

Reforming the Nigerian National Assembly for Legislative Effectiveness: Issues, Constraints and Way-Forward

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Abstract: The persistent refusal of the Nigerian legislators to disclose to the public their actual earnings has continued to generate comments which, among other issues, have led to agitations for the reform of the National Assembly to reduce the cost of governance in Nigeria, especially in the wake of the scrapping of the Senegalese Senate in 2012 and the recent ‘yes’ vote to scrap the upper chamber in Mauritania in 2017. In addition, the intensity of the recent claims by a federal lawmaker, Honourable Abdulmumin Jibrin on the pattern of running the National Assembly in terms of scandalous extra-budgetary allowances of lawmakers and secrecy of legislative activities among others, is too weighty to be ignored, hence the significance and inevitability of researching into these issues. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines the issues and arguments surrounding the calls for reforming the National Assembly. The paper adopted mixed-method research design and found that the official salaries and allowances of Nigerian legislators are relatively low in comparison with what obtains in other climes. It also found some elements of lopsidedness in the House’s seats distribution as some states with lower population are given more seats than some with higher population.

Keywords: legislative reform; legislature; democratic; governance

1. Introduction

Over the years, legislative assessment has remained the most topical issue in democratic discourse. This trajectory is mainly attributed to the centrality of the legislature to democratic governance as studies have established that democracy cannot exist without the people’s assembly otherwise referred to as the legislature (Fish, 2006; Alli, 2014; Bello-Imam, 2004; Volden & Wiseman, 2013; Barkan, 2010; Aiyede, 2006). However, the behaviours of the legislators in and out of the legislature have subjected the institution to public condemnation. Since 1999, the

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question of the effectiveness of the National Assembly has been generating concerns among political analysts, scholars and other stakeholders. This is attributed majorly to the excessive and needless confrontations with the executive on one hand, and the immoral behaviours of some legislators on the other hand. The National Assembly has never ceased to make headlines. At some points, it enmeshed itself in internal controversial issues and at other times it engaged in confrontational battles with other arms of government (mostly the executive). Most of these issues ended up soiling its public image as people saw the legislators fighting or struggling for self interests.

As a result of this, people hardly celebrate any good deeds from the National Assembly but are quick to knock the legislators when their conduct seems inimical to democratic survival or developmental aspirations of the people. This makes many people to see the institution as a parasite draining the country's resources especially in the wake of the calls for the reduction of the institution's running cost. In some quarters, some people even opined that the existence of the legislature is the major cause of the developmental quagmire the country is facing and subsequently call for its scrapping (Fatade, 2015). Some also call for the reform of the institution to pave way for part time legislature in order to reduce the scandalous salaries and allowances being gulped by the lawmakers (Ndibe, 2015; *Vanguard*, August 16, 2016)

The agitation reaches climax in 2012 when the government of Senegal announced the emergency legislation to scrap the Senate in order to free its annual budget of 8billion CFA francs (\$16 million), to address the flood disaster that killed thirteen people and rendered thousands homeless (*Agence France Presse*, 2012). More recently, the Mauritanian President, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, declared that the country's Senate is "useless and too costly", and should be abolished to allow for a referendum where 85% of the voters eventually supported the reform in order to bring about local forms of lawmaking and entrench good governance (BBC News, August 7, 2017). This also fuelled the agitation for the reform of the Nigerian National Assembly.

It is against this backdrop that this paper examined the basis and validity of the issues raised in the argument and call for the reform of the National Assembly. In doing this, the paper emphasized on the cost of running the National Assembly with focus on cross-country analysis of the salaries and allowances of Nigerian lawmakers with their counterparts in selected developed and developing countries. The paper also looked at the membership spread of legislative seats among the federating units in the country in order to examine the degree of conformity to the principles of equality and equity in Nigeria's democratic project. The paper is divided into eight (8)

sections. The first section which is the introduction is followed by the second section which dealt with the issues of concerns in legislative politics and governance in Nigeria since 1999 and how they fuelled the agitation for institutional reform. The third section dwelled on the research methodology while the fourth section dissected the appropriateness of the cost of running the National Assembly and a comparative analysis of the salaries and allowances of Nigerian legislators and their contemporaries in other climes. Section five of the paper examined the second parameter of an assessment of how representatives of the diverse population make up the National Assembly in the area of seats allocation among the federating units. The sixth section discussed the constraints to the reformation of the Nigerian National Assembly and the seventh section chatted the way forward in reforming the National Assembly. The paper was concluded in section eight.

2. Issues of Concerns in Legislative Politics and Governance in Nigeria since 1999

As noted in the introductory section of this paper, the significance of the National Assembly in Nigeria makes it an indispensable institution in the country's democratic project. However, there is wide condemnation of the institution especially in the public space, thus, posing the institution as the known enemy of democracy and development (Nnamdi, 2017). This contradictory trajectory portrays the institution as an arm of government 'too weighty to discard and much problematic to retain'. The intensity of the condemnation of the institution in many quarters makes it necessary to review some of the issues that are generating concerns in order to know how to chat a way forward for the institution's reform.

