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REVIEW OF CHAPTER EIGHT: CITIZENS ROLES IN A DEMOCRACY

Sovereignty resides in and flows from the people in a democracy. They have a collective right to choose their governmental, political and electoral systems. These precepts are embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in modern constitutions the world over. There is no democracy without the engagement of citizens. Engagement is therefore both a right and responsibility of citizens in establishing, developing and sustaining democracy. For democracy to deliver, citizens must become informed about 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. To be informed, citizens need accurate and timely information, particularly government-held information.

Barriers to citizen participation are multiple in every country. They are subtle and obvious, small and formidable, and based on numerous factors. The removal of these barriers is important and necessary for full citizenship to be achieved. If the removal of these barriers is unachievable, then universal and equal suffrage is essentially denied, and government credibility is equally undermined. A symbiotic relationship should exist between democracy, the citizens and the government. Citizens must therefore understand ideas about citizenship, politics and government.

Citizens have a set of rights and responsibilities, including the right to participate in decisions that affect public welfare. In ancient Rome, it was considered a privileged status to be called a citizen because the status was not accorded to all inhabitants of the Roman Empire. To be a citizen means to enjoy certain liberties and rights as opposed to the slaves who could not enjoy them.

Citizenship of a state 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 the state. Citizenship determined by the place of birth is fundamental in the laws of most countries. On the other hand, the process by which an individual may voluntarily change his/her citizenship of a state to another is known as naturalization.

Citizenship can be perceived to be made up of, or be divided into civil citizenship, political citizenship, and social citizenship. Civil citizenship refers to the rights necessary to protect individual liberty. Political citizenship is associated with participation in the democratic exercise of political power, either as a member of a political community or as an individual elected by members of such community. 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 in society. Citizenship is about being willing to contribute to social action as well as to political debate, to be willing to get involved.

There are three dimensions of citizenship namely ethical citizenship, integrative citizenship and educative citizenship.

* Ethical citizenship understands active participation in a collective strive towards the public good as an essential feature of citizenship. The personal sacrifices that are made and some public benefit and are hence ultimately also enjoyed by the person who sacrifices.
* Integrative citizenship needs engagement in a wide sphere of participation that can go beyond formal political policies and institutions.
* Educative citizenship refers to the process that develops a moral, practical and intellectual sense of self in individuals when they practice their citizenship.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CITIZENS IN A DEMOCRACY

* A citizen in a democracy should have the duty to vote.
* A citizen should be willing to pay taxes, since without taxes to fund a democratic government, there would be no democracy.
* A good citizen must have a duty to obey the law. They must be ready to assist the law enforcement officers by reporting breaches of the law and by giving them any useful information that they may have.
* A good citizen must refrain from uttering destructive criticisms but must be prepared to offer constructive alternatives to government policies.
* A good citizen must refrain from interference with the rights of other members of the community. He must not interfere with the properties of other persons.
* A good citizen must support public education in every way possible through the payment of taxes, through local volunteer efforts and so on.