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Citizens Roles in A Democracy

There is no democracy without the participation of the citizens. They have the right and responsibility to choose their governmental, political, and electoral systems. Participation of citizens in democracy helps to establish, sustain and develop it. Citizens must be informed for democracy to deliver. They must be able to express their perspective and preferences and work to see that government responds to their needs therefore holding government accountable for its actions and inactions. There are multiple situations in which citizens cannot participate in democracy which may be based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age or another status. Whatever the reason we must conquer it so as for full citizenship to be achieved. Citizens must also be knowledgeable in the matters of citizenship, politics and government in order to be able to make decisions about policy choices and the proper use of authority.

To further understand the roles of citizens in democracy one needs to understand the meaning of some concepts. The term citizen has an inherently political meaning that implies a certain type of relationship between the people and the government. Citizens have the right to participate in the decisions that affect public welfare. According to Turner, citizenship 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. It can be acquired by birth i.e. if either of your parents are citizens or if you were born within the geographical region of the state, or by naturalization i.e. a situation where one freely changes their citizenship of a state to another state. The conditions for citizenship by naturalization differs in each state.

Citizenship can also be divided into three: civil citizenship, which refers to the privileges required to protect individual freedom, political citizenship, which involves engaging in the democratic exercise of political power, either as a member of a political group or as an individual chosen by a member of such a community, and social citizenship, which is the case cited above. Nonetheless, the term of citizenship has been given various meanings by different individuals as it has a different significance for different individuals.

People of a state have a collection of individual rights and freedoms that exist to allow men to fully live and grow, so a right can be defined as a privilege given to a person or community by statute. Within the context of the constitution of a state, a civil right is a privilege conveyed. Under the Nigerian constitution, such fundamental rights include the right to life, the right to freedom of expression, the right to education, etc.

Etymologically, democracy is derived from the Greek word "demos" meaning citizens and "kratos" means law, because it is a people's rule. The idea of democracy originated in ancient Greece, where people were free to meet regularly in city states in assemblies that had the authority to make laws and were free to address state affairs and exercise their political rights, but Greek democracy was restricted because it prohibited peasants, slaves and aliens from exercising their political rights. However, the notion that all people within the state, regardless of their status, be granted the right to engage in the running of their state's affairs was first encouraged in England after the seventeenth century's great civil war. Democracy today is related to the open debate of political opinions, the right to disagree and the resolution of disagreements by elections.

Democracy has some characteristics taken from its different meanings that have been adopted. The basic rights of people are guaranteed in a democracy. A democracy must also have a judiciary that is autonomous and impartial. In a democracy, there must also be the presence of the rule of law, as well as the freedom of the press and the free and equal conduct of periodic elections.

Both people have responsibilities to the state in a democracy. In order for democracy to succeed, people must be involved because their duty is the success or failure of the government, so that citizens are required to fulfil those duties. A citizen should have the duty to vote in a democracy; a citizen should be able to pay taxes; a good citizen must follow the law; a good citizen must refrain from expressing negative critiques, but rather give government policies positive substitutes; a good citizen must avoid interfering with the rights of other community citizens and must support public education in any way.

Democratic people need to be aware of their rights and obligations and always ensure that their rights are protected by ensuring that the government is accountable and by checking how different institutions operate as the public interest and the state's growth is the top priority.