

Nigeria's Federal Legislators' Bloated Remuneration and Implications for Public Policy and Good Governance

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Abstract

This paper is a descriptive type. The study employs secondary data that was sourced from journal articles, online materials, government documentaries, and dailies to examine the huge salaries and other allowances “earned” by members of the National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The study is against the background of the controversies that enormous salaries and allowances of legislators have generated in the country since the return of democratic rule in 29th May; 1999. Despite the biting economic situation, poverty, unemployment and collapsed public infrastructures, members of the National Assembly continue to receive controversial salaries and allowances, and still often clamor for more. This study examines this issue and its implications for the country. The study concludes by proffering policy options which include but are not limited to giving serious thought to the need for part-time legislators who would only be entitled to sitting allowance, a significant reduction in the payments of all political office holders, and reduction of the two chambers of the National Assembly in Nigeria to one house-unicameral legislature, or at worst; reduction in the number of national lawmakers to maintain a cost-effective legislature.

Key words: Legislature; National assembly; Bicameralism; Bloated payments; Public policy; Governance

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INTRODUCTION

In the Presidential system that Nigeria operates, the legislature is expected to be an important arm of government whose activities should impact positively on the conduct of government's business. The parliament in Nigeria is an essential organ of government and is empowered by the 1999 constitution to make law for the good governance of the country, and exercise control over its public funds and expenditures. It should do these through representation, debate and passage of bills, and exercise of oversight functions on the executive arm of government through its various committees (Alake, 2018; Obiyan, 2007). However, since the return of democracy in 29th May; 1999, it appears the lawmakers have become more prominent in the media, not because of vibrancy in legislation or adequate checks on the executive but of controversial demands for higher compensation. There have been agitations by Nigerians that the salaries and allowances that legislators collect in the country are too much.

Most times, when there are misunderstandings among the 360-member House of Representatives, the crises boil down on higher emoluments. If it is not a fight for juicy committee positions, it is a battle for bigger appropriation for members (Biobaku, 2020; Dickson, 2019). According to Moradeyo (2019), when the legislators confronted the executive, especially during former President Olusegun Obasanjo's led regime, the legislators wanted “settlement,” a euphemism for a bribe and special package. It seems there is a cordial relationship between the executive and legislature currently because of a seeming ‘understanding’ of I rub your back you grease my palm. A common language in the public discourse to mean the loot from public treasury must be for everyone directly involved in governance. The attitude of being after public treasury without doing much has tarnished the image of legislators, for earning so much and doing so little, more so, that they sit for three days a week or struggle to complete

one hundred and eighty-one days in a year and spend the rest of the year on recess. Although, lawmakers are also expected to carry out their committee duties outside these three days, even then, it is evident that there is a high rate of absenteeism among the honorable members in both upper and lower houses in Nigeria.

The same attitude of looting the parliament treasury led to the removal of the lower House Speaker, Honorable Patricia Etteh in 2007 (Badejoko and Jacob, 2021). Since the emergence of Honorable Dimeji Bankole as the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the House has continued to be shrouded with one scandal or the other despite the huge allowances they take from time to time. At a time, Honorable Bankole was given seven days to resign or be disgraced for “consistently mismanaging House funds.” But, as it turned out, it were the group led by Honorable Dino Melaye and ten others that was disgraced out of office, as the crisis the group orchestrated in the House over alleged financial wrongdoing by the Speaker led to their suspension from the House (Tell, 2020). Although the level of sanity in the National Assembly under the leadership of Ahmad Ibrahim Lawan and Femi Gbajabiamila is becoming robust, the amount of money each lawmaker takes home as salary and allowances in both houses continues to increase and remains highly secretive, perhaps to cover up for its non-justification, not minding the agitations that surround the massive pay over the years.

The legislators in Nigeria have always been fond of frequently asking for more of the nation’s material resources like Oliver Twist. The frequent exchange of fisticuffs at the House of Representatives over allegations against the Speaker, Dimeji Bankole and members’ quest to have their collective allowances increased from N9.8 billion to #15.1 billion quarterly, as widely reported in the media, is a case in point and is, indeed, worrisome. About the bloated salary of the National Assembly, Jerry (2020) recalls how the regime of former President Obasanjo paid each representative #4 million as furniture allowance while each of the House of Representatives member and a Senator took between #15 million and #25 million respectively as monthly pay.

