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**CHAPTER 8: CITIZENS ROLES IN DEMOCRACY**

This chapter explains what a citizens’ life in a democracy should be, their roles, duties and rights. There is also clarification of some concepts and I’ll be summarizing them all. Firstly however, in a democracy, sovereignty resides in and flows from the people. They have a collective right to choose their governmental, political and electoral systems as part of self-determination. The authority of government likewise derives from the will of the people in their choice of these systems, and the people have a right to take part in their government, including through genuine elections to determine who will legitimately occupy governmental offices.

These precepts are embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in modern constitutions the world over. They capture the formation of the famous formulation that democratic government is “of the people, by the people and for the people.” In essence, they mean just that: governments belong to the people and elections belong to the people. There is no democracy without the engagement of citizens. For democracy to deliver, citizens must become informed about the 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 responds to citizens’ views, thus holding those in government accountable.

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.

**Conceptual Clarifications**

In order to enhance their meanings as used in this chapter, it is important to clarify a few concepts. Such as:

**Citizen/citizenship**

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. To be a citizen means to enjoy certain liberties and rights. Modern states confer citizens on practically their whole residents or populations to enable them develop their potentialities. **Citizenship** on the other hand may be acquired either by **birth** or by naturalization. A man becomes a citizen of a particular state if his parents are citizens of that state or if he is born within the territory of that state. On the other hand, the process by which an individual may voluntarily change his/her citizenship of a state to another state is known as **naturalization**. The conditions under which naturalization are conferred vary from country to country. In Nigeria, it can be found in **chapter 111, section 25:** **1(a) of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria** while **section 26(1) to section 32** also stipulates the conditions which any person that is trying to naturalize must fulfill before he or she can be registered as a citizen of Nigeria.

Citizenship can be perceived to be made up of, or be divided into civil citizenship, political citizenship and social citizenship. However, as with so many other concepts, citizenship does not have just one definition, it means different things to different people.

**Citizens’ rights**

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 duties and responsibilities on the part of every citizen. A right may therefore be defined as a privilege or prerogative conferred by law upon a person or a group.

**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’.” The concept of democracy, like many other political concepts first originated from Ancient Greece where in the city states, citizens were free to meet frequently in assemblies which had the power to make laws. Abraham Lincoln, former American president, perceived democracy as the government of the people, by the people and for the people. Since there is no single definition of democracy however, what can be deduced from the various definitions of democracy are the following features:

1. The fundamental rights of the citizens 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**

While the state provides rights and liberties, all citizens have duties to the state, these are:

1. A citizen in a democracy should have the duty to vote
2. A citizen should be willing to pay taxes which are essential to fund the government
3. A good citizen must have a duty to obey the law
4. A good citizen must refrain from interference with the rights of other members of the community
5. A good citizen must refrain from ushering destructive criticism but must be prepared to offer constructive alternatives to government policies.

In conclusion, citizens play an important role in democracy. There would probably be no democracy without the co-operation and commitment of citizens. They should be aware of their rights and must not lose sight of the pursuit of public interest. A positive attitude should be maintained with development of the state being the priority.