



# National Assembly Members and their Jumbo Pay Controversy: Matters Arising

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**Abstract:** *The objective of this paper is to examine the intrigues, power play and accusations surrounding the National Assembly budgetary allocations between 1999 and 2016. This is because since it was inaugurated in June 1999, the Legislature of Nigeria's Fourth Republic has been roundly defined as an enigmatic one, due to the many twists and turns which accompanied its leadership and membership. It is no longer news that Nigerian legislators are the highest paid lawmakers in the world. When this fact was first revealed a few years ago, the federal lawmakers tried to justify the jumbo pay package without any success. The data for this study was generated from Focus Group Discussion and documentary sources which include books, journals and online materials. The technique of content analysis constituted our data analysis technique. Among the conclusion drawn is for Nigeria to return to the core argument that by paying excessively high salaries and emoluments to top public officials; in particular, permanent secretaries, ministers and legislators, we are mortgaging the rights of our people to development. We suggested among others the need to spend the bulk of available public resources to provide improved infrastructure, health and education to our citizens. As petroleum revenues continue to decline, the reality on the ground is that we can no longer sustain the current expenditure profile we are running the paper concluded.*

**Key words:** *Budget and Budgetary Process, Good Governance, Budgeting, Legislator and Legislature, Revenue Allocation and Corruption.*

## INTRODUCTION

It is no longer news that Nigerian legislators are the highest paid lawmakers in the world. When this fact was first revealed a few years ago by the respected international magazine The Economist of London, the federal lawmakers tried to justify the jumbo pay package without any success. The matter is once again on the front burner of public discourse as recently affirmed by Economic Confidential that Nigerian lawmakers, with a basic salary of \$189,500 (N30.6 million) yearly, excluding allowances, are indeed the highest paid lawmakers in the world. As the magazine noted, it is unfortunate that Nigeria is running the costliest democracy in the world. Even Kenya that comes second on the dishonourable ranking of costly democracies does not pay even half of Nigerian lawmakers' salaries to its legislators. The disparity widens more down the line out of the 28 countries investigated. The Economist magazine had also, in an earlier report, declared the Nigerian legislature as the "filthiest arena of the most corrupt politicians in the world."

Unfortunately, rising government expenditure has not translated to meaningful growth and development, as Nigeria ranks among the poorest countries in the world. In addition, many Nigerians have continued to wallow in abject poverty, while more than 50 percent live on less than US\$2 per day. Couple with this, is dilapidated infrastructure (especially roads and power supply) that has led to the collapse of many industries, including high level of unemployment. Moreover, macroeconomic indicators like balance of

payments, import obligations, inflation rate, exchange rate, and national savings reveal that Nigeria has not fared well in the last two years.

One arm of government that would be remembered for this ignoble role in deepening and institutionalising the culture of secrecy and high cost of governance in the polity is the Nigeria's federal legislative body. For instance, in 2003, total National Assembly budget was about N23.347 billion. The next year, the figure rose to about N32.229 billion and then N55.422 billion in 2005. Although the figure dropped to N39.810 billion in 2006, the allocations have remained on the upswing ever after. In 2007, the National Assembly's budget rose from N66.488 billion to a shocking N104.825 billion in 2008, before dropping marginally to N96.052 billion in 2009. By 2010, while he was still in charge, the allocation had a geometric jump, skyrocketing to unprecedented levels to a peak of about N154.2 billion. But between 2011 and 2015, it stood at 150 billion before dropping down to 115 billion in 2016.

The jumbo pay of Nigeria's lawmakers raises some salient questions. For example, what does lawmaking in Nigeria entail that ours should be the most exorbitant legislature in the world? Is it that our lawmakers do more than their counterparts elsewhere or that our representatives are just greedy? Should the country be shouldering their excesses and wastages on platoons of aides? These are the puzzles this paper seeks to address.

### **Politics – Budget Interrelation**

A lucid discussion and proper understanding of the politics of government budgeting requires the explication of the concepts of 'politics' and 'budget'. The concept of politics has been so widely used and even jargonized that it is often associated with any behaviour/statement that appears dubious and aimed at maneuvering a situation to gain advantage over another. However, from scholarly and narrow perspectives, some definitions deserve our attention. Wikipedia defines the concept as the study or practice of the distribution of power and resources within a given community. The Free Dictionary equally presents politics as "the art or science of government or governing, especially the governing of a political entity, such as a nation and the administration and control of its internal and external affairs. For the purpose of this paper, the classical definitions of politics as "who gets what, when and how" (Lasswell) and "authoritative allocation of values for the society" (Easton) appear most apt. In summary, politics refers to all the processes whereby a society and various groups within it use the government to attain certain goals and values for the society which often involves the allocation and distribution of resources.