Due to the enormous overhead costs of the legislature, infrastructure facilities are nothing to write home about. State’s institutions are not equally viable. Infrastructures are in a deplorable state. The above position is captured in the words of Alake (op cit), who notes that:

...all the state do is receive the monthly allocation and pay personnel which is often bloated, particularly the politicians. They maintain the usual state organs, public service, judiciary, the legislature, and the executive arm. After these expenses have been met, there is hardly anything left to provide infrastructure in the state again.

We can argue that the enormous pay to politicians has led to increase in poverty among Nigerians, despite several measures taken by government to curb the menace.

The situation becomes more worrisome when Sulaiman (2018) notes that in the past seven years; the 469 members of the two arms of the National Assembly have been paid over #80 billion per annum. Unarguably, the #80 billion is above the budget of some state governments in Nigeria. This huge financial package has made the National Assembly to appear as a drain pipe on the country’s dwindling resources and has called for serious attention. Worst still, such allowances are aside of the retinue from staff attached to the House leaders.

As a result of the vast sums of money that the members of the National Assembly take monthly, indebtedness to China, servicing of debts, revenue loss, poverty, unemployment, and a large number of staff attached to each lawmaker, it is sure the government cannot afford the enormous payments any longer. The bicameral legislative system that Nigeria adopts is more or less a duplication of the national lawmaking institutions, which no doubt adds to the cost of governance, and is not sustainable again. Thus, the government of Nigeria needs to steer efforts at reducing the current overhead cost that the national legislature currently receives.

CONCEPTUALIZATION

The legislature is a fundamental organ of government that is more or less the heart of the operation of good governance. In the view of Obiyan (2007), some of the functions of the legislature are representation, lawmaking, and over sighting of other organs of government, especially the executive. Obiyan is of the view that the above functions placed the legislature at the heart of democratic consolidation. He remarks that when the legislature fails, democratic consolidation will also fail. Therefore, a legislator should protect and promote the interest of his constituency, differentiate his personal position and that of his constituency on issues, be in constant contact with members of his constituency, so as to acquaint him with their problems.

Undoubtedly, the 1979 constitution that adopted a bicameral legislature and presidential system of government was re-enacted in 1999. Bicameral and unicameral legislatures have their peculiar gains and challenges. The bicameral legislature that Nigeria adopts allows for robust debate, effective representation, and a more sober and reflective organ of government that can take care of some issues (Festus, 2021). In the same vein, Okon (2019) believes that in a functional democracy, where the people confer legitimacy on their elective representatives, the two chambers perform separate and complementary functions. “One is more representative of the people and deals with immediate concerns of a small constituency; the other has a broader outlook and aggregates the interest of a district (Sulaiman, 2018; Jerry, 2020). The two chambers are actually good in real sense, but it is unfortunate that some of the Senators and Members of the House of Representatives in Nigeria do

not know their districts and constituencies (Tell. 2020). Sadly, most legislators at the National Assembly could not be said to provide effective representation. Hence, the noble function of expression is defeated.

While we share the idea of having two legislative arms, the practice, procedure, and outputs of both components have not engendered confidence in the electorate, particularly as it relates to financial matters. It should be stated that the problem is not the system; as regarding, the character of the people operating the system. This is why the legislators have been labeled as in Nigeria as not men of honor. Although, the bicameral legislature is expensive, but this fear has been alleviated by Odunola and Stone (2020), who opine that the system should not have been costly, if it was “a part-time” job, but today, many African countries, including Nigeria, have turned law-making to a process of making huge money or looting the treasury.

