Ugo-nnorom adaugo

19/lqw01/257

LAW

200 LEVEL

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

GST 203

REVIEW OF CHAPTER 8 OF SALIENT ISSUES IN GOVERNMENT AND NIGERIA’S POLITICS: CITIZENS ROLES IN A DEMOCRACY

In a democracy, sovereignty resides with the people which is why it is often said that a democratic government belongs to the people. There is no democracy without citizen engagement. According to Albright, citizen engagement pursues economic, social, cultural and political development including the provision of opportunity, resources, services and security. Citizens must be kept informed about issues that may affect their lives for a democracy to be effective. Thus, the government must be transparent and not withhold any information from the citizens as this may be a barrier to their participation seeing as they cannot make choices when they are not informed. This isn’t the only barrier to citizen participation as they vary from country to country and may be based on race, ethnicity, religion or any other status. These barriers must be totally removed to ensure government credibility which is essential in a democracy to bring about development.

Citizen/ Citizenship: these terms have an inherently political meaning that implies a certain relationship between the people and the government. In Ancient Rome, it was a considered a privilege to be called a citizen due to the liberties and rights awarded to them. Because of this, citizenship wasn’t granted to all the inhabitants (as is done nowadays) but only to those of high class.

Turner describes citizenship as 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 of society. It may be acquired by birth, that is, a person may become a citizen of a state if either of his parents are citizens of that state or if he was born within the territory of that state, and by naturalisation, that is, the situation where an individual fulfils certain conditions in order to change his citizenship of one state to that of another. This process varies from country to country and it is found in Chapter III of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended.

Citizenship is divided into:

- Civil citizenship; refers to the rights necessary to protect individual liberty.

- Political citizenship; associated with participation in the exercise of political power in a democracy.

- Social citizenship; according to Marshall, this 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.

However, there are multiple perspectives of citizenship. For example, Brannan et. al. holds that citizenship is not solely comprised of passive membership of a political entity, but that being active is an essential feature of being a citizen. Stating his own view, Glover argues that there are three dimensions of active citizenship: ethical citizenship; active participation towards the public good, integrative citizenship; active participation that may go beyond formal political practices and institutions and educative citizenship; active participation that develops a moral, practical and intellectual sense of self in individuals. In addition, Kenny argues that “to ensure full citizenship, people must be empowered to participate in the continual process of shaping their society, their communities and their identities.” But anyhow one chooses to look at the concept it is a privileged status conferred by states on its people either by birth or by naturalisation.

Citizens’ Rights: a right may be defined as a privilege or prerogative conferred by law upon a person or group. These rights are essential for citizen engagement in the running of the state. When a right is expressed within the framework of the constitution, it is called a civil right and when this right is infringed by any other person, the citizen has a right to seek redress in the court of law. The rights of a Nigerian citizen can be found in Chapter IV of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended.

Democracy: this is gotten from the Greek word; demos which means people and kratia which means rule, that is, rule by the people. The concept originated in ancient Greece in the city states where citizens were free to meet to make laws, discuss state affairs, take decisions and exercise their political rights. This type of democracy was classified as a direct democracy because the people were empowered to rule themselves. However, the democracy practiced in Greece was a limited institution in that not all inhabitants were free to exercise their political rights. The idea that all citizens, regardless of class, should be allowed to participate in the running of the affairs of the state was first advocated in England after the civil war in the 17th century. This led to the establishment of indirect democracy; a way of determining who shall govern and to what ends they shall rule.

Abraham Lincoln, the former president of America described democracy as the government of the people; seeing as it was designed to represent the common will of the people, by the people; in that it is grounded in the people’s culture and for the people because the power employed by the custodians of the state resides in the people.

Duties and Responsibilities of Citizens in a Democracy: all democratic citizens have duties and responsibilities. Some of which include:

- A citizen should have the duty to vote.

- A citizen must pay his/her task.

- A good citizen must be prepared to offer constructive criticisms of the activities of the government.

- A good citizen must refrain from interfering with the rights of other members of the community.

- A good citizen must support public education in every possible way.