The word budget denotes many kinds of statements of future plans and expectations, varying enormously in their form and content, the uses to which they are put and even in their names. The various terminologies associated with the budget include 'programme', 'forecasts' and 'estimate'. It has also been variously defined (Chikeleze, 2002; Edwards et al, 1959; Schick, 1966; Okogu, 2011) and can be viewed from different perspectives depending on the orientation or interest of the actor.

The authors then synthesize their analysis into what can be considered an operational definition (Wikipedia)

A budget is a plan for the accomplishment of programmes related to objectives and goals within a definite time period including an estimate of resources required together with an estimate of resources available, usually compared with one or more past periods and showing future requirements.

Halidu (1994) cited in Ocheni et al (2013) gives an encompassing definition of the budget as:

A conscious and systematic allocation of resources prepared in advance, relating to a future period and based on a forecast of key variables adopted to achieve certain policy objectives, which may or may not set explicit performance targets for the achievement of objectives, relates anticipated expenditure to anticipated revenue and forms the bases against which the actual expenditure and revenue can be measured and controlled.

Arising from these definitions of the budget is the fact that it is a plan to determine which resources will be allocated towards the attainment of a given objective (or value) articulated in financial terms. It is a critical mechanism by which state actors decide on relevant ways to effectively extract and re-allocate resources from society. Budget is the sum total of the aspirations, values, social and economic policies, and services of government.

The budget process comes to grips with the big question of politics; who gets how much, for what purpose and who pays? Budgets determine the proportion of national resources that go to the various sectors of the economy, public priorities, the goals and objectives of thousands of programmes and projects and the claims that various groups in the society make on the public purse. An analysis of the budget processes seeks to

understand the capacity of the state to aggregate diverse preferences, address distributive conflicts, enforce contracts over time and remain accountable to the will of the people. Here lies the interrelation between politics and budget.

Budgeting therefore, has become one of the chief decision – making systems. While many major policy decisions are made outside of the budget process, virtually every decision entails budgetary consideration. As a result of the dearth of resources which is often a major constraint on government, every policy making takes place under the umbrella of fiscal constraints. The key issues or questions that policy makers raise are, “what shall we do?” and “can we afford it?”. The budget is a financial and political plan designed to provide answers to these questions. It is against this backdrop that Wildavsky noted in a seminal paper back in 1961 that “perhaps the study of budgeting is just another expression for the study of politics (Wildavsky 1961:190).

In view of the above, it is necessary to understand the environmental dynamics that affect and influence the process, procedure, forms and output of budgets in Nigeria. That is, there are critical factors that are important determinants in budgeting. Therefore, the thrust and purpose of our discussion on environmental variables and budgetary process is to show the link or the relationships, which exist between budget initiation, formulation implementation and its environment. It means the symbiotic relationships between budgeting and its environment in terms of content, implementation, performance and service delivery. Supporting the above view, McCurdy (1977:298); adds that out of this realization comes a theory called ecology of public administration, which holds that any public organization must conform to social, economic and political environments, or suffer by extension. McCurdy (1977:298); means that budget formulation and implementation must tolerate, accommodate and take cognizance of its social, economic and political environments for it to succeed because the environment must have an impact on its effectiveness, efficiency and performance. No doubt, the impact may be positive or negative, depending on the administrative capability and ability to adjust to the environmental demands.

The budgetary policy deals with revenue and expenditure of the government. It relates to decisions relating to taxation and governmental spending with the goals of full employment, price, stability and economic growth. In essence, it refers to efforts by the government to stimulate the economy directly affects economic variables which is an important instruments of the general economic police of the government.