Bicameralism is good because it affords the Senate and the House of Representatives the benefit of harmonizing policies. But, there is the argument that bicameral legislature is cumbersome and time-wasting, and hence breeds slow passage of urgent bills. Aside from this, just as Okon (2019) has argued, some of lawmakers are invisible in the House, thereby making them to be irrelevant. Many of the lawmakers have never sponsored any bill or made any motion that can enhance public policy or good governance since 11th June, 2019 when the 9th National Assembly was inaugurated up to the time over 450 bills have been introduced. As of the time quoted above, when about 450 bills have been introduced, there were still over 90 legislators, including principal officers, which have not supported any bill. The absentee legislators cut across all political parties in Nigeria, including the major ones, which are Peoples Democratic Party and All Progressive Party. As shown in Table 1 below, there were about ten senators that have not sponsored any bill as at May 10th, 2020, almost a year that the ninth senate was inaugurated.

Table 1
List of 10 Prominent Senators who did not Sponsor any Bill after a year

S/N	Names	Political Party	State
1	Ahmad Lawan – President of the Senate	All Progressive Congress	Sokoto
2	Adamu Bulkachuwa	All Progressive Congress	Bauchi
3	Ibrahim Shekarau	All Progressive Congress	Kano
4	Christopher Stephen Ekpenyong	Peoples Democratic Party	Akwa Ibom
5	Godiya Akwashiki	All Progressive Congress	Nasarawa
6	Emmanuel Yisa Orkerjev	Peoples Democratic Party	Benue
7	Kabir Abdullahi Barkiya	All Progressive Congress	Katsina
8	Nicholas Olubukola Tofowomo	Peoples Democratic Party	Ondo
9	Peter Onyeluka Nwaobushi	Peoples Democratic Party	Delta
10	Lawal Hassan Anka	Peoples Democratic Party	Zamfara

Source: Nurudeen (2020) Legit.com

Due to the inability of some lawmakers to sponsor any bill within record time or move an appropriate motion, they are labeled ‘absentee lawmakers.’ The 7th senate, under the leadership of Senator Bukola Saraki adjourned a plenary in the red chamber because they did not form a quorum (Legit.com; 2022). According to Open Parliament (2022), attendance at the National Assembly sittings declined by 13% since 2019, when the current lawmakers were sworn in. Thus, continuous spending of taxpayers’ money on these absentee legislators amounts to a waste of public funds.

The United Nations Commission on Human Rights (2019) opines that good governance on the other hand, is the process whereby public institutions conduct public affairs, manage public resources, and guarantee the realization of human rights. Good governance is free of abuse of office and corruption and has due regard for the rule of law. Good governance guarantees access to good health, adequate housing, sufficient food, quality education, fair justice, and overall security. Key attributes of good governance, according to the United Nations (United Nations, 2018), are transparency, responsibility, accountability, participation, responsiveness to the needs of the people, efficiency in public administration and development of public-oriented budgeting. Good governance emphasizes programmatic strategies for achieving positive and cost-effective results in public administration. Good governance also ensures the rule of law promotes due-process, improves efficiency, facilitates accountability, tackles corruption, salutes excellence, insists on productivity and delivers high-quality service to the people. It is a pity that the over-bloated allowances paid to absentee-Nigerian lawmakers do not facilitate the promotion of good governance, and is indeed antithetical to good governance.

NIGERIAN LEGISLATURES ALLOWANCES: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

In the United States, with a population of almost 303,824,650 (World Report, 2018), where the presidential system has been in operation for centuries, the lower House consists of 435 members while the Senate has 100 members. Nigeria, with a population of about 180 million, less than half of the United States population (by 2018 estimate), has a 360-member House of Representatives and 109 Senators. In the US, a member of the Lower House represents 700,000 people while in Nigeria, a member of the House of Representatives represents nearly 400,000 people. For the American Senate, two Senators represent each of the fifty states; while in Nigeria, each of the thirty-six states produces three Senators and a Senator represent the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. With the relatively high number of representatives in Nigeria, things have

neither been better in terms of accurate representation and provision of democratic yields for the people nor nearer to the modeled system of the US that Nigeria adopts.

