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**GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS**

**CHAPTER 8**

**CITIZENS ROLE IN A DEMOCRACY**

Sovereignty resides in and flows from the people in a democracy. They have a collective right to choose their governmental, political and electoral systems as part of self-determination. These precepts are embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in modern constitutions the world over. For democracy to deliver, citizens must become informed about issues that can improve their lives. Barriers to citizen participation are multiple in every country. They are both subtle and obvious, small and formidable and based on numerous factors. 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.

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. Modern states confer citizens on practically their whole residents or populations. In reality, the essence of a state is to provide opportunities to enable citizens to lead the good life. Citizenship of a state may be acquired either by birth or by naturalization. Citizenship is about being willing to contribute to social action as well as to political debate, to be willing to get involved. However, there are broader definitions and perceptions of citizenship as well, as shown by Glover who argues that there are three dimensions of active citizenship: ethical, integrative and educative citizenship.

Individual’s rights and liberties are the groundwork of the state since it exists to enable men to live and develop fully. These rights are not absolute since they are limited by the rights of other citizens in the state. A right can 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 right.

Democracy is derived from Greek words ‘demos’ (people) and ‘kratos’ (rule), i.e rule of the people. It originated from Ancient Greece. Every citizen was expected to participate in the running of government. This system is classified as direct democracy. Today, democracy or representative government is associated with the free discussion of political differences by counting of votes. Abraham Lincoln defined democracy as the government of the people, by the people and for the people. Since there is no single definition of democracy, features can be derived from the various definitions. They include; existence of rule of law, freedom of press, fundamental rights of the citizens are guaranteed, independent and impartial judiciary.

For democracy to succeed, citizens must be active because they know that the success or failure of the government is their responsibility. Citizens are therefore expected to perform the following responsibilities: (i) A citizen in a democracy should have the duty to vote (ii) A citizen should be willing to pay taxes (iii) A good citizen must have a duty to obey the law (iv) A good citizen must offer constructive and not destructive criticism. (v) (S)he must refrain from interference with the rights of other members of the community.

Democracy is a system of government where the citizens directly elect the government by voting. It is considered as the best form of government in the modern era as it allows citizens to exercise and enjoy many rights and it gives them responsibilities at the same time. Citizens play an important role in democracy. They must be aware of their rights and responsibilities otherwise a government may turn into a tyranny. A positive attitude should be maintained by citizens with development of the state being the priority.