The most paramount issue of concern in legislative discourse in Nigeria is the issue of alleged scandalous salaries and allowances of the national legislators which many commentators believe is outside the purview of what is legally accrues to the lawmakers by the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC). Many Nigerians have continued to complain about the huge salaries and outrageous allowances shrouded in secrecy since 1999. Save for the release of the monthly payment slip by the Speaker of the 8th House of Representatives, Honourable Yakubu Dogara (Aytogo, 2017), the National Assembly never deems it fit to publicize or respond to these allegations appropriately. The controversy raised by the yearly budgetary allocation to the institution lingers on without any sign of abatement in the nearest future. This contributes immensely to the wide negative

public perception of the institution. In view of this, most people have the prejudice that nothing good can come from the National Assembly, therefore denying the lawmakers of kudos for the meritorious efforts towards engendering good governance in the country. Thus, the issue of cost of running the National Assembly is germane to any attempt at reforming the institution.

The issue of public perception of the National Assembly is another concern that refuses to abate since the inception of the Fourth Republic. The National Assembly is seen as a conduit pipe through which public fund is siphoned, especially under the banner of constituency project fund and extraneous allowances that are shrouded in secrecy despite public outcry for the institution's finances to be made public (Oladesu, 2016). Though, the legislators are aware of the negative perception and regard it as worrisome (Umoru, 2016), it is worthy to note that the legislature is not doing enough to correct it. Instead, the National Assembly features in the news on issues inimical to development and democratic survival. Prominent are the issues of corruption scandals, insensitivity and irresponsiveness to the needs of the people at critical periods (such as purchasing bullet proof vehicles during recession when government finds it difficult to pay workers' salaries), and refusal to pass important bills like the Petroleum Industry Bill, among others. The National Assembly is also alleged to have been frustrating the anti-corruption fights through non passage of Special Criminal Courts Bill initiated by President Buhari in 2016 (Nnamdi, 2017). Consequently, the negative perception of the Assembly soars as a result of trivial acts and unprofessional actions of some legislators. For instance, habitual engagement in physical brawls at plenary over issues of personal concern, such as the release of the video by Senator Dino Melaye on the punishment meted out to Senator Ali Ndume for raising the allegation of certificate scandal against him (Senator Melaye) and purchase of N300million bullet proof SUV car by the Senate President, Senator Bukola Saraki.

The ways and manners by which the leaderships of the National Assembly are emerging since 1999 is antithetical to an ideal democratic process. The drama that characterized the contest for the Senate presidency on the June 3, 1999 between Senators Evan Enwerem (from Imo State) and Chuba Okadigbo (from Anambra State) right to that of Senators Bukola Saraki (Kwara State) and Ahmed Lawan (Yobe State) showed that the institution cannot be trusted to organized a credible internal election and selection devoid of deviant politickings. The consequence of the shallow and perverted elections is the leadership instability haunting the institution. The instances are seen from incessant impeachments and removals of

principal officers on slight provocation or political permutation to protect personal or sectional interests. For instance, The 4th Senate had three different Presidents in four years, while the 4th House had two Speakers. Each of the impeached officers was removed as a result of allegation that was politically exaggerated. For instance, Enwerem was impeached on an allegation of an outrageous furniture scandal while Okadigbo was axed on a ‘Salah ram’ scandal. In the House, Salisu Buhari was kicked out as a result of certificate forgery (from University of Toronto in Canada) which brought about the sobriquet of ‘toronto certificate’ in Nigeria’s socio-political discourse. The trend continued in the 6th House when Honourable Patricia Etteh was removed in what is today known as *Ettehgate* in Nigerian politics (Saliu & Bakare, 2016a). This trajectory is not limited to presiding officers, as chairmen of committees and other principal officers were removed in controversial circumstances devoid of due process. Examples are Honourable Abdulmumin Jibrin (Chair, House Committee on Appropriation- removed on budget padding allegation), Senator Babajide Omowore (Chair, Senate Committee on Rules and Business) and more recently, Senator Ali Ndume (as Majority Leader) removed by Senator Bukola Saraki in a circumstance that is widely referred to as a ‘civilian coup’.

Another issue of concern is the wide allegation of corruption leveled against members of the institution. The instances of corruption activities are so numerous that the institution has lost its place of pride among the institutions of democracy. Several commentators and analysts at one time or the other referred to the National Assembly as a den of thieves and self-centered people. A celebrated accusation was that of Obasanjo (2016) when he designated the National Assembly as “an assemblage of thieves and rogues”. Also, Olaoye (2015) referred to Nigerian legislators as ‘legislathieves’. The corruption tendency in the National Assembly is traceable to the era of self-appropriation of allowances such as furniture, wardrobe, newspaper, with outrageous amount shrouded in secrecy. However, it took another dimension when the issue of vehicle purchase scandal rocked the Rt. Hon. Dimeji Bankole-led House of Representatives in 2010. Till date, the National Assembly has continually engaged in vehicle scandals. Latest is the purchase of 109 Toyota Land Cruiser Sport Utility Vehicles (SUVs) at N35 million apiece for Senators and 360 Peugeot cars for House members despite strong opposition from members of the public (Thisday, April 28, 2016). Aside the vehicle purchase scandal, there are other corruption cases most of which are yet to be resolved. These include: The Maina’s N195billion Pension Scam involving Senator Aloysius Etuk, the Kerosene subsidy scam, Esai Dangabar’s Police Pension Fund Fraud involving members of the Senate

joint Committees on Establishment and Public Service Matter, and State and Local Government Affairs (Adams, 2015), Stella Oduah's N255 million armoured car scandal, the Missing N20billion Naira oil money, and the Farouk Lawan's \$620,000 bribe from Femi Otedola in the fuel subsidy scam among others.

