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**CITIZENS’ ROLES IN A DEMOCRACY**

Sovereignty resides in and flows from the people in a democracy. There is no democracy without the engagement of the citizens. They have the collective right to choose their governmental, political and electoral systems as part of self-determination. For democracy to be delivered, citizens must be informed about issues that can improve their lives. To be informed, citizens require accurate and timely information, particularly government-held information. Transparency is a necessity for democracy because it is essential for an informed citizen to have access to information.

Barriers to citizen participation such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion or age, are multiple in every country and must be removed for full citizenship to be achieved. A symbiotic relationship exists between democracy, the citizens and the state’s development to the effect that citizen’s government, made by the citizens for the citizenry is called democracy. Democracy is therefore, the involvement or active participation of the people in the governance that brings about development.

**Citizens/Citizenship**

Citizens have a set of rights and responsibilities, including the right to participate in decisions that affect public welfare. In ancient Rome, it was considered a privileged status to be called a citizen as to be a citizen meant enjoying certain liberties and rights as opposed to the slaves who could not enjoy them. Nowadays, states confer citizens on practically their whole population. The essence of a state is to provide opportunities to enable citizens lead a good life.

Citizenship may be acquired either by birth or by naturalisation. Citizenship determined by birth is fundamental in the laws of a country. Naturalisation is the process by which an individual may voluntarily change his/her citizenship of a state to another state.

Citizenship can be divide into three groups. Civil citizenship, which refers to the rights necessary to protect individual liberty. Political citizenship, which is associated with participation in the democratic exercise of political power, either as a member of a political community or as an individual elected by members of such a community. Social citizenship, which 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.

Citizenship means different things to different people. According to Brannan et al (2006:55), the concept of citizenship is not solely comprised of passive membership of a political entity, but that being active is an essential part of being a citizen. However, there are also broader perceptions of citizenship. According to Glover (2004:18), there are three dimensions of citizenship: ethical citizenship which understands active participation in a collective strive towards the public good as an essential feature of citizenship; integrative citizenship which needs engagement in a wide sphere of participation that can go beyond formal political practices and institutions; and educative citizenship which refers to the process that develops a moral, practical, and intellectual sense of self in individuals when they practise their citizenship.

**Citizens’ Rights**

In order to let the citizen have a fair share in the running of his/her government, a group of rights is very essential. 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 group. When a privilege is expressed within the framework of the constitution of the state, it becomes a civil right. Important civil rights accorded Nigerian citizens in its constitution include the right to life, right to education, right to freedom of speech etc.

**Democracy**

Democracy originates from the Greek words *“demos”* meaning people and *“kratos”* meaning to rule. Former American President, Abraham Lincoln, perceived democracy as the government of the people, by the people and for the people.

According to Maxey (2010:51), the states and countries where the arrangements, constitutions and practices and the workings of the government are such that the individuals and his rights, freedoms and worth are ensured and guaranteed are usually referred to as democracy.

From the various definitions of democracy, the following features can be deduced:

1. The fundamental rights of the citizen is guaranteed
2. Independent and impartial judiciary
3. Existence of rule of law
4. Freedom of press
5. Periodic election that is free and fair

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

Democratic citizens recognise that they not only have rights, they have responsibilities. A government of the people demands constant vigilance and support by the people. Citizens are therefore expected to perform the following responsibilities in a democracy:

1. A citizen in a democracy should have the duty to vote.
2. A citizen should be willing to pay taxes since there would be no democracy without taxes to fund a democratic government.
3. A good citizen must have a duty to obey the law.
4. A good citizen must refrain from uttering destructive criticisms but must be prepared to offer constructive alternatives to government policies.
5. A good citizen must refrain from interference with the rights of other members of the community.
6. He/she must support public education in every way possible, through the payment of taxes, through local volunteer efforts, through according this system respect to which it should be entitled.