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**GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS**

**CHAPTER 8**

**CITIZENS ROLES IN A DEMOCRACY**

People have a right to take part in their government, including through genuine elections to determine who will legitimately occupy governmental offices. These rights are embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. According to Abraham Lincoln, democracy is the government of the people, by the people,, and for the people.

This shows that engagement in a democratic government is thus both a right and responsibility of citizens in establishing, developing and sustaining democracy. People must be free to express their views and preferences and work to see that government responds to their views, thus holding those in government accountable. Access to information is essential to an informed citizenry. There are some barriers for participation in government that must be removed for the effective running of the government; based on age, gender,ethnicity, religion, or another status. Citizens must be knowledgeable about what constitutes government and politics.

Citizens have set of rights and responsibilities, including the right to participate in decisions that affect public welfare. In ancient Rome, being called a citizen was seen a privilege because they enjoyed certain rights in the society. In reality, the essence of a state is to provide opportunities to enable citizens to lead the good life.

Citizenship of a state can be acquired by birth or by naturalization, that is, 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. Conditions under naturalization are conferred vary from country to country.

Citizenship is divided into; civil citizenship(rights to necessary to protect individual liberty), political citizenship(participation in the democratic exercise of political power), and social citizenship(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 the society.

There are several definitions for citizenship. To Brannan et al holds that citizenship is not solely comprised of passive membership of a political entity, but being active is an essential of being a citizen. Citizenship is about being willing to contribute to social action as well as to political debate, to be willing to get involved. Bur whichever ways one looks at the concept either by birth or by naturalization, that is voluntary change of citizenship from a state to another.

Individual’s rights and liberties are the groundwork of the state since it exists to enable men to live and develop fully. A right may therefore be defined as a privilege or prerogative conferred within the framework of the constitution of the state, it become a civil right.

Democracy is derived from greek word ‘demos’ meaning people and ‘kratos’ meaning rule, that is, ‘rule by the people.’ democracy emancipated from Ancient Greece, where people meet in assemblies to discuss the state affairs, take decisions and participate in the running of the government. To Johnston this system is called direct democracy, a system that unables people exercise authority themselves. The Greek democracy excluded laborers, slaves and aliens from exercising political rights. According the Abraham Lincoln, he perceived democracy as the government of the people, by the people and for the people. To him, democracy is a government of the people when it is designed to represent the common will of the citizenry within a state and that it is a government by the people when its ideological under currents is grounded in the people’s culture.

Some features of democracy can be deduced from these definitions; fundamental rights of the citizens is guaranteed, independent and impartial judiciary, existence of rule of law, freedom or press, and periodic election that is free and fair.

As citizens enjoins specific right, they have duties and responsibilities. For democracy to succeed, citizens must be active, not passive, because they know that the success or failure of the government is their responsibility, and no one else’s.

Responsibilities of citizens in a democracy includes; they have the duty to vote, they should be willing to pay taxes, they must have a duty to obey the law, they must refrain from interference with the rights of other members of the community. A citizen must support public education in every way possible, through the payment of taxes, through local volunteer efforts, through according this system the respect to which it should be entitled.

Democracy is a system of government where the citizens directly elect the government by voting. It is considered as the best form government in this modern era. The government must be accountable and transparent. Citizens must also participate positively in the running of the government. When there is co-operation and understanding, conflict of democracy can be solved.