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REVIEW ON CITIZEN'S ROLE IN DEMOCRACY

In democracy, power resides in the people and they have the right to choose the government and political systems. They have the right to cast their votes through a free and fair election to determine who will legitimately occupy governmental office. There is no democracy without the engagement of the citizens. The precepts about rights of citizens are embodied in the UDHR, Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the modern constitution. The UDHR captures the foundation that the democratic government is "Of the people, by the people and for the people. This just means that the government, governmental processes and the elections belong to the people. The participation of the citizens in democratic activities is both a right and a responsibility. It pursues economic, social, cultural and political development.

Democracy can only be delivered if the citizens are duly informed about the issues that can improve their lives. The citizens must be free to come together and express their views and preferences and work to see that the government responds to their views hence making those in government accountable. Citizens require accurate and timely information. Access to the right information is important for citizenry which is why transparency is a necessity for democracy. In order for citizens including the political competitors to be truly informed they must be free to impart their views. There are certain barriers to citizen participation, these barriers are subtle and obvious, small and based on certain factors but in order for full citizenship to be achieved this barriers must be removed whether they are gender based, race or ethnicity. If the barriers are not removed governmental credibility is undermined. Knowledge is needed to make decisions about policy choices and the proper use of authority. Hence a symbiotic relationship exists between democracy, the citizens and the state's development. Democracy can be defined as the involvement or active participation of the people in governance that bring about development.

Citizen is a certain type of relationship between the people and government. There are various rights citizens are entitled too and they also have responsibilities including to participate in decisions that affect public welfare. The state is responsible for providing opportunities to enable citizens live a good life. There are various ways through which citizenship can be acquired which is either by birth, marriage or naturalization. A person becomes a citizen of a particular state if his parents are from the state or if he is born within the territory of that state. Citizenship by birth is fundamental in some states. According to Turner: "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" An individual can decide to change his/her citizenship voluntarily by a process called NATURALISATION but the conditions vary from state to state. Citizenship as defined by the constitution of the Federal republic of Nigeria is; a) Every person born in Nigeria before independence whose parents or grandparents belong to an indigenous community in Nigeria, b) Every person born after date of independence whose parents or grandparents are citizens of Nigeria, c) Every person born outside Nigeria whose parents are citizens of Nigeria.

Citizenship is divided into civil, political, and social citizenship. Civil citizenship refers to rights necessary to protect individual liberty such as: Freedom of speech, justice etc. Political citizenship refers to participation in the democratic exercise of political power, either as a member of a political community or as a member elected by the community. Social citizenship embodies the claim that citizens ought to have the right to access resources that will allow them live a civilized existence in accordance with standards of the society.

Citizenship has numerous definitions because it means different things to different people. For Example: a) Brannan et al argued the concept that citizenship is not comprised of passive membership but being active is an essential of being a citizen. b) Glover argued that there are three dimensions of active citizenship: Ethical Citizenship, Integrative Citizenship, and Educative Citizenship. Ethical citizenship understands active participation in a collective strive towards the public good. Integrative citizenship needs engagement in a wide sphere of participation that can go beyond formal political practices. This concept involves the belief that every citizen plays different roles and this form enables the individual to integrate the various roles and to immerse themselves in the community. c) Educational citizenship according to Dagger is the process that develops a moral, practical and intellectual sense of self in individuals when they practice their citizenship. Active participation seeks to expose individuals to various “views and beliefs” and deepen their sense of interconnectedness with their fellow members and the ones unknown to them. d) A community development practitioner Kenny, argued that contemporary constructions of citizenship can be understood by active citizenship. In order to ensure full citizenship, people must be empowered to participate in the continual process of shaping their societies, communities and their identities. Citizenship is a privilege status conferred by status on its people either by birth, or by naturalization.

Citizen's rights and liberties are the groundwork of the state since it exists to enable men to live and develop fully. These rights are absolute since they are limited by the rights of other citizens in the state. A right is defined as a privilege conferred by the law upon a person or a group. Civil rights are the privileges expressed within the framework of the constitution. If the civil rights are invaded, the individual has the right to seek redress in the court of law. Important civil rights accorded to the Nigerian citizens in its constitution include:

- ✓ The right to life
- ✓ The right to work
- ✓ The right to freedom of religion
- ✓ The right to education
- ✓ Right of association
- ✓ Right to Education
- ✓ Freedom of speech and many others

Democracy is derived from the Greek word “demos” meaning people and “Kratos” meaning Rule. The concept of Democracy first originated from Ancient Greece. The Greek democracy was a limited institution in that it excluded laborers, slaves and aliens. According

to Abraham Lincoln former American President perceived democracy as the “government of the people, of the people and by the people. He also described democracy as government of people when it is designed to represent the common will of citizenry within a state and government by the people when its ideological undercurrents is grounded in the people’s culture also it is the government for the people when the power employed by the custodians of state business emanates from and resides in mandate of the people. The following can be deduced from the definitions of democracy

- i. The fundamental rights of citizens
- ii. Independent and impartial Judiciary
- iii. Existence of rule of law
- iv. Freedom of Press
- v. Periodic free and fair elections

Citizens have certain responsibilities while the state provides the rights and liberties. Democratic citizens realize they not only have rights but also responsibilities. They recognize democracy as an investment of hard work and time. For democracy to succeed citizens must be active and not passive because they know failure of government is their fault. Some responsibilities of citizens in democracy are:

- ❖ A citizen should have duty to vote.
- ❖ A citizen should be willing to pay tax.
- ❖ A good citizen must obey the Law.
- ❖ A good citizen should refrain from uttering destructive criticisms.
- ❖ A good citizen must refrain from interference of rights from other members.
- ❖ A good citizen must support public Education.

CONCLUSION

Democracy is a system of government where citizens elect their government by voting. It is the best form of government in modern era as it allows citizens to fully their rights to vote. Citizens play an important in democracy and there will be no democracy without the co-operation and commitment of citizens. Citizens must be aware of their rights and responsibilities to avoid turning government into tyranny. Finally democracy assures fundamental rights of citizens like right to life, right to vote, right to information, right to practice any religion and many others, Citizens must also participate in democracy with full enthusiasm to ensure survival of democracy.