Related to the issue of corruption is the concern on budget handling by the National Assembly especially in the 8th Assembly owing to the much celebrated 2016 budget padding allegation. One of the many reasons attributed to the budget padding issue is the habitual delay in passing the budget annually. Budget processing in the National Assembly since the emergence of the Fourth Republic is characterized by several complexities which undermine the sanctity of the whole exercise. Until 2016, the National Assembly used to transmit passed Appropriation Bill in two batches for Presidential assent. The first transmission is the 'budget highlight' that only captures Ministerial, Departments and Agencies appropriations and the second transmission is the 'budget details' which state the comprehensive breakdown of items and amount appropriated. The practice over the years shows that the Presidents had been signing the budget highlights into law without detail knowledge of the contents of the budgets as passed by the National Assembly. This allows the legislators to tamper with the contents of the budget by re-appropriating funds and inserting new projects alien to the policy direction of the executive. In doing this, the legislators can reduce or increase the appropriated amount of items or remove and insert new ones sometimes in conspiracy with the heads of the concerned MDAs but to the ignorance of the President. The Presidents only examine the sub-totals of the MDAs' budgets as stated in the transmitted passed Appropriation Bill in comparison to what was earlier presented to the National Assembly and assented if no significant variation is observed.

However, the tradition was challenged when President Muhammadu Buhari withheld assent to the harmonized N6.06 trillion 2016 Appropriation Bill as passed and transmitted by the National Assembly on March 23, 2016 (Udo, 2016; Ameh & Adetayo, 2016). It took the meticulous line by line re-checking of the transmitted passed Appropriation Bill by the Buhari-led Federal Executive Council to discover the discrepancies in the 2016 budget. This was as a result of the whistle blown by the embattled former Chairman of the House Committee on Appropriation, Honourable Abdulummin Jibrin in what consequently led to the 'Budget Padding' scandal. Honourable Jibrin accused the Speaker, Rt. Hon. Yakubu Dogara and three other Principal Officers of corruption and padding the 2016 budget (Obioha, 2016). This was done in a way where new constituency projects were freshly inserted into

the budget during scrutiny against the plan of the executive. On the other hand, the consequential outcome of the interplay of these complexities was the preponderance delay in budget enactment which not only served as a threat to democratic survival but also slowed down development thereby raising concerns on the need to reform the legislative institution.

The effectiveness of the National Assembly is also challenged on the grounds of poor performance of oversight function, cold Executive-legislative relations, and uncoordinated constitutional amendment attempts, among others. In view of these, this paper narrows down the issues to two for consideration on the need to reform the National Assembly for more effective output.

3. Research Methodology

As stated earlier, the paper examined the appropriateness of the cost of running the legislature in the light of how representative the institution is to the people. In doing this, mixed-method research design was adopted to combine elements of qualitative and quantitative gathering and analysis of data. The rationale for adopting this research design is premised on the fact that neither of the qualitative and quantitative methods is suffice for studying the subject matter under the two adopted indicators. Hence, using quantitative to leverage on the qualitative becomes inevitable. Data were gathered through primary and secondary sources. The secondary data were sourced from official documents of the National Assembly, publications of National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies, scholarly journal and newspapers' articles, as well as textbooks. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as percentile and tabular illustration. In addition, thematic and content analyses were used to analyze the data to explain the causality, outcome and effect of the findings. The outcome is subjected to Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) to elicit informed information on the causal factors. Two former legislators were interviewed, one Senator and one member of the House of Representatives for balance and representation.

4. Dissecting the Appropriateness of the Cost of Running the National Assembly

In the wake of the allegations of scandalous and outrageous salaries and allowances of the Nigerian national legislators, it becomes necessary to look into how much the legislators officially earn in order to take position on whether they are being overpaid or underpaid. On a general note, it is arguable that no legislature in the world can be effective if such lacks adequate funding. However, the definition of the ‘adequacy’ of funding is debatable. Whether the funding is high or low, adequate or inadequate, it is expected that the output of the legislature should commensurate with the hard earned tax-payers’ money expended on it. The pattern of funding the legislature varies with countries depending on the socio-economic status, the type of legislature adopted (unicameral or bicameral) and the size of the legislature and sometimes the tenure system.

In Nigeria, Section 70 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) provides that the salary and allowances of the members of the National Assembly shall be as determined by the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC). However, it is widely believed as argued by Amaefule (2015), that the salaries and allowances of legislators are not limited to the ones officially stated, rather there are others that accrue from self-appropriation and corruption. Comparing the remuneration of Nigerian legislators with their counterparts in other democracies is also a trending issue of public discourse. For instance, A Senator and House Member in the United States are annually entitled to \$3,409,422 and \$1,429,909 respectively while those of Nigeria get \$184,961 and \$166,739 respectively. Two reasons can be attributed for the gap. One, the economies of the two countries are incomparable. Two, all allowances of the United States’ legislators are captured in the pay while that of Nigeria is partly captured. For example, ‘estacode’, tour duty, and medical allowances, among others, are not captured as they are paid except when the need arises (Saliu & Bakare, 2016b). In view of this, making a cross-country comparison of legislators’ salaries and allowances may be technically difficult but not out of point. As a result, this paper focuses on Nigeria’s legislators’ official salaries and allowances vis-à-vis those of their counterparts in selected countries in order to take a stand on whether it is a venture of extravagance or essentiality.

