

Citizen's Roles in Democracy

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.

Citizenship of a state may be acquired either by birth or by 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. 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 naturalisation. The conditions are (a) Every person born in Nigeria after the date of independence either of whose parents or any of whose grand parents is a citizen of Nigeria (b) 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. Civil citizenship refers to the rights necessary to protect individual liberty. Political citizenship is associated with participation in the democratic exercise of power, either as a member of a political community or as an individual elected by the members of such community. 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.

A citizen's right is defined as a privilege or prerogative conferred by law upon a person or

or group. When a privilege is expressed within the framework of the constitution of the state, it becomes a civil right. Civil rights accorded to Nigerian citizens includes: (i) right to life (ii) right to work (iii) right to freedom of religion (iv) right to education etc

Democracy is derived from the word "demos" which is of greek origin meaning "people" and "kratos" meaning "rule by the people". The concept of democracy, like many other political concepts first originated from Greece wherein citizens were free to meet frequently in assemblies which had the power to make laws. In these assemblies, citizens were free to discuss state affairs, take decisions and exercise their political rights. The Greek democracy was limited in that it excluded labourers, slaves and aliens from exercising political rights.

Abraham Lincoln, former president, 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. Since the concept of democracy is too broad and cannot be said to have one definite definition, there are important key points we can deduce from people who have tried to define it and they are called features of democracy which are;

- i) The fundamental rights of the citizens is guaranteed
- ii) Independent and impartial judiciary
- iii) Existence of rule of law
- iv) Freedom of press
- v) Periodic election.

There is a saying in free societies; you get the government you deserve. For democracy to succeed

Citizens must be active, not passive, because they know that the success or failure of the government is their responsibility, and no one else's. In turn government officials understand that all citizens should be treated equally. The following are responsibilities of a citizen (i) Voting (ii) Payment of taxes (iii) A good citizen must refrain from uttering destructive criticisms but must be prepared to offer constructive alternatives to government policies (iv) A good citizen must refrain from interference with the right of other members of the community (v) A good citizen must obey the law. All these responsibilities are aimed at establishment a good governance of the government.