The comparison of legislators pay with parliamentary remunerations of other democracies shows clearly that Nigerian federal lawmakers earn considerable pay. As at April 2022; the annual salary of each representative in the US was \$174,000, the Speaker received \$223,500, and the Principal Officers took a uniform of \$193,400 (Samuel, 2022). The current annual salaries for each of the 650 members of the parliament in Britain is 84,144 pounds and the package covers the cost of running an office, appointment of aids, accommodation, and traveling allowances to, and from their constituencies (op. cit). A cursory look senator's annual pay globally shows that Nigerian senators take too much salary. Table 2 below attests to the above.

Table 2
Senators Pay from selected countries

S/N	States	Salary in Dollar (\$)
1	Malaysia	\$25,300.00
2	Spain	\$43,900.00
3	Ghana	\$46,500.00
4	Stri-Lanka	\$5,100.00
5	Saudi Arabia	\$64,000.00
6	France	\$85,900.00
7	South Africa	\$104,000.00
8	Britain	\$105,400.00
9	Germany	\$119,500.00
10	Canada	\$154,000.00
11	United States	\$174,000.00
12	Nigeria	\$2,183,685.00

Source: Sahara reporter (2022)

The details of an average Nigerian senator are shown in Table 3.

Given the Table 3 salary to a senator and the average thirty thousand naira 30,000.00 naira, to the least worker in Nigeria, which many states of the federation are yet to implement, it is practically unreasonable to continue to pay such huge and bloated salary to the lawmakers. In addition, if the figure is multiplied by twelve months and 109 senators, the sum is indeed vast as the overhead cost to a state like Nigeria that has kept borrowing to finance its budget since 2020. A look at the budget of the National Assembly from 2003, as shown in Table 4 below, revealed that its expenditure kept rising except for 2006, perhaps due to the frosty relationship between the National Assembly and the then President Olusegun Obasanjo. To show that the budget of the national legislature is high over the years, the former Central Bank of Nigeria

Governor, Alhaji Sanusi Lamido Sanusi alleged that 'the situation whereby 25% of the country's revenue spending yearly goes to the National Assembly is unhealthy for the country, and its economy (Jide, Ben, and Luka 2022). Also, over the years, the budget of the National Assembly has been shrouded in secrecy. In Nigeria, since the beginning of the ongoing democratic dispensation, in 1999, the federal legislature has been accused of several allegations that ranged from the Faruk Lawan's saga, Professor Fabian Osuji bribe-for-budget passage to Mallam Nasir El-Rufai bribe-for-ministerial clearance scandals. Despite all allegations against the Nigerian lawmakers, they continued to allocate enormous sums to themselves annually, as shown below. There have been public concerns over vast sums and allowances earned by lawmakers over the years. Accusing fingers are pointed at the legislature that each senator gets as much as #13.5 million as running cost that covers all their allowances. In contrast, a member of the House of Representatives gets #8.5million for a similar running cost. With considerable budget and appropriations to the lawmakers, about 83 million Nigerians still live in poverty, while unemployment rate has reached 33.3% as at the fourth quarter of 2020 (Samuel, 2022).

Table 3
Breakdown of Senator Pay in Nigeria

S/N	Purpose	Pay
1	Basic Salary	#2, 484,245.50
2	Hardship Allowance (50% of Basic Salary)	#1, 242,122.70
3	Constituency Allowance (200% of Basic Salary)	#4,968,509.00
4	Newspaper Allowance (50% of Basic Salary)	#1,242,122.70
5	Wardrobe Allowance (25% of Basic Salary)	#621,061.37
6	Recess Allowance (10% of Basic Salary)	#248,424.55
7	Accommodation (200% of Basic Salary)	#4,968,509.00
8	Utilities (30% of Basic Salary)	#828,081.83
9	Domestic Staff (70% of Basic Salary)	#1,863,184.12
10	Entertainment (30% of Basic Salary)	#828,081.83
11	Personal Assistants (25% of Basic Salary)	#621,061.12
12	Vehicle Maintenance Allowance (75% of Basic Salary)	#1,863,184.12
13	Leave Allowance (10% of Basic Salary)	#248,424.55
14	Severance Gratuity (300% of Basic Salary)	#7,452,736.50
		#9,936,982.00
15	Car Allowance (400% of Basic Salary)	Total Monthly #29,479,749.00 (\$181,974.00)

Sahara reporter: 2022

* Several Senators and members of the House of Representatives that were contacted to affirm or debunk the above income, at the time of investigating the subject matter still keep mum on their salary. The silence of lawmakers suggests the income quoted above is more or less valid.