Table 1. Breakdown of Official Salaries and Allowances of Nigerian Legislators

ANNUAL	Senators (N)	House of Representatives (N)
Basic salary	2,026,400.00	1,986,212.50
Vehicle Fuelling/Maintenance	1,520,000.00	1,489,000.00
Constituency	5,000,000.00	1,985,000.00
Domestic Staff	1,519,000.00	1,488,000.00
Personal Assistant	506,600.00	493,303.00
Entertainment	607,920.00	595,563.00
Recess	202,640.00	198,521.00
Utilities	607,920.00	397,042.00
Newspapers/Periodicals	303,960.00	297,781.00
House Maintenance	101,320.00	99,260.00
Wardrobe	506,600.00	496,303.00
Estacode	\$950.00**	\$900.00**
Tour Duty	\$37,000.00**	\$35,000.00**
TOTAL	12,902,360.00	9,525,985.50

*** Not added to total

OTHERS

TENURE (Every 4 Years)	Senators (N)	House of Representatives (N)
Accommodation	4,000,000.00	3,970,000.00
Vehicle Loan	8,000,000.00	7,940,000.00
Furniture	6,000,000.00	5,956,000.00
Severance Gratuity	6,090,000.00	5,956,000.00
TOTAL	24,090,000.00	23,822,000.00

Source: NILS, 2015 (as reproduced from Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission – RMAFC's website <http://www.rmafc.gov.ng/>)

From the table 1, it is observed that the annual remuneration (including salaries and yearly allowances) of a Nigerian Senator is pegged at N12, 902,360.00. Aside this, A Senator is also entitled to N24, 090,000.00 (a once and for all pay). On the other hand, a member of the House is entitled to N9, 525,985.50 annually as salaries and allowances with N23, 822,000.00 as a one-time pay. The amount spent on Nigerian legislators is calculated below:

A Senator:

$$N12, 902,360.00 \times 4 \text{ (tenure years)} = N51, 609,440.00$$

$$N51, 609,440.00 + N24, 090,000.00 = N75, 699,440.00^{**}$$

The 109 Senators:

$N75, 699,440.00 \times 109 = N8, 251,238,960.00^{**}$

A House of Representatives Member:

$N9, 525,985.50 \times 4 \text{ years} = N38, 103,942.00^{**}$

$N38, 103,942.00 + N23, 822,000.00 = N61, 925,942.00^{**}$

The 360 House of Representatives Member:

$N61, 925,942.00 \times 360 = N22, 293,339,120.00^{**}$

***Excluding estacode and tour duty allowances*

This shows that the entire legislature (109 Senators and 360 House members) gulped N30, 544,578,080.00 (i.e. N8, 251,238,960.00 + N22, 293,339,120.00) excluding estacode and tour duty allowances which are paid based on the number of overseas travels and duty tours (which include oversight tours).

5. Cross-Country Analysis of Official Salaries and Allowances Legislators in Developing Countries

Having analyzed the official salaries and allowances of the Nigerian legislators on individual basis, it is necessary to present the analysis of the salaries and allowances of their counterparts in other countries especially developing nations. Three developing countries that share some democratic and economic similarities with Nigeria were selected (India, Tanzania and Kenya). Furthermore, a comparative analysis is done among the selected developing countries and some other developed countries. The various amounts in the countries' local currencies were converted to US dollar and further converted to Naira at US\$1/N200 for easy comparison and understanding.

Table 2. Breakdown of Official Salaries and Allowances of Indian Legislators

Annual	Amount (₹)
Basic Salary	
Monthly fixed salary 50,000.00/month	
Constituency Allowance 45,000.00/month	
Office Expense 45,000.00/month	
Total Basic Salary (140,000.00 x 12)	1,680,000.00
DA 2,000.00 x 190 days	380,000.00
Air Travel	408,000.00
Rail Travel	5,000.00

Water	4,000.00
Electricity	400,000.00
Furniture	75,000.00
Telephone	90,000.00
House Rent	420,000.00
Medical	40,000.00
TOTAL Salary and Allowances	3,502,000.00
Constituency Development Fund: \$420,790 x N200	84,158,000.00
GRAND TOTAL	87,660,000.00

Source: NILS, 2015 (as reproduced from Pay and Perks of Indian MP, MLA and Prime Minister, 2015 <http://www.bemoneyaware.com/blog/pay-and-perks-of-indian-mp,-mla-and-prime-minister/>)

From the table 2, it can be deduced on the one hand that the salary and allowances of an Indian legislator is somewhat similar to that of Nigeria in terms of headings and line items. On the other hand, there is a wide gap in terms of the financial entitlements. A legislator in India earns about N3.5million annually putting his/her monthly entitlement at N291,833.33; an amount that is about 73% lower than the pay of a Nigerian Senator. However, an Indian legislator is entitled to a whopping N84.1million as Constituency Development Fund (CDF) which makes the total emolument to be higher than the Nigerian counterpart.

Table 3. Breakdown of Official Salaries and Allowances of Tanzanian Legislators

Annual	Amount (₦)
Basic Salary \$84,000 x N200	16,800,000.00
Care Allowance \$13,000 x N200	2,600,000.00
Committee Meeting/Parliamentary Sessions \$22,200 xN200	4,440,000.00
Constituency Allowance\$13,761 x N200	2,752,200.00
TOTAL Salary and Allowances	26,592,200.00
Severance Package\$98,000 x N200	19,600,000.00
Constituency Development Fund \$13,761 x N200	2,752,200.00
GRAND TOTAL	48,944,400.00

Source: Author's Computation with data from NILS, 2015

Unlike the Indian and Nigerian cases, the line items of Tanzanian legislators are fewer but the aggregate amount allocated to the items is more than the entitlements of the legislators in India and Nigeria. A Tanzanian legislator earns N26.5million annually, an amount that is more than double of what a Nigeria Senator officially earns. While an average Nigerian legislator is entitled to about N6million severance pay, a Tanzanian legislator goes home with N19.6million at the end of his/her tenure. The legislator is also entitled to N2.7million CDF, though lower than that of his Indian counterpart which stands at N84.1million.