The process of budget preparation is essentially based on the information content of a large host of macroeconomic indicators, quantum and rate-spanning the entire domestic macro-economy as well as international macroeconomic developments. It is necessary to submit that budget plays a vital role as an instrument of development by improving the growth performance of the economy and ensuring social justice. Budget assumes centre stage in policy deliberation as the continuous fiscal imbalances and rising levels of public debt pose risks to the prospects for macroeconomic stability and accelerating and sustaining growth. To this end appropriate and timely budgetary policy measures can promote growth by setting efficient and effective use of scarce resources and by extension creating the right incentive signals as well as designing fiscal strategy that would move the economy to the next level. In Nigerian federalism, budget deals with financial relations between different tiers of government within the polity.

Consequently, in every financial year, both the federal, state, and local governments raises the hope of Nigerian citizenry high through budget presentation with sugar coated nomenclature viz; budget of hope, budget of empowerment and consolidating, a caring heart budget, budget of sustainable growth, budget of transformation, budget of restoration, budget of actualization, budget of integrated development, budget of sustained prosperity, budget of redemption, budget of consolidating the focused socio-economic transformation programme, budget of commitment and so on. The extent to which the budget is being implemented for the overall development of the country becomes a very serious disturbing notoriety in the system. This stems from the fact that trillions of naira is always quoted in the budget but at the end of the financial year it cannot be seen to have been actualized in terms of development.

Governance is the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs. Good governance which is now of global concern demands prudent management of scarce resources for the provision of goods and services for the citizenry. In Third World countries where financial resources are grossly insufficient, the need for careful and planned resource administration becomes imperative. This is the role which government budget plays. It is the apportioning of funds or financial resources to satisfy the numerous and sometimes conflicting desires of men/women in the polity, that is the pre-occupation of government budgeting.

Human desires and preferences are varied. In this regard, Wildavsky (1964:5) posits that “human nature is never more evident than when men are struggling to gain a larger share of funds or to apportion what they have among myriad claimants”. A lot of processes are involved in apportioning the limited financial resources to cater for the numerous needs of individuals and groups in the polity. Oftentimes, the process requires adhering to the laid down framework of government budgeting. However, sometimes the processes transcend the known and documented to informal and even covert activities. At this juncture, politics takes the stage in the budgeting process.

The politics of government budgeting emphasizes the human and behavioural aspects of the budget. It is specifically concerned with answering the question, who gets what, how, when and why of government financial resources? It is through the budget mechanism that state actors decide on relevant ways to effectively extract and reallocate resources from the society. The capacity of the state to aggregate diverse preferences and address distributive conflicts among other activities determine the outcome of the budget.

### **Materials and Methods**

Materials for this paper were mainly based on secondary data. The secondary data was collected from published literature that was relevant to the topic such as books, journal articles, newspapers, magazines and internet sources as well as other library materials. The paper analyzes materials collected using a qualitative methodological approach in line with the explorative nature of the paper. The adoption of this model of data analysis makes the paper easy to appreciate and understand. In essence, no primary data such as that derived from questionnaires or oral interviews was used.

According to Maree (2007), document analysis means focusing on all types of written material such as books, journals and other sources that could shed light on the studied phenomenon. The study of documents involves the analysis of any written material that contains information about the phenomenon being researched (de Vos et al, 2011). The study of documents may help answer questions that interviews may have missed to address.

In order to convince a reader, the study findings in a qualitative research must be credible. Credibility refers to that which can be seen and believed. The key criterion or principle of good qualitative research is found in the notion of trustworthiness and neutrality of its findings or decisions (Babbie and Mouton, 2005). Just as a quantitative study cannot be considered valid unless it is reliable, a qualitative study cannot be called transferable unless it is credible, and it cannot be deemed credible unless it is dependable.

Trustworthiness entails credibility and transferability, which is the extent to which the findings can be transferred to other context (Bassey, 1999). Babbie and Mouton (2005) explain that transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can be applied in other contexts or with other respondents. In a qualitative study, the obligation for demonstrating transferability rests on those who wish to apply to it to the receiving context, (Babbie and Mouton, 2005).

In ensuring that the study has credibility and trustworthiness, the researcher used multiple data collection instruments, for an example, online and document analysis. Again the researchers ensured that the sources confirm whether the transcript of the data analysed is a correct reflection of the information provided to the researchers by allowing them to have access to read the data collected or by giving the participants a report back. That was why we reproduced the document by the whistle blower as he wrote.

