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**CHAPTER 8: CITIZENS ROLES IN A DEMOCRACY**

**Definition of Citizen/Citizenship**

The term ‘citizen’ has an inherently political meaning that implies a certain type of relationship between the people and government. Citizens have a set of rights and responsibilities, including the right to participate in decisions that affect public welfare.

Citizenship of a state may be acquired either by birth or by naturalisation. A man becomes a citizen of a particular state if his parents are citizens of that state of if he is born within the territory of the state. On the other hand, the process by which an individual may voluntarily change his/her citizenship of a state to another state is known as naturalisation.

Chapter 111, section 25: 1(a) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria define citizenship as:

1. Every person born in Nigeria before the date of independence, either of whose parents or any of whose grandparents belongs or belonged to a community indigenous to Nigeria: provided that a person shall not become a citizen of Nigeria by virtue of this section if neither of his parents nor any of his grandparents was born in Nigeria;
2. Every person born in Nigeria after the date of independence either of whose parents or any of whose grandparents is a citizen of Nigeria; and
3. Every person born outside Nigeria either of whose parents is a citizen of Nigeria.

Section 26(1) to Section 32 also stipulates the conditions which any person that is trying to naturalise must fulfill before he or she can be registered as a citizen of Nigeria.

Citizenship can be perceived to 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 the members of such a community; 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 in society.

**Democracy**

It has been etymologically established that the word ‘democracy’ is derived from the Greek word “demos” meaning people and “kratos” meaning rule, that is “rule of the people”

Abraham Lincoln, former American President, perceived democracy as the government of the people, by the people, and for the people. According to him, democracy is a government of the people designed to represent the common will of the citizenry within a state and that it is a government by the people when its ideological undercurrents is grounded in the people’s culture, also, 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. In the words of Maxey, the states and countries where the arrangements, constitutions and practices and the workings of the government are such that the individuals and his rights, freedoms and worth are ensured and guaranteed are usually referred to as democracies.

Since there is no single definition of democracy however, what we can deduce from the various definitions of democracy are the following features:

1. The fundamental rights of the citizens are guaranteed
2. Independent and impartial judiciary
3. Existence of rule of law
4. Freedom of press
5. Periodic election that is free and fair

**Duties and Responsibilities of Citizens in a Democracy**

There is a saying in free societies: “you get the government you deserve”. 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.

Citizens are therefore expected to perform the following responsibilities in a democracy:

1. A citizen in a democracy should have the duty to vote.
2. A citizen should be willing to pay taxes, since without taxes to fund a democratic government, there would be no democracy.
3. A good citizen must have a duty to obey the law.
4. A good citizen must refrain from uttering destructive criticisms but must be prepared to offer constructive alternatives to government policies.
5. A good citizen must refrain from interference with the rights of other members of the community.
6. A good citizen must support public education in every way possible, through payment of taxes, through local volunteer efforts, through according this system the respect to which it is entitled.