Table 4. Breakdown of Official Salaries and Allowances of Kenyan Legislators

Annual	Amount (₦)
Basic Salary \$63,129.84 x N200	12,625,968.00
Sitting Allowance \$9484.32 x N200	1,896,864.00
Contributory Pension \$16035.12 x N200	3,207,024.00
Car Allowance \$49397.35	9,879,470.00
Travel Allowances \$38767.08 x N200	7,753,416.00
Constituency Allowance \$794,464 x N200	158,892,800.00
TOTAL Salary and Allowances	194,255,542.00
Constituency Development Fund \$794,464	158,892,800.00
GRAND TOTAL	353,148,342.00

Source: Author's Computation with data from NILS, 2015

Table 4 shows a six-item salary and allowances payable to Kenyan legislators. A legislator in Kenya is entitled to an annual remuneration of N194.2million excluding about N158.8million CDF. Out of the four developing countries under review, the Kenyan legislators are the highest paid in all ramifications.

Table 5. Comparative Analysis of Official Salaries and Allowances of Legislators in Selected Developed and Developing Countries

	India	Tanzania	Kenya	Nigeria House Members	Nigeria Senators	US House Members	US Senators	UK
Annual Basic Salary	\$25,758	\$84,000	\$61,964	\$9,926	\$10,132	\$174,000	\$174,000	\$75,330.85
Other Allowances	\$27,936	\$133,200	\$111,585	\$156,813	\$174,829	\$1,255,909	\$3,235,422	\$479,917.28
CDF	\$420,790	\$13,761	\$794,464	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
TOTAL	\$474,484	\$230,961	\$968,013	\$166,739	\$184,961	\$1,429,909	\$3,409,422	\$555,248.13

Source: Extracted from NILS, 2015 with Author's re-computation

Comparing the salaries and allowances of the four countries with the United States and the United Kingdom legislators shows that the United States Congress is the highest funded followed by Kenya. It is disturbing to note that Kenyan legislature despite the country's lower economy gulps more money than the United Kingdom parliament. It is also interesting to note that Nigeria's National Assembly is the least funded out of the six countries under review.

6. Discussion of Findings on Nigeria's Legislative Pay vis-à-vis other Countries' Legislators

Though, contrary to the information in public domain that the Nigerian legislature is the highest funded, it is observed that there are some legislatures that enjoy more funding even in countries that are less economically viable than Nigeria (for example, Kenya and Tanzania, among others). However, the issue with legislative funding in Nigeria is not in terms of total officially documented earnings but the earnings that are self-appropriated outside the purview of the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC), an organization solely saddled with the responsibility of fixing the emoluments of public servants. It is officially stated that no lawmaker earns 'Constituency Development Fund' (CDF) which makes the total earning to be \$184,961 and \$166,739 for each Senator and House member respectively which is less than what is obtainable in countries like India (\$474,484), Tanzania (230,961), Kenya (\$968,013), Philippines Senate (\$4,497,957) and Australia (\$646,230) whose legislators earn the CDF (NILS, 2015), but in reality the Nigerian lawmakers are known to earn quarterly allocations for constituency projects known as constituency allowance which is different from the CDF as well as 18 different regular and irregular allowances totaling N5,472,436,419.5 for the 358 House members (excluding Speaker and his deputy) and N1,994,788,160 for the 107 Senators (excluding Senate President and his deputy) annually (Amaefule, 2015). This was recently corroborated by the Hon. Abdulmumin Jibrin who disclosed that each member of the House of Representatives earns about N10million monthly (Adesanya, 2016).

Hon. Abdulmumin Jibrin unveiled that the unofficial earnings of the legislators are too many. There are several claims on the guesstimate figures of the annual salaries and allowances noted by prominent persons that could not be out-rightly discountenanced. For instance, Prof. Itse Sagay, who is the Presidential Adviser on Anti-corruption to President Muhammadu Buhari, claimed that information available to him shows that a Nigerian Senator earns about N29 million a month and over N3 Billion a year (Adebayo, 2017). The breakdown of the figure shows that the basic salary is pegged at N2, 484,245.50 as against the official N2, 026,400.00 stated by the RMAFC. While the difference in the figure seems marginal, there are some figures that are widely different with some allowances not captured by the official pay but claimed to be payable to the legislators by Sagay. For example, while the official newspaper allowance is put at N303, 960.00 for a Senator and N297,781.00 for House member, Sagay claimed that a Senator gets a whopping N1, 242, 122.70

for newspapers annually. In addition, the RMAFC in its official payment breakdown did not include hardship allowance; Sagay claimed that a Senator takes N1, 242, 122.70 for such. Another report of the bogus remuneration of the legislators worthy of note is the one put forward by the Economic Confidential (2016) which claimed that aside the official remuneration packages of the federal legislators, Nigerian lawmakers corruptly appropriate non-regular allowances for themselves. Despite public outcry and press' revelations triggering the Freedom of Information Act in this regard, the National Assembly remains adamant to make public declaration of the actual entitlements of the legislature. The refusal to publicly declare the legislative pays is a sign that they are earning more than the legally appropriated pays (Mahmud, 2017).