Mare (2007) believes that data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. Data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating and recombining (Bell, 2001). The process of data analysis takes place once data collection and checking have been completed. Data analysis may begin informally during interviews and continue during transcriptions, when recurring patterns, themes and categories become evident. Once written records are available, analysis involves the coding of data and the identification of salient points or structures. Qualitative data which forms the gist of this research was subject through data analysis techniques which find compatibility in each other. The technique to be used in the study is the content analysis. The data collected was analysed according to themes.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The capture theory was developed by George Stigler, a Nobel laureate in economics. Other scholars that have extended the frontiers of the theory included, Duncan Black (1948), James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock (1962), Mancur Olsons' Collective Action (1965), and the Rise and Decline of Nations (1982), among others.

The capture theory of politics is a synthesis of decision making theory, elite theory, public choice theory and collective action theory as well as power theory, among others.

Stigler uses a simple model of regulation: A regulator (Congress, an agency, or whatever) faces special interest pressure from producers and electoral pressure from consumers. The special interest pressure is always more "persuasive," so producers always win. Regulations are passed only for the benefit of large firms, not for the benefit or protection of consumers. This does not mean that regulators will be blatant about this. There are two ways to help a producer: Via a direct subsidy or via protectionism. Subsidies aren't good--they encourage new entrants into the market, so producers gain only a short-term benefit. Protectionism, on the other hand, limits entry into the market--regulators favor this method. So we see protective regulations like tariffs, occupational licensing, fees, and so on.

State capture is defined in the given project as the systematic activity of individuals or groups to influence to their own advantage the activity of the principle state institutions using nominally legal mechanisms and to influence to their own advantage. These activities of the highly level placed politicians are supported as the result of illicit and non-transparent provision of private benefits going to them. As may be observed, the given approach blends what WB/EBRD literature depicts as state capture and influence. Such an approximation is better adapted to understanding the phenomenon of state capture on the level of the state's central executive and legislative institutions.

The major reason behind the search for a new theory is that existing political science theories are incapable of explaining the issue we wish to address, namely why Nigerian economy has refused to respond to treatment. The true position is that academic explanation for the failure of the economy is certainly inadequate. For instance, Awojobi (1982) blamed the failure of the economy on misgovernance, rent seeking and corruption. Lewis (1984), Lewis and Stein (1997) noted that parallel regulation and policies with large opportunities for interference and arbitrage as well as kleptocratic application of the structural adjustment programme is responsible for the failure of the economy. However, Rowley (2000) is of the view that weak institutions, rent seeking, poor economic policies crisis. Akindele (2005) came nearer to the answer when he observed that political/career opportunism and capture of the apparatus of the state by elite and bureaucrats explain the persistent crisis of the Nigerian economy. Ribadu (2004) blamed the crisis on corruption. According to him, Nigeria ha by way of corruption and rent seeking, squandered over US \$400 billion since independence in 1960. While these views are crucial, they did not go far to explain why there is policy inconsistency. Policy consistency is fundamental, for the lack of it has truncated all attempts to revamp and sustain the economy. Let us then explore the dynamics of the capture theory of politics.

It is a pity that with a paltry N17 billion doled out by former President Goodluck Jonathan in 2012 to alleviate the pains of the devastating flooding that ravaged over 40 million Nigerians across the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), the Federal Government had estimated a similar sum of money in the 2013 Appreciation Act for new residences and utilities of just about six Nigerians in privileged positions. New residential quarters and office complex for principal officers of the National Assembly (Senate President and his deputy) gulped a princely sum of N5.8 billion. Similarly, FG had estimated N5 billion for the international travels of the President and his vice and renovation of their official residences in the 2013 Appropriation Act. Also, it was estimated that the Presidency spent a whopping N733,893,900 on refreshment and meals, foodstuff and catering materials for both the President and his vice.

This outrageous and extravagant spending was proposed at a time thousands of Nigerians die yearly as a result of bad roads, hunger and diseases precipitated by leadership failure. What will the walls and floors of the official residences are made of? And what kinds of features and fittings will be put in those houses to cost such frightening amount of money? Those intoxicated with their delusion of grandeur should note that Blair House, where the United States Vice President resides, is in a naval base and is a property of the United States Navy. We are not aware of any 'official residence' for the United States Vice President. This was clearly a great setback in President Goodluck Jonathan administration's effort to convince Nigerians that it intends to run a transparent and accountable government.

