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CITIZENS ROLES IN A DEMOCRACY

Citizens have the right to engage in the political processes of their nation. That is the foundation and basic structure of a democratic government (a government of the people, by the people and for the people). There is no democracy without the direct or indirect involvement of the citizens. However, for a democracy to stand, the citizens must be adequately informed and involved in decision making. Citizens must be given the free will to relay their thoughts and opinions on the actions of the government hence there is a need for transparency in a democratic government. There should be no barriers to citizen participation such as gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion or any other status.

The term citizenship has to do with a relationship between the people and the government. Each and every citizen is entitled to rights and responsibility which include the right to life, right to participate in decisions affecting public welfare. In ancient Rome, to be called a citizen was a great achievement as not every inhabitant of the Roman Empire was acknowledged as such. People like slaves, serfs and some alien residents were deprived of it due to racial, political or religious reasons. The people regarded as citizens enjoyed certain rights and privileges which the others were denied off. However, as time passed, states started to refer to all its residents as citizens (every individual enjoyed equal right).

Nowadays, citizenship is obtained either by birth (a man becomes a citizen of a nation if his parents are citizens of the nation or if he was born in the territory of the nation) or naturalization (a situation where an individual voluntarily changes his/her citizenship to a nation to another nation).

Citizenship is divided into civil citizenship (refers to the necessary rights for the protection of individual liberty such as freedom of speech, justice, the freedom to conclude valid contracts), political citizenship (refers to the participation in the democratic exercise of political power, either as a member of the political community (voter) or as an elected individual elected by the members of the political community (politician)) and social citizenship (which supports the fact that citizens ought to have access to resources which allow them to live up to the standards prevailing in the society).

Citizenship has a lot of definitions however there are three dimensions of citizenship, as shown by Glover, which are: ethical citizenship (which believe in the active participation for

the sake of achieving the public good while making personal sacrifices), integrative citizenship (which believe in the active participation for the public good while putting personal needs into consideration) and educative citizenship (which believe in the active participation as a means of understanding the link between personal and public needs). Individual rights exist to enable men to live and develop fully. A right is therefore defined as a privilege conferred by the law upon a person or group.

Citizenship participation is essential for a democratic government to run as said earlier. Democracy is derived from the Greek word ‘demos’ meaning people and ‘kratos’ meaning rule (rule of the people). Democracy was first adopted in Ancient Greece as the citizens were allowed to meet in assemblies which had the power to make laws. This was referred to as direct democracy by Johnson. However, it was limited in the sense that slaves and aliens were exempted from participating in political rights. The idea that all residents within a state were entitled to take part in decision making affecting the state was first adopted in England after the great civil war of the seventeen century. Several other states and nations opposed the idea however others adopted it. Nowadays, in democracy; the fundamental rights of citizens are guaranteed there is existence of rule of law, freedom of press, independent and impartial judiciary and periodic election that is free and fair.

Just as the government has a role to perform for the citizens in democracy, the citizens also have a role to play which include: voting, payment of taxes, obeying the law, restraining from uttering destructive criticisms, refraining from violating rights of other members of the community and supporting public education.