However, in as much as these claims, among several others, cannot be discountenanced, their validity seems questionable. For instance, the average budgetary allocation of the National Assembly stands at N150billion yearly. But taking the figure by Prof. Sagay that a Senator earns N3 Billion a year, it means that the National Assembly will need N981billion to pay the 109 Senators (excluding the 360 House members, civil servants, legislative aides and running total etc.); a figure that is almost seven times the total annual budget. In view of this, where is the National Assembly generating extra fund to offset the self-appropriated pay? It is interesting to note that the legislators have on several occasions continued to refute the claims but little is done to absolve the institution of the alleged scandalous remunerations. After several requests that the National Assembly should publish its financial dealings, the Senate President (Bukola Saraki) ordered the breakdown of the budget of the legislature should be published on line. However, the breakdown did not show precisely how much each legislator earns. In reaction to the open challenge once made by the Governor of Kaduna State, Nasir El-Rufai, that the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Rt. Hon. Yakubu Dogara should make the details of the National Assembly's N115 Billion budget public, the Speaker published his pay slip for two months which shows that he receives N402,500 monthly (Ayitogo, 2017). The authenticity of the pay slip is questionable on the grounds that the official remuneration as fixed by the RMAFC as his entitlement as a House member (excluding his allowances as a principal officer) is more than what was shown (Saliu & Bakare, 2016b).

From the above analysis, premised on the official pay, it may not be out of point to argue that the salaries and allowances of Nigerian legislators are not extravagant but essential given the fact that they are usually faced with enormous financial requests

from their constituency members, friends, party leaders and members, community development associations and family members among others, as claimed by Solomon (2016) and Akinderu-Fatai (2016). However, it becomes an extravagant venture when one considers the days of working vis-à-vis the pay. Section 63 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) requires both chambers to sit for a period of not less than 181 days each in a year. This means that the chambers will make at least 724 sittings in their 4-year tenure. A Senator receives an average of N104, 557.24 per sitting, N313, 671.72 in one week and N1, 254,686.88 in a month; an amount no Professor can make in two months. On the other hand, a member of the House receives an average of N85, 533.07 per sitting, N256, 599.21 weekly and N1, 026,396.84 monthly; an amount that can be used to pay the monthly salaries of about 35 graduate civil servants in a State like Kwara among others in Nigeria whose average salary scale is around N30,000/month (Saliu & Bakare, 2016b).

7. How Representative are the Representatives: Interrogating Seats Allocation in the National Assembly

Membership of the two chambers of the National Assembly is spread across the nooks and crannies of the country in line with the representative nature of the legislature. While the Senate is distributed equally, the House seats are distributed based on population. While the former is equality-based, the latter is equity-based. However, the question is: 'to what extent is equality and equity holistically achieved?' If the distribution of membership of a legislature does not truly reflect the population distribution, the consequence is the illegitimacy or unpopularity of the decision made by such legislative body since it will never portray the decision of the entire citizenry. First and foremost, one should begin the assessment of Nigerian National assembly on the premise of whether their membership distributions truly reflect the heterogeneous nature of the country or not. The table 6 clearly shows the legislative seats allocated to each of the thirty six states and the federal capital territory (FCT) in the country:

Table 6. Numerical and Percentage Distribution of Legislative Seats in the National Assembly by States' Population

S/N	STATE	POPULATION	% OF TOTAL POPULATION	SENATORIAL SEATS	% OF TOTAL SENATE SEATS	HOUSE REPRESENTATIVE SEATS	% OF TOTAL HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVE SEATS
1	Kano	9,401,288	6.69	3	2.75	24	6.67
2	Lagos	9,113,605	6.49	3	2.75	24	6.67
3	Kaduna	6,113,503	4.35	3	2.75	16	4.44
4	Katsina	5,801,584	4.13	3	2.75	15	4.17
5	Oyo	5,580,894	3.97	3	2.75	14	3.89
6	Rivers	5,198,716	3.70	3	2.75	13	3.62
7	Bauchi	4,653,066	3.31	3	2.75	12	3.33
8	Jigawa	4,361,002	3.11	3	2.75	11	3.06
9	Benue	4,233,641	3.03	3	2.75	11	3.06
10	Anambra	4,177,828	2.97	3	2.75	10	2.78
11	Bornu	4,171,104	2.97	3	2.75	10	2.78
12	Delta	4,112,445	2.93	3	2.75	10	2.78
13	Niger	3,954,772	2.82	3	2.75	10	2.78
14	Imo	3,927,563	2.80	3	2.75	10	2.78
15	Akwa Ibom	3,902,051	2.78	3	2.75	11	3.06
16	Ogun	3,751,140	2.67	3	2.75	9	2.50
17	Sokoto	3,702,676	2.64	3	2.75	11	3.06
18	Ondo	3,460,877	2.46	3	2.75	9	2.50
19	Osun	3,416,959	2.43	3	2.75	9	2.50
20	Kogi	3,314,043	2.36	3	2.75	9	2.50
21	Zamfara	3,278,873	2.33	3	2.75	7	1.94
22	Enugu	3,267,837	2.33	3	2.75	8	2.22
23	Kebbi	3,256,541	2.32	3	2.75	8	2.22
24	Edo	3,233,366	2.31	3	2.75	9	2.50
25	Plateau	3,206,531	2.28	3	2.75	8	2.22
26	Adamawa	3,178,950	2.26	3	2.75	8	2.22
27	Cross River	2,892,988	2.06	3	2.75	8	2.22
28	Abia	2,845,380	2.03	3	2.75	8	2.22
29	Ekiti	2,398,957	1.71	3	2.75	6	1.67
30	Kwara	2,365,353	1.68	3	2.75	6	1.67
31	Gombe	2,365,040	1.68	3	2.75	6	1.67
32	Yobe	2,321,339	1.65	3	2.75	6	1.67
33	Taraba	2,294,800	1.63	3	2.75	6	1.67
34	Ebonyi	2,176,947	1.55	3	2.75	6	1.67
35	Nasarawa	1,869,377	1.33	3	2.75	5	1.39
36	Bayelsa	1,704,515	1.21	3	2.75	5	1.39
37	FCT	1,406,239	1.00	1	1.00	2	0.56
	TOTAL	140,431,790	100	109	100	360	100