No matter what angle it is viewed from, N12 billion is a huge amount which is more than the monthly allocation of 10 states put together. To use such a big sum as pecks for just a few officials of government in a country where more than 70 per cent of its citizens, according to the United Nations rating, live below the poverty line, is most insensitive, and a clear advertisement of official waywardness which, if left unchecked, can only sabotage whatever dreams and expectations for progress and greatness that are being nursed by the country.uch expenditure can only come from a government that is not only unfocused, but has since lost

touch with the stark reality of Nigeria's present depressing situation. When will such retrogressive preferences like profligacy, corruption and abuse of office fade into the dark chasm of a distant, infamous history in Nigeria, if, in the second decade of the 21st Century, we still have as leaders people who have no feelings for the governed? It is, however, reassuring that some civil society groups like the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) expressed their deep disappointment and sadness over such outrageous expenditure and clearly isolated themselves from the delusion of grandeur that goads our public officers to exaggerate their powers and exceed the boundary specified for them by law.

In Great Britain, for instance, the Speaker of the House of Commons maintains only a modest three-bedroom flat upstairs in the House of Commons, which is mainly for the reception of visiting dignitaries. He or she is not entitled to any mansion that is usually renovated at huge cost to the state. In that country, decency, integrity and accountability are the hallmark of governance.

The kind of lavish lifestyle led by public officials in Nigeria is an indication that many of them have since lost focus, and have, indeed, forgotten that Nigeria, despite its abundant natural endowments, still remains a poor, struggling country due to boundless corruption and misrule. Many secondary schools in the country operate without functional science laboratories and libraries. By today's cost, N10 million can give one school both facilities – a well equipped science laboratory and a library stocked with books – to advance the frontiers of knowledge at all levels, since a child that loses adequate learning at that stage loses all. What it means is that the amount proposed to provide more comfort for the executive and legislature can give hundreds of thousands of schools befitting laboratories and libraries. Social services in Nigeria have virtually collapsed. At a time other oil-producing and even non-oil-producing nations are offering free medicare to their people, many Nigerians are dying daily because they cannot afford the cost of even the substandard medical services available in the country.

Many Nigerians, even in the urban centres, have no access to electricity, water or decent accommodation. Many have acquired refugee status in their own country. Our leaders have criminally cornered state resources to service themselves and cronies, and every day the fact that they have been cruelly shortchanged is clearly brought home to the mass of the Nigerian people. Not too long ago, there was a report that only one per cent of Nigerians control over 80 per cent of proceeds from the oil and gas sector. Majority of Nigerians are virtually left with nothing.

### **National Assembly Budgetary Allocations: The Contending Issues**

With the Nigerian public increasingly scrutinizing the spiraling annual allocations to the National Assembly, questions about why the lawmakers got so much, amid rising overheads in the national budget, became inevitable. To block Nigerians from knowing details of how the National Assembly's jumbo allocations are spent, and how much lawmaker's earn in allowances, The National Assembly's leadership wrapped up the federal legislator's finances in utmost secrecy.

In one master stroke of legislative brinkmanship, the National Assembly budget, hitherto open to public scrutiny, like those of all ministries, departments and agencies, suddenly became secret. Details of the allocation were never made known, and the Principal Officers and their team resisted all efforts to pry it open. By 2010, the National Assembly legislated to make itself member of an exclusive club of agencies whose budget details are never disclosed but whose finances are deducted en-bloc (first-line charge) via statutory transfers. This group includes the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), the National Judicial Council (NJC), the Niger-Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and the Public Complaints Commission (PCC). Agencies in this group receive their annual budgetary allocations in bulk without providing breakdown of expenditure details. Under the 7th's leadership, details of the National Assembly's N150 billion allocations remained secret, despite public outcry against it. Yet, details of how the fund would be spent remained secret.

For the first time in several years, the federal lawmakers agreed to cut their jumbo allocation by 23.3 percent to N120 billion in 2015 and 115 billion in 2016. The legislature has three core functions to carry out as a democratic institution. These functions include legislation, representation and oversight. Legislation has to do with making laws, which involves passing of bills into law. A bill could be entirely new proposal aiming to establish a new law or it may be aiming to repeal or amend an existing law.

Passing motions and making resolutions from such is also a process of lawmaking. The parliament is also deeply involved in the act of representation. Under this role, the legislators bring issues directly affecting their constituents to the legislative chambers for consideration and perhaps resolutions made on them by the

whole house or a committee of the house. Such issues include petitions from constituents. Another area legislators carry out their role of representation is attracting developmental projects to their respective constituencies.

