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## **CHAPTER 8 CITIZENS ROLES IN A DEMOCRACY**

Sovereignty resides in 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. There is no democracy without the engagement of citizens. Engagement is thus both a right and a responsibility of citizens in establishing, developing and sustaining democracy. Citizen engagement is not an abstraction; it takes tangible forms and serves particular purposes to improve peoples' lives. Citizen engagement pursues economic, social, cultural development, including the provision of opportunity, resources, services, and security.

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.

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS**

In order to enhance their meanings as used within the context of this paper, it is important to clarify a few concepts.

### **Citizen/citizenship**

Citizens are very important in the decision making of the government. Citizen has a political meaning that implies a certain type of relationship between the people and government. They have a set of rights and responsibilities, including the right to participate in decisions that affect public welfare.

To become a citizen of a state, one must acquire the citizenship of the state; it can be acquired either by birth or

by naturalization. A man becomes a citizen of a particular state if his parents are citizens or if he is born in the territory of that state.

Turner opines that 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. 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 following are some of the conditions under which naturalization are conferred; it varies from county to country, under chapter 111, section 25:1(a) of the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria define citizenship as:

(a) Every person born in Nigeria before the date of independence, either of whose parent or any of whose grandparents belongs or belonged to a community indigenous to Nigeria: provided

that the person shall not become citizen of Nigeria by virtue of this section if neither of his parents nor any of his grandparents was born in Nigeria;

b) Every person born in Nigeria after the date of independence either of whose parents or any whose grandparents is a citizen of Nigeria; and

c) Every person born outside Nigeria either of whose parents is a citizen of Nigeria.

## **CITIZENS' RIGHT**

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.

By definition, right can be defined as a privilege or prerogative conferred by law upon a person or group. When a privilege is expressed within the frame work of the constitution of the state, it becomes a civil right.

## **DEMOCRACY**

Etymologically, democracy was derived from a the greek word "*demos*" meaning people

and *kratos* meaning rule, that is "rule by the people" the concept democracy was 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. In these assemblies, citizens were free to discuss state affairs, take decision and exercise their political right. Since there is no single definition of democracy however, what can be deduce from the various definitions of democracy are the following features:

- The fundamental rights of the citizen is guaranteed
- Independent and impartial judiciary
- Existence of rule of law
- Freedom of press
- Periodic election that is free and fair.

## **CONCLUSION**

DEMOCRACY is a system of government where the citizens directly elect the government by voting.

Citizens play an important role in democracy. There would probably be no

democracy without the co-operation and commitment of citizens. Citizens must therefore be aware of their rights and responsibilities in the development of a better government.