Source: Bakare, 2014

An examination of the table shows elements of lopsidedness in the distribution of legislative seats in the House of Representatives. One may not be out of context to question the rationality behind giving nine (9) seats to Ogun State with a population of 3,751,140 while its contemporaries like Akwa Ibom and Sokoto in term of population size with 3,902,051 and 3,702,676 respectively have eleven (11) seats each. One will also wonder if the people of Zamfara are not legally entitled to equal representation in the lower chamber. The state with the population might of 3,278,873 people is allocated seven (7) seats while those with lower population such as Enugu with 3,267,837 people and Kebbi with 3,256,541 inhabitants are given eight (8) seats each and above all Edo state with 3,233,366 residents has nine (9) seats. The injustice meted out to Ogun and Zamfara amongst others like Anambra, Bornu and Delta can also be seen in the allocation of ten (10) seats to Niger and Imo with 3,954,772 and 3,927,563 people respectively as against the same allocation to Anambra, Bornu and Delta states with a whopping one million people higher. Is the FCT not also shortchanged with two (2) seats compared to five (5) given to Nasarawa and Bayelsa considering their population range?

However, there is no doubt that aside the few cases noted above, the legislature relatively conforms to the tenet of democratic representativeness. This is because there is never perfection in humanity and the seat distribution reflects average distribution according to population range. On the other hand, the equal distribution of senatorial seats regardless of population, economic viability, social advancement, political consciousness and geographical size makes up for the little deficiencies. It also satisfies moral justification to check the possible excesses of the highly populated states and regions in becoming dictatorial in the conduct of legislative businesses (Bakare, 2014). To this end, legislative decisions in the National Assembly do reflect the wish of the entire citizenry; *ceteric paribus* (all things being equal). Perhaps, that is why there is little or no agitation for the creation of more federal constituencies on the basis of marginalization.

8. Constraints to the Reformation of the Nigerian National Assembly

There are numerous factors militating against effectiveness of the National Assembly since inception of the Fourth Republic that necessitate the need for institutional reform. However, few and cogent ones are discussed in this paper. These are: Poor capacity of most legislators, poor funding, lack of timeliness in the constitution for the President's presentation of budget, misconception of the roles of the legislature, and inter-organ suspicion and excessive rivalry between executive and legislature among others.

At the inception of the republic, it was obvious that most of the legislators lacked adequate capacity to effectively perform their legislative duties. Series of trainings, workshops and seminars were organized both at home and abroad to mitigate this challenge. However, the challenge still persists. Most of the legislators lack the capacity to engage with bills especially the complex ones. This situation is not peculiar to Nigeria and it has therefore necessitated the global practices of hiring legislative aides who are experts in different fields such as law, economics, democratic studies and sociology, among others, to give expertise support to legislators. However, this has not solved the problem in Nigeria as most of the legislators hire their legislative aides based on political patronage at the expense of expertise consideration. The National Assembly makes provision for each legislator to have five legislative aides (NILS, 2013) to assist them but some of them rather hire their relatives who would not surface in Abuja not to talk of performing any support services. To make up for this, some legislators engage the services of

consultants privately but this is limited because of the cost implication borne by the lawmakers.

Aside the poor lawmaking capacity, many legislators also lack the ability to optimally utilize the information and communications technology (ICT) equipment that ought to assist them drastically reduce the challenges of lawmaking. Despite the series of training and procurement of ICT equipment (such as computers and internet facilities), most of them are not inclined to the usage of this equipment. For instance, electronic voting machine installed in the gallery of the National Assembly is hardly put to use as voice voting is still popularly used. In addition, the legislators still conduct their businesses with huge pile of papers in spite of the paradigm shift to paperless legislature where bills and other information are sent to legislators' email to reduce financial and time costs.

Inadequate funding is another challenge facing the National Assembly. As claimed by Sumaila (2013), the annual budget of the National Assembly hovers around N120-150 billion which is grossly inadequate for running the legislature. This is because the salaries and wages of the legislators and their legislative aides, management of National Assembly and constituency offices and consultation of professionals and technical experts in various fields as well as running the agencies of the National Assembly, among others, are expected to be funded from the legislative budget. For instance, out of the 2013 national budget of N4.9trillion, the National Assembly budget was N150billion, representing a meager 3.1% of the total national budget less than the budget of the agencies and parastatals under the executive like the CBN with N300billion budget. However, the public is made to believe that the legislature gulps about 25% of the budget which therefore pitches the public against the legislators and portrays the institution as an extravagant venture (Sumaila, 2013).

With respect to budget efficiency, the National Assembly is faced with the challenge of lack of timeliness in the constitution which allows the President to present it at his own convenience (mostly in November/December) and expect the National Assembly to pass it before the commencement of the new fiscal year. The failure to do this on time has put the National Assembly at the receiving end of the knocks for budget delay. The corruption tendency of some people (including private and public officials) is not helping the situation. Some corrupt-minded people usually attempt to pervert the process for their selfish gains. All these coupled with other challenges do affect effectiveness and efficiency of the National Assembly in budget processing.