They achieve this by ensuring that such projects are captured in the annual budgets during budget preparation. They also follow up and make sure that the projects are implemented and according to specifications too. Then, the oversight function is the supervisory or monitoring jurisdiction of the legislature. The parliamentarians monitor the Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) of government to ensure that the budget, once passed into law, are implemented within the provisions of the Appropriation Act. Therefore, it is the duty of parliament to monitor releases of funds and proper application by relevant authorities. The Eight National Assembly, which was inaugurated on June 9, 2015, in the course of its existence is expected to discharge its constitutional responsibilities to the people of Nigeria within the confines of these fundamental functions. It is universally agreed that the most important function of the legislature is passing of appropriation bill, which is also called money bill. It deals with budgets of the country, which is more or less an annual ritual.

The former Seventh Senate, which had a four-year life span, was able to successfully pass national budgets for the period spanning 2012-2015. For the 2012 budget, the Senate passed a budget figure of N4.8 trillion on March 15, 2012. Then, the Senate on December 20, 2012 passed the 2013 Appropriation Bill of N4.99 trillion into law. Similarly, the Seventh Senate on April 9, 2014 passed the 2014 budget totaling N4.6 trillion. In the same vein, the Red Chamber on April 28, 2015, passed the N4.493 trillion budgets for the 2015 fiscal year. That was about five months after it was presented by the Minister of Finance and then Coordinating Minister for the Economy.

One key area of the budgets in Nigeria since 1999 is the large deficits and the projected huge public sector borrowing. The total expenditure for 2001 was given at N4.2trillion while total revenue estimate was given as N2.83 trillion. This leaves a deficit of over N1.4 trillion which can only be met by internal (bonds) and external borrowings. It will be argued that the deficit represents only 16 per cent of our GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and that this is well below the prescribed limit of 30 per cent for developing economies. But in Nigeria's case, most of the internal and external borrowing will simply go towards administrative costs and not for capital projects. We would, in other words, be borrowing funds simply to allow the Federal Government to run its vast bureaucracy and fund the profligate legislature which the CBN governor says accounts for 25 per cent of the 2010 budget of the Federal Government. This is totally wrong and will not assist the economy to achieve real growth.

Our lawmakers, oftentimes, engage in unnecessary brawls, fisticuffs and free for all. At other times, they engage themselves in debates over issues that are not critical to the people's needs and aspirations. If it is not same sex argument, it is upping of legislative allowances, pension or immunity. There is hardly any seriousness in debates. The National Assembly chambers are usually half-filled, with some of those in attendance dozing off amid debates, under the full glare of television cameras. There is a dearth of robust debates, laudable and enduring contributions from lawmakers and evidence of research on legislative matters. If our lawmakers are not on prolonged and, at times, indeterminable holidays, they are busy hopping from one social event to another with irrational passion.

As Eme(2009 & Eme, et.al,2014) have had cause to point out in the past, there can be no rationalization for the huge cost of legislators on the public purse. This is one of the reasons why some people have advocated the making of legislation a part-time affair in the country. This way, a lot of public funds could be saved. A situation where lawmakers are required to sit for only 187 days in a year, while receiving full time salaries, speaks volumes of the level of mediocrity in the national legislature.

The current legislators' pay is not just alarming; it is scandalous, especially in a country as relatively poor as Nigeria. Nigeria's current socio-economic milieu does support this kind of flagrant deployment of scarce resources to meet the inexplicable wants of lawmakers who make up an insignificant percentage of our population. Nigeria is at the bottom of everything when compared to the developed world. The country's educational sector, technological endeavours, healthcare and other social infrastructure are in a shambles. For instance, Nigerian senators currently draw a scandalous N180 million illegal allowance each annually, making them the world's highest paid lawmakers. This excludes their basic salary – a far lesser figure -and essential allowances approved by the Revenue Mobilization, Allocation and Fiscal Commission. It also does not include allowances and estacodes the senators draw while on committee work within and outside the country. A member of the House of Representatives also receives N144 million as allowances. The principal

officers for the two chambers receive far much more, with the Senate President said to be drawing an allowance of N250 million every quarter, making the allowances N1billion yearly.

