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A Review of chapter 8; Citizens Roles in a Democracy

Democracy according to Abraham Lincoln is “government of the people, by the people and for the people”. That is to say that the people cannot be exempted from the government in a democracy and the sovereignty of the democracy belongs to the people. Transparency is also important in democracy, as this helps the people know what the government is doing to turn their lives around and in what direction. Lack of transparency of the government among others hinders the participation of citizens in a democratic system and if the citizens cannot perform as is needed; the credibility of the government becomes questionable.

To fully grasp the roles of a citizen in a democratic system of government, certain concepts must be understood. Among these are; citizen, citizenship, citizens’ rights and democracy. The chapter explained what it means to be a citizen thus “the term citizen has an inherently political meaning that implies a certain type of relationship between the people and the government”. In ancient Rome, being called a citizen was a huge deal for most people as not everyone who stayed in Rome was awarded with the title ‘citizen’ and they were justified to feel elated when they were given the status of citizen. The state exists to provide opportunities to enable citizens to live a good life. To become a citizen of a state, one must qualify in certain aspects in order to be awarded with citizenship. One can become a citizen either by birth or naturalization, but citizenship by naturalization is subject the laws governing the state.

Like most concepts, citizenship does not have just a single definition, but it is perceived to be divided into, civil citizenship, political citizenship and social citizenship. Civil citizenship are rights necessary to make sure the individuals enjoy liberty; political citizenship is associated with participating in politics either as a contestant during elections or as a voter; and social citizenship entails that citizens are supposed to be given access to living a civilized existence in a society. The chapter brought into account Glover’s attempt at expanding the scope of the term ‘citizenship’. He argued that there are three dimensions of active citizenship: ethical citizenship, integrative citizenship and educative citizenship. It was then concluded, that however one chose to see citizenship, it bows down to the simple definition of citizenship, where it is seen as a privilege status conferred by states on its people either by birth or by voluntary change of one’s citizenship from one state to another (naturalization).

To understand what is meant by Citizen’s right, you must first understand what a right is. A right is a privilege bestowed on a person or a group of people by the law of a state. Therefore, citizens’ rights are privileges that citizens of a state enjoy that are ensured by the law. It is important to note that when it comes to rights they are not absolute. That is to say that your right is limited by the rights of other citizens in the state.

Etymologically, the word democracy is of Greek origin having been derived from Greek words *demos* and *kratos* meaning, people and rule respectively. Therefore, democracy is the rule by the people. Democracy must exhibit the following features; guaranteed fundamental rights of the citizens, independent and impartial judiciary, the existence of rule of law, freedom of press and periodic election that is free and fair.

Now, while it is true that the state has to provide opportunities and rights to citizens to make their life easier, the citizens have a part to play as well to see that democracy runs smoothly and that is where the issue of responsibilities of citizens arises. As it is said, “you get the government you deserve”. If citizens don’t play their part and take up their responsibilities, the state won’t be able to cater for their every need. And some of their responsibilities include; Voting, Paying taxes, obeying the law of the state, Offering constructive alternatives to government policies, respecting the rights of other members of the community and supporting public education to the best of their abilities. All these tasks should be carried out willingly and effectively in order for the citizen’s contribution to hold water.