Misconception of the role of the legislature is another challenge hindering the Fourth Republic National Assembly's efficiency. Most people do not understand the line of demarcation between the legislature and the executive in terms of their constitutional functions. The failure of the executive to provide all basic needs of the people and the consequent high poverty prevalence in the country make most Nigerians to turn to the legislators (given their proximity to the grassroots) to solve their material needs. This always distracts them from lawmaking duties and encourages them to engage in sharp practices that will fetch them more money to take care of their responsibilities in their constituencies. These are responsible for the desperate involvement of the legislators in the award and execution of constituency projects thereby denting the institution's image.

There is also a wide gap between the executive and legislature to the extent that both arms see themselves as rivals and not different parts of same system. This promotes suspicion and consequently leads to excessive perverted politicking, confrontations and rivalry between them. To a large extent, the rivalry creates unfavourable environment for development and good governance, with the legislature always receiving the blame from the people.

9. The Way forward in Reforming the National Assembly

From the analysis so far, it is established that the National Assembly has the potential to perform better than what is obtained, if necessary measures are taken into consideration. In light of this, the paper recommends that the authority and management of the National Assembly should consider serious and adequate capacity training and re-orientation of the legislators toward effective performance as against the ceremonial trainings given to them at the beginning of the first session which hardly give them adequate knowledge about bill processing and budget scrutiny, among other legislative duties. It will not be out of place for the NILS' induction course, workshops, trainings and seminars to be held on yearly basis instead of once in four years tenure. In addition to this, NILS should be more proactive by packaging emerging issues, presenting such before the National Assembly and educating them on world best practices in handling such issues or acquiring expertise options on how to tackle such issues.

It is also recommended that the budgetary allocation to the National Assembly should be increased to enable the legislators perform their oversight functions without relying on logistics from the MDAs under assessment. However, the fact

that the institution is not accounting for the methods of expending the current funds by disclosing its budget to the public like that of the executive is recognized. To this end, the National Assembly budget should be made public for people to see who gets what, when and how? This will make Nigerians understand the financial challenges facing the institution thereby advocating for increased funding.

The Ministry of Budget and National Planning and its ministerial agencies should commence working on the next fiscal year budget on time to enable the President present it to the National Assembly around August of the preceding fiscal year. This will afford the National Assembly the average of four months needed for the scrutiny and passage of the budget. It will also absolve the National Assembly of the unnecessary pressures that open rooms for manipulation of the budget process. In the light of this, the National Assembly, as a matter of urgency, should initiate constitutional amendment of Section 81(1) to stipulate that budget estimate of the next fiscal year should be laid before the National Assembly not later than last week of August of the preceding year. It should be noted that several scholars had earlier called for the amendment of the Section 81 and 82 of the constitution to tackle the lack of timeline and lateness of budget presentation by the executive (see Obadan, 2009 and 2014; Ekeocha, 2012; Abiola, 2012). To this end, efforts that were made led to the enactment of Fiscal Responsibility Act (FRA), 2007 (Sam-Tsokwa and Ngara, 2016); it is however observed that this has failed to solve the problem rather it has compounded it. In view of this, while also advocating for same constitutional amendment, some people are still clamouring for the enactment of a budget law similar to the United States' Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974 in Nigeria.

It is also opined that the National Assembly should consider massive and continuous public re-orientation of the power, roles and functions of the institution. Many Nigerians are unaware of the pros and cons of the power bestowed on the National Assembly by the constitution. Perhaps, this is the reason why people perceive their activities as excessive politicking and needless confrontation with the executive during lawmaking and oversight functions. Also, it will reduce the high expectation of the people from their legislators to provide infrastructural facilities which are an exclusive function of the executive.

It is also recommended that there should be frequent interactions between the legislature and the executive through the Presidential Advisers on National Assembly to reduce the gap between the two arms. This will also enable the National Assembly to have prior knowledge of executive disposition/position on issues under

discussion and factors to be considered in line with mutual inclusiveness (without undermining the independence) of the arms and institutions of government. Carrying the executive along and giving consideration to its policy direction will urge the executive to implement the motions and resolutions of the legislature that are hitherto not binding under the force of law. This will also reduce the tendency of the executive's refusal to sign passed bills into laws thereby increasing the output of the legislature and entrench good governance in Nigeria.

10. Conclusion

From the analysis, the paper found that the salaries and allowances of Nigerian legislators are relatively low compare to what their counterparts earn in other countries whose economies are not as buoyant as that of Nigeria. The paper also established that the National Assembly is the least funded institution among her peers. This corroborates the claim of the Nigerian legislators. However, the paper is quick to point out that the unwillingness of the legislators to make public their actual emoluments is responsible for the series of guesstimates which portray the institution as an arm gulping more money than its peer institutions across the world. In terms of membership, the paper found some lopsidedness as some states with lower population such as Imo, Akwa Ibom, Sokoto and Niger have more seats in the House of Representatives than states like Ogun, Zamfara, Anambra, Bornu and Delta with higher population. Though the paper raised concern about the lopsidedness, it concluded that the rate of lopsidedness is minimal and is responsible for why the shortchanged states are not agitating for increase seats. The paper generally concluded that the National Assembly can redeem its image and become more productive if the identified recommendations are considered for the reformation of the institution.

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