The issue still remains whether Nigeria's lawmakers can justify this payout in a country ravaged by poverty, where more than 80 per cent of the people live on less than a dollar a day. The Senate, last year August in an effort to addressing this challenge suspended open debate on the report of the Ad-hoc Committee on the Review of the Finances of the upper legislative body. The report of the review recommended the pruning down of the legislators' jumbo pay, which was listed in the Senate's order paper was later dropped for "executive session" — a euphemism for closed-door meeting. The Senate's decision to keep the debate out of public glare fueled speculations that the senators were opposed to the downward review of their approved pay and illegal allowances. The lawmakers eventually debated the issue of budget review behind closed doors. After the closed-door session, the senate president, Bukola Saraki, announced a suspension of the report of the committee for further legislative input. Mr. Saraki gave no further details.

*Premium Times* learnt that during the executive session, many of the senators argued against pay cut, saying they have increasing obligations to their constituencies. Some also contended that there was no need for any review given that the National Assembly budget for 2015 was already slashed from N150 billion to N120 billion. Mr. Saraki had set up the committee on June 25 to review the finances of the Senate, following public outcry over the alleged huge wardrobe allowances for lawmakers. However, the Chairman Ad hoc Committee on Media, Dino Melaye, said the lawmakers were committed to cutting their pays.

He said,

The Senate is ready to make sacrifices for the purpose of developmental purposes and that has already been indicated even in the Appropriation Act 2015. It is the responsibility of the Revenue Mobilisation and Fiscal Allocation Commission to stipulate how much we would be paid. But you can be sacrificial as a public officer to say: I am taking half of my salary and then taking half back to the treasury. Already, there has been a reduction of N30 billion in the budget of the National Assembly. And this N120 billion is to be shared among about six, seven organs of the National Assembly – the National Assembly Service Commission, the Senate, the House of Representatives, the Institute, the Public Complaints Commission, amongst other arms of the National Assembly, including salaries and allowances of the legislative aides, numbering over 3,000 ([Adebayo](#), 2015).

Following President Muhammadu Buhari's order directing the Revenue Mobilisation, Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) to address public outcry over huge salaries and allowances of members of the National Assembly, the chairman of the commission, Elias Mbam, said that Senators and members of the House of Representatives will earn less than N1 million starting from August 2016. Speaking at the State House after Mr. Mbam made presentation on the activities and challenges of the commission, President Buhari chided the RMAFC for approving excessive remunerations for some political office holders, and urged the commission to seek a proper interpretation of its powers and address the public outcry against the unreasonably high payments. President Buhari also warned that severe sanctions will be visited on any individual or organisation that violates the directive on the payment of all national revenue into the Federation Account.

President Buhari spoke after *Premium Times* published details of the federal lawmakers' salaries and allowances, a publication that sparked widespread public anger against the lawmakers, with many calling a drastic cut. But in his response to reporters' questions after meeting the president, the RMAFC boss said the commission had been working on the review of the salaries and allowances of the political office holders at National Assembly, the State Assemblies and Local Governments, adding that the review also covers the Judiciary. Mr. Mbam said the review, which according to him is still going through a process and expected to be ready soon, is expected to reflect the economic realities of the day occasioned by the drop in oil prices. He said:

We are currently reviewing the subsisting remuneration packages and it is going to reflect the socio-economic realities of today. We expect that before the end of next month, it will be ready. But it will go through a process, it is not something that you will just say yes or no. The second challenge, he said is lack of power of enforcement. He therefore demanded a review of the Act establishing the commission so that it can have power of enforcement and sanctions on any of the defaulting MDAs ([Adebayo](#), 2015).

Mr. Mbam posited that the review of salaries and allowances had been on since last year, noting that it had become imperative to conclude it following the drop in oil prices and the financial constraint which had degenerated to states been unable to pay salaries of staff. These are some of the issues that made the



review necessary. It did not start with this administration; we started the review as far back as last year. It is not because of the present administration that we commenced it.

