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CHAPTER 8

CITIZENS ROLE IN A DEMOCRACY

For democracy to deliver, citizens must become informed about issues that can improve their lives. They must be free to come together to express their views and preferences and work to see that government to citizens views, thus holding those in government accountable. To be informed, citizens need accurate and timely information. particularly government-held information. They need to learn from those who compete in politics how politicians intend to employ that information for the good of the population. Access to information is essential to an informed citizenry. That is why transparency is a necessity for democracy. Citizens, including political competitors, must also be free to impart their views about governmental processes and public affairs, otherwise citizens cannot be truly informed, nor can they freely take choices.

Barriers to citizen participation are multiple in every country. They are both subtle and obvious, small and formidable, and based on numerous factors. For full citizenship to be achieved, we must remove these barriers, whether they are based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age or another status. If not, universal and equal suffrage is essentially denied, and governmental credibility is undermined. Citizens must, therefore understand ideas about citizenship, politics and government. They need knowledge to make decisions about policy choices and the proper use of authority, along with the skills to voice their concerns, act collectively and bold public officials accountable. Thus, a symbiotic relationship exists between democracy, the citizens and state's development to the effect that citizen’s government, made by the citizens for the citizenry is called democracy and it is the involvement or active participations of the people in governance that brings about development.

**Citizen Citizenship**

Citizen has an inherently political meaning that implies 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. In addition to the intrinsic Democratic and socio-economic change, and a fundamental way to empower citizens.

Individual's rights and liberties are the groundwork of the state since it exists to enable men to live and develop fully. In order to let the citizen 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 other citizens in the state. Right entails some duties and responsibilities on the part of every citizens A right may therefore be defined as a privilege or prerogative conferred by law upon a person or a group. When a privilege is expressed within the framework of the constitution of the state, it become a civil tight. If the civil rights of a citizen are invaded by another citizen or the government, he is entitled to seek redress in the court of law. Important Civil rights accorded Nigerian citizens in its 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 has been etymology established that the word democracy is derived from the Greek word "demos meaning people and kratos meaning rule, that is 'rule by the people (Emiri, 2003, cited in Ojo, 2015) The concept of democracy, like many other political concepts first originated from Ancient Greece where in the city stales, 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. Every citizen was expected to participate in the running of government. This is what Johnston (2000.23) classified as direct democracy, a system that enables people exercise authority themselves. Since there is no single definition of democracy however, what

can be deduce from the various definitions of democracy are the followings features:

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 that is free and fair

**Duties and Responsibilities of Citizens in a Democracy**

While the state provides rights and liberties, all citizens have duties to the state. Democratic citizens recognise that they not only have rights, they have responsibilities. They recognise that democracy requires an investment of time and hard work. A government of the people demands constant vigilance and support by the people. Democratic citizens know that they must bear the burden of responsibility for their society if they are to benefit from its protection of their rights. Citizens are therefore expected to perform the following responsibilities in a democracy:

a. A citizen in a democracy should have the duty to vote. There is no point in democracy in which we do not participate, People who are unhappy with their leaders are tree to organise and peacefully make the case for change or try lo vote those leaders out of office at established times for elections.

b. A citizen should be willing to pay taxes, Since without taxes to fund a democratic govemment, there would be no democracy. A democracy must provide for all of its citizens and this can be better enabled when citizens pay taxes.

c. A good citizen must have a duty to obey the law. A democracy cannot exist in a lawless society, and without the willingness of citizens to obey the law, which is really a social contract no govemment has the wherewithal to police a nation of lawbreakers, and anarchy results. Therefore, they must be ready to assist the law enforcement officers by reporting breaches of the law and by giving them any useful information they may have.

Citizens also have the duty in a democracy of ensuring that their rights are preserved by challenging government when it errs. Besides the rights, citizens must be critical of what the government does. Citizens should also check how institutions like investigating agencies, law-making agencies, and even civil servants are put in place for the well-being of the democracy, are working. At the same time, while being critical, citizens must also not lose sight of the pursuit of public interest. A positive attitude should be maintained with development of the state being the priority.