are given the right to take part in the running of affairs of their state was first encouraged in England after the great civil war of the seventeenth century. Today democracy is associated with the free discussion of political views, the right to differ concerning them and the settlement of differences through elections.

Democracy has certain features which have been adopted from its various definitions. In a democracy the fundamental rights of the citizens are guaranteed. A democracy must also have an independent and impartial judiciary. There must also be the existence of rule of law in a democracy as well as the freedom of press and the conduction of a periodic election that is free and fair.

In a democracy all the citizens have duties to the state. In order for democracy to succeed citizens must be active because the success or failure of the government is their responsibility hence citizens are expected to perform certain responsibilities. A citizen in a democracy should have the duty to vote; a citizen should be willing to pay taxes; a good citizen must obey the law; a good citizen must refrain from expressing destructive criticisms but rather give constructive substitutes to government policies; a good citizen must avoid conflict with the rights of other members of the community and he/she must support public education in every way possible.

Citizens of a democracy must be aware pf their rights and responsibilities and always ensure that their rights are preserved by ensuring that the government is accountable and by checking how various institutions are working as the interest of the public and the development of the state is the top priority.