**Table 4
National Assembly Budget from 2003 - 2010**

		Senate					
2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003
#41,993,644,134	#29,768,664,134	#33,768,644,134	#18,523,899,686	#16,008,142,776	#16,108,142,000	#11,241,962,802	#9,682,666,000
		House of Representatives					
#59,323,316,247	#49,148,215,964	#56,148,215,964	#30,326,330,880	#23,802,113,193	#24,102,112,000	#16,676,533,426	#15,851,000,000

Grand Total = #636,568,819,761

Source: Jide; Ben and Luka (2022): Vanguard Newspaper

A total of #115 billion was given to the National Assembly in 2016. Out of the 2017 #7.44 trillion budget, the 8th Assembly lawmakers allocated N125 billion to themselves. The breakdown showed N23.7 billion for personnel costs, N85.8 billion for overhead and N14.9 billion for financing capital projects. In the same 2017, the National Assembly took N14.9 billion with N31.3 billion for the Senate, and N49 billion for the House of Representatives, while the National Assembly Service Commission collected N2.4 billion. The budget provided N9.6 billion for legislative aides, while the Senate Public Accounts Committee took N118.9 million and the House of Representatives had N142.7 million. N12.5 billion

was earmarked for general services; N4.3 billion for the National Assembly Legislative Institute, and N391.3 million for service-wide vote (Guardian, 2022). To show its displeasure with the above budget, the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project, SERAP, in an open letter to Acting President Yemi Osinbajo, expressed grave concern and worries over the 2017 National Assembly budget (Op.cit).

Again in 2018, the National Assembly was allocated #125 billion and was also appropriated with #128 billion in 2019. The same National Assembly collected #115.2 billion in 2020 (Samuel, 2022). For the 2021 budget, the National Assembly was allocated #128 billion, but the lawmakers increased it to #134 billion (Premium Times, 2021).

**Table 5
The breakdown of the \$35 billion 2021 budget in critical areas**

Selected Ministries	Special Allocation	Capital Projects
Ministry of Defence -N840.56 billion	North East Development Commission -N29.7 billion	Power – N198 billion
Ministry of Interior - N227.02 billion	Nigerian Judicial Council N110 billion	Works and Housing – N404 billion.
Ministry of Police Affairs -N441.39 billion	Universal Basic Education Commission – N70.05 billion	Transportation – N256 billion.
Ministry of Education - N545.10 billion	INEC – N40 billion	Defence – N121 billion.
Ministry of Health - N380.21 billion	Public Complaints Commission – N5.20 billion;	Agriculture and Rural Development – N110 billion.
	Human Rights Commission – N3.00 billion;	Water Resources – N153 billion.
	Basic Health Care Provision Fund – N35.03 billion.	Industry, Trade and Investment – N51 billion.
		Education – N127 billion.
		Universal Basic Education Commission – N70 billion.
		Health – N132 billion.
		Zonal Intervention Projects – N100 billion.
		Niger Delta Development Commission – N64 billion

Source: Ndubuisi Ekekwe, December 21, 2020, *Premium Times*.

In the 2022 budget as well, the sum of #134 billion was earmarked for the national Assembly. The sum is the highest since 2015, when the Buhari-led administration came into power (Samuel, 2022). Unfortunately, the colossal sum allocated to constituency allowance that the legislature overlooks for its members amounts to 'looting' of the public tilt and a quick way to protect the looters. According to the remuneration package

published by Legit.com (2022) and Vanguard (2021), the basic annual salaries of the federal legislator's in Nigeria, which would be calculated as follows: Senate President N2, 484,242.50; Deputy Senate President N2, 309,166.75; Senator N2, 026,400 .00; Speaker, House of Representatives N2, 477, 110.00; Deputy Speaker of House of Representatives N1, 98 5.212.50 (See Table 6 for details).

