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ASSIGNMENT

THE ROLES OF CITIZENS IN A DEMOCRACY

In a democratic system, sovereignty resides in and flows from the people which simply means that the power lies in the hands of the people without any form of limitation. Citizens have the right to choose their governmental, political and electoral systems.

Also, we have precepts embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in modern constitutions all over the world. They captured the foundation for the formulation that democratic government is "of the people, by the people and for the people", this simply means that government belongs to the people including elections. There is no democracy without the engagement or participation of citizens but sadly this participation can be hindered due to certain barriers. Therefore, in order to achieve an effective flow of democracy these barriers must be eradicated.

Who is a citizen? A citizen is someone who has a political relationship with the state, thus has the ability to partake in the state's affairs as a social, civil and political individual. Simply, to be a citizen means to enjoy certain liberties and rights. Citizenship could be acquired through birth or naturalisation. Citizenship could either be civil - refers to the rights to protect individual liberty (e.g. freedom of speech), etc.; political - the right to participate in democratic activities, either as a member of the political community (e.g. a voter) or as an individual elected by the political community (e.g. a politician); and social - this embodies when citizens have access to resources that will enable them to have a civilised existence in accordance with standards prevalent in society.

According to a community development practitioner, Kenny, due to the differentiation of active and passive participation, the contemporary constructions of citizenship are better understood. Passive citizenship is when the state has given citizens' rights and duties, and this is based on the notions of social justice. Active citizenship transcends this level, because within its premises the citizens are empowered to participate in the continual processes of shaping the society, as well as their identities. A citizen is not just one because of some legal or official documents that state so, but a citizen must show active participation in the affairs of their state of citizenship. According to Glover 2004, there are three dimensions of active citizenship. These dimensions are Ethical citizenship - this is about active participation in order to benefit the public as a whole. Here, the citizen is expected to make personal sacrifices if the result is more beneficial to the public and citizen., Integrative citizenship - this is about engaging oneself in the sphere that is much wider than the formal political institutions and practices. This concept stems from the idea that everyone plays a variety of roles and this form of citizenship enables the citizens to integrate their various roles and immerse themselves into the community so as to help them appreciate the collective more. The third, the Educative citizenship, according to Dagger 1997, refers to a process that develops a moral, practical and intellectual sense of self in individuals when they practice their citizenship. Active participation exposes individuals to an array of belief and value systems thus forming a sense of oneness among people in the community. Glover also states that this also works to form a connection between personal and public interest.

Citizens of a state have some rights and liberties which enable them to live and develop fully as a member of the state. These rights are not absolute because they are limited by the rights of other members of the state. These rights include duties and responsibilities. When these rights are expressed within the framework of the constitution of the state, they are called civil rights e.g. the right to life, the right to association, the right to education etc. When these rights are encroached upon by other members of the state or the state itself, the citizen is entitled to seek redress in court.

Democracy is derived from two Greek words demos- people and Kratos- rule, thus the simple meaning of democracy is “rule by the people”. Democracy was first practiced in Ancient Greece. The system which was used was the direct democracy system where the people were allowed to make governing decisions in assemblies, however, the system was a limited democracy system, because not every individual, for example, labourers, slaves and so on, could participate in the political affairs of the state, since they were denied citizenship. The first time that all citizens could take part in the political affairs of the state was first advocated in England, after the Great Civil War of the 17th century. Around the same time, a radical party, known as ‘The Levelers’ campaigned strongly against the idea that any man be ruled or governed by another without their free consent. In his Treatises on Civil Government, John Locke advocated for government based on consent. After their break from England as a colony, America developed democratic ideas and institutions as a way of life. These ideas became widespread in the western world by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Abraham Lincoln defined democracy as the government of the people, when it is designed to represent the common will of the citizenry within a state, it is a government by the people when its ideological undercurrents are grounded in the people’s culture and it is a government for the people when the power employed by the custodians of state business emanates from and resides in the collective mandate of the people. This is the root of the most popular definition of democracy which is “the government of the people, by the people and for the people”. There are so many definitions of democracy, however it is deduced that they all highlight the following features: the fundamental right of the citizens is guaranteed, existence of rule of law, freedom of press, independent and impartial judiciary, periodic elections that are free and fair.

As citizens of a state individuals do not only enjoy rights, but also have duties and responsibilities to fulfil. A government of the people requires constant vigilance and support of the people to be functional.

-A citizen has the duty to vote.

-A citizen should be willing to pay taxes.

-A responsible citizen must obey the law.

-Citizens should always support public education, whether through payment of taxes, local volunteer efforts, etc. Public education is the foundation of democracy, as children, youth are made to be knowledgeable participants in democratic processes.

-A good citizen must not interfere with the rights of another member of the society, but interact peacefully and deal amicably in order to co-exist with other individuals.

-A citizen should criticise the government only in a constructive manner, as opposed to any form of destructive criticism which could lead to or inspire unrest in the political system.

In conclusion, Citizens play an important role in democracy by understanding ideas about citizenship, politics and government complementary political roles that include: acting as watchdogs, advocates, mobilizers, educators so as to prevent the government from becoming a tyranny.