**Table 6
Salaries and Allowances of Current Members of the National Assembly**

Official	Annual Pay	Duty Tour Allowance	Estacode	Privilege	Others Parks
Senator President	N2,484,242m	N37,000 Per day	\$1300	Eight vehicles, including an ambulance	To be provided
Deputy Senate President	N2,309,166m	N32,000	\$790	Four vehicles, including pilot and protocol	To be provided
Senator	N2,026,400 m	N32,000	\$600	Monetized	Monetized
Speaker, House of Reps.	N2,477,100 m	N35,000	\$1000	Seven vehicle, including ambulance	To be provided
Deputy Speaker	N2,287,034m	N30,000	\$750	Four vehicles, excluding, pilot and protocol	To be provided
Members, House of Reps	N1,985,212m	N21,000	\$550	Monetized	Monetized

Source: Tell, 2020

According to Revenue Mobilization, Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC 2016), a Senator or member of the House of Representatives is entitled to some official allowances which would be calculated in specified percentages of the legislator's annual basic salary. The budgets are: accommodation: 200 percent; furniture 300 percent; motor vehicle loan 400 percent; motor vehicle maintenance 75 percent; personal assistant 25 percent; estacode \$600; domestic staff 7 percent; entertainment 30 percent; utilities 30 percent; recess allowance 10 percent; robe allowance 25 percent; newspapers 15 percent; house maintenance 5 percent; constituency allowance 250 percent; while severance gratuity is 300 percent of annual basic salary (Nigerian Tribune, 2022).

While a Senator collects 250 per cent of his annual basic salary as a constituency allowance, his colleague in the House of Representatives gets 100 percent because he has, a smaller constituency. Apart from one personal assistant paid directly by the legislators, the lawmakers are also entitled to five legislative aides, seven special assistants, a secretary, a legislative assistant, a legislative aide, and a senior legislative aide. This is because the salaries of these aides are not included in legislator's allowances because they are paid directly by the National Assembly. In effect, the least paid legislative aide equally receives #52, 240.00 per month, while the highest paid gets as much as #122,372 per month. Thus, officially, a Senator in Nigeria collects about #29,479,749.00 per annum; while his House of Representatives counterparts take home a sum that is only a little lower (Tribune, op. cit.). This makes the National Assembly spend about 4.5 million Naira sides of each of the legislators. However, many of the legislators including the Senators do not use the number of aides they are officially entitled to, although, they employ those aides whose pay comes directly from the National Assembly and pocket the allowances of the remaining ones they are entitled to employ on their own, including the fact that they do not need the services of these other aides (Adewale. 2019). In the second republic, annual pay for Senate President was #16,000.00 while the Speaker made N15, 000.00. Senators earned #12,000 per annum, his counterpart in the House of Representatives received #1,200.00 instead of accommodation and where accommodation was provided, the lawmaker paid #300 as rent. Things degenerated during the military era, particularly during Ibrahim Babangida's regime from December 31, 1983 (Jide, 2019).

In short, if the legislator's payments are considered with the annual budget, gross domestic products, and per capita income of each of these countries, the pay for Nigerian federal lawmakers becomes unjustifiable and ridiculous. In 2015, for instance, the National Assembly unilaterally increased its budgets from #150 billion to #130 billion, which was signed into Appropriation Act by Goodluck Jonathan (Ibanga, 2015). The argument is

simply that the National Assembly's vast allocation, in an attempt to cater to the enormous pay, is higher than the individual budget of 19 states. Despite this over-bloated pay, it is doubtful if the legislators are performing an oversight functions maximally. For instance, exercising oversight function on the ministries and agencies of government is an essential function of the legislature, but still characterized by controversies bordering on corruption. For Odunola and Stone (op. cit.), the oversight has become a conduit pipe through which the legislature milks the nation. Reinforcing this view, Festus (2021) concludes that when the legislators have to undertake oversight functions at the committee level, they request bribes from the relevant ministry, department, or agency. With the ongoing strike in all public universities about seven months over poor welfare and revitalization, it is unreasonable to keep paying the national lawmakers the current bloated emoluments. Hence, pruning membership, in addition to slashing the payments could bring Nigeria in line with countries such as the United States, Britain, and Jamaica whose leaders are daily exploring ways to have more minor government officials and cut the cost of governance.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE HUGE PAY FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

One of the unfortunate effects of the controversial hefty pay of the national lawmakers is the astronomical increase in the cost of governance. As Jerry (2020) notes, Nigeria's presidential system, particularly at the legislative level, is the most costly compared to situations in other countries like the United States and Britain, as we have seen. Besides, the outrageous pay to the legislature is also indirectly the primary reason why they are always desperate to win elections or retain their seats in "choice" or "juicy" committees, particularly, the second-term lawmakers. In effect, the desperation to cling to power or retain the seat in the preferred committees could not be said to be entirely altruistic. In essence, the quest for political power is driven, in most cases, by a desire for monetary gains.

Also, when funds meant for the masses are shared among the few elites, because they are in power, not much is left for the poor and the development of the polity. The shrinking of state resources arising from unduly skewed resource allocation in favor of the legislators impede the capacity of the government to pursue development-oriented policies or even policies that could enhance the welfare of the masses. 'While the benefits of judicious application of such funds cannot be overemphasized, there is equally no doubt that the ability of a state to deploy and implement public policies effectively is partly conditioned by the quantum of available resources.

Hence, a disproportionate appropriation of state funds by the legislators works against sound public policy.

Interestingly, the continued clamor for increment in the allowances of the lawmakers has also resulted in a free-for-all fight among legislators, such as the type that took place on the floor of the House of Representatives on June 2010. The brawl followed an attempt to suspend eleven members who had openly accused the House of Representatives leadership of corruption; the end of which the coup failed, that 'eleven-member progressive faction' of the House, headed by Hon. Farouk Lawan was placed on suspension.

The bandwagon effect is also that, there has not been anybody to protect the interests of the affected constituencies in the lower House. This shameful and open violent hostility has affected the integrity of the lawmakers, and indirectly Nigeria. If perhaps an opinion poll is taken in Nigeria on the National Assembly's credibility, it is doubtful whether it could get an approval rating of 20 percent. The dignifying picture of Hon. Dino Melaye in torn clothes and the manhandling of the only female member of the group, Hon. Mrs. Doris Uboh, which graced the front pages of most national dailies, would be hard to erase in the memory of Nigerians (Nigerian Tribune, 2020).

Before the Honourable Melaye's unfortunate incident, the legislators demanded an increase in their quarterly allowance. According to Jide (2019), they wanted N42 million per quarter instead of the N27 million they received. As if the revelation was neither outrageous nor scandalous enough that need a rebuttal from the House, yet none came. Similar grumbling over allowances resonated in the Senate chamber. The Senators also allegedly asked for a 100 percent increase in their budgets. Each senator of the 109 members currently collects N45 million every quarter or N15 million per month (Odey, 2010). But, they wanted N90 million per quarter or N30 million per month. Even though the legislature does not fix payments, the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) is always burdened by the nuances of the legislature, when it comes, to fixing allowances of the federal legislators, as disclosed by Festus (2021). Besides, RMAFC is not empowered to probe the inflation of their allowances which the national legislators always pay to themselves during the budget passage; it can only verify it (FGN, 2019).

It will appear that the RMAFC lacks the political will. To resist pressure for increased pay let alone ensure a significant reduction in the payments of the legislators and political office holders. Thus, political action by Nigerians, including the civil society, organized labor, and students, may be essential to force the hands of the Federal Government to reduce the emoluments of political office holders. Thus, the over-bloated allowances of the legislature are significant reasons for the frequent delay in

passing Nigeria's appropriation bills. Because legislators usually build their allowances inside the budget during appropriation, these accounts for putting on hold such budget until the executive sufficiently caters for their interest as far as their payments are concerned, therefore not an overstatement to say that the national lawmakers usually milk the national treasury through vast amount they frequently collect and allocate to themselves during the budget process. An analysis of the country's annual budget indicates that a considerable percentage of public resources are committed to the maintenance of the legislature.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the resource drain that the National Assembly seems to represent, the two chambers of the National Assembly in Nigeria could be reduced to one-house-unicameral legislature. Taking the above step will reduce duplication of offices, its paraphernalia, and cost involved. However, given the merits of a bicameral legislature, and, more importantly, its unique place in the federal system that Nigeria operates, this cannot be an attractive option. Another possible option is to reduce the number of members of the National Assembly. In order to have a National Assembly modeled after that of the United States, it is necessary to reduce the number of Senators to two per state (in contradistinction to the current three per state) and one representing the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja (as is currently the situation). This will make a total of 73 Senators instead of the current 109 Senators. Doing so will significantly reduce the number of representatives to be paid.

The Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, should faithfully implement the current 2022 electoral act, to ensure that Nigerian votes count. The Bimodal Accreditation System (MBAS) and electronic transmission of ballots recently introduced should be sustained. To enable the National Assembly performs its oversight functions effectively, members should be appointed into committees positions based on competence. The lower House should emulate the Senate, which has been more stable since 2007, when Senator David Mark, as the president, was elected. The Senate too, can do more in this regard by placing a premium on Senator's capacity and proven competence before being appointed to the various committee positions.

The RMAFC, in conjunction with the Accountant General of Federation, should begin to publish precisely what each of the legislators collects as take-home earnings as they do for other tiers of government. The issue of salaries and allowances paid to the national lawmakers should no longer be kept secret. The constituency allowance should be separated and put apart, so that members of the constituency involved can

evaluate the dividends for such area if it is in tandem with the fund collected for the purpose. If there is no hiding place for our legislators, they will desist from continuously asking for outrageous allowances. Any unrepentant absentee lawmaker should be adequately sanctioned by deducting their pay for the period of absence. The National Assembly Order should be reworked to incorporate this move.

The electorates should also do away with the timid ideas. They should hold elected representatives accountable for their shortcomings. The era of taking money before voting should be a thing of the past, if indeed we want to hold our public officers accountable. This is the time to use the electorate power of recall as stipulated in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The two anti-corruption agencies should do more and be transparent in their efforts. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC, and Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission, ICPC, should not treat any public officer as a sacred cow. It is only when the anti-corruption agencies are not selective in their mandates that supported confidence can be built in our anti-corruption commissions. The outcome of such investigations should be openly made known to Nigerians. To have sustained conviction, the anti-corruption crusade should be public-driven. Nigerian media, both electronic and print, need to do more in their campaigns against corruption and unjustifiable allowances that our legislature frequently demands. This is the time to allow the “Freedom of Information Act’ takes its course on public matters.

Above all, there is a need for a significant reduction in the payments of all political office holders. The planned removal of their pay by 20 percent by President Umaru Yar’ Adua was a right step in the right direction, even though he could not implement it before his illness and eventual death. We would contend, however that to make an impact; a more significant reduction would be essential. This will allow the nation to use the excess funds for other basic infrastructures like electricity, health, agriculture, education, and job creation that are currently gasping for survival. The civil society groups need to do more in this regard by leading the teeming Nigerian voices to be heard and obeyed by our honorable men and women. The voice of Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) has been loud in this area; and others, need to join it in the crusade of reducing political office holders’ colossal pay.

Perhaps, it is high time that Nigerians gave serious thought about part-time legislators, who would only be entitled to a sitting allowance. In this case, the representation will be more likely driven by service. A condition for membership should be access to meaningful source of income.

CONCLUSION

This paper has interrogated the crisis of payments in Nigeria’s National Assembly. It also examined the implications of the vast payments of legislators for good governance and public policy. The paper contended, among other things, that outrageous payments of legislators and political office holders generally aggravate crisis in electoral contest as candidates are desperate to win election to enable them “earn” fat resources. Equally, keen contest characterizes appointment to Committees besides, huge pay for legislator’s crowds outside infrastructure and employment. In essence, devoting a large proportion of the country’s resources to maintaining legislators reduces the funds available for other (more desirable and noble) purposes such as infrastructural development, maintenance, and job creation. This may eventually elicit unpalatable pressure on the government from the masses. The paper concludes by proffering policy options for maintaining a cost-effective and development of a friendly legislature.

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