The RMAFC is saddled with the responsibility of determining the remuneration for political office holders, both elected and appointed, from the national level to the local government level. The pay packages of public office holders, particularly the salaries and allowances of the National Assembly members, have been an issue of serious concern among Nigerians. Since 2010, the N150 billion annual allocations to the National Assembly in the budget, which includes the salaries and allowances as well as other perks, have remained a closely guarded secret, as their details have always been hidden from the public. *Premium Times* had on August 18 published a report indicating that the 360 members of the House of Representatives gulp N6.58 billion from the nation's treasury in annual salaries and allowances, while the 109 Senators cost the nation N2.14 billion in similar emoluments. Cumulatively, the country shells out a hefty N8.72 billion every year in salaries and allowances to lawmakers in the two chambers of the National Assembly. However, the amount the Senators and Members of the House of Representatives remit as tax appears insignificant as their income tax is calculated as a function of their basic salaries alone.

Reacting to the development, an Associate Professor of Economics at the Ekiti State University, Dr. Abel Awe, described the lawmakers' jumbo salary as indicative of the huge gap that separates the poor and the rich in the country, calling it "satanic democracy." To him, *"This is part of the reason why 70 per cent of the nation's budget is allocated to recurrent expenditure. We are using a huge chunk of the nation's resources to service just less than 1,000 people in a country of over 160 million people"* (Anugwara, 2013). But spokespersons of the two chambers of the National Assembly, believes that the matter is 'grossly exaggerated.' The Senate committee chairman on Information and Media, Enyinnaya Abaribe, said the report was misleading and incorrect. "My reaction is that the report is incorrect. It is very easy for anybody to know what we earn by going to the Revenue Mobilisation Allocation and Fiscal Commission," he said. Speaking in similar tone, the House of Representatives spokesman, Zakari Mohammed, dismissed the report.

For them, huge increase in the figures appropriated to the federal lawmakers, was a result of increasing desire to make the business of lawmaking more comfortable for the elected representatives. In 2009, the budget for the National Assembly, which the then President, Musa Yar'Adua was reluctant to implement, the senators are to take N1.1 billion as allocation for refreshment and meals, while N957 million and N180 million are budgeted for maintenance of vehicles and procurement of fuel for vehicles. Also, the upper chamber spent N429 Million for training and N957 million on the maintenance of office equipment, vehicles and generators. Similarly, the House of Representatives spent N1.36 billion on meals and refreshments this year, while N1.2 billion was projected as expenditure for the maintenance of vehicles, generators and equipment. The lower chambers expenditures this year will also include N340 million of training and N400.6 million for fuels and lubricants.

The then chairman of the House Representatives on Rules and Business Committee, Mr. Ita Enang, Justified this huge expenditures on the basis of the volume of work the lawmakers are doing in Abuja, which he said had contributed to the growth of democracy in the polity. *According to him*, the National Assembly made laws; passed resolutions, received petitions and attended to them, had public hearings, invited heads of parastatals, departments and agencies.

Figures received from the National Assembly's main library and its website indicates that the 14 bills passed in both 1999 and 2003 remained the lawmaker's lowest annual output, while 132 for 2008 were their highest for a year. AS President Yar'Adua expressed dissatisfaction at the non-performance of the National Assembly, the former Senate President, David Mark defended the legislative arm of government, positing that its performance should not be rated on the basis of the number, but quality of laws made. The delta (rate of change) of legislator pay is growing faster, relative to the growth rate of the capital expenditure (Capex. This may to explain why Nigerians say they have largely felt little or no impact from the annual budget ritual. An analysis of the National Assembly's (NASS) budget, compared to the capital expenditure budget in the past five years shows this trend. NASS had a budget of N104 billion, N127 billion, N232,7 billion and N150 billion for the years 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012 respectively, according to data from budget proposals. This compares to N890 billion, N1.3 trillion, N1.12 trillion, and N1.32 trillion as capital expenditure for the 2009-2012 period.

The NASS budget grew by 22.7 percent in 2010 (from the 2009 levels), 82.2 percent in 2011 (from the 2010 levels), before falling by 35.5 percent in 2012 (from the 2011 levels), as the Finance Ministry began to

make good on fiscal consolidation plans. The Capex, Budget however grew by 53.9 percent in 2010 (from the 2009 levels), fell by 18.2 percent in 2011 (from the 2010 levels), and rose by 17.8 percent in 2012 (from the 2011 levels). The numbers reveal that the steepest rise in National Assembly pay occurred in 2011 when it rose by 82.2 percent, compared to a 53.9 percent rise in capex which occurred in 2010.

The headline numbers above are however made worse by a couple of facts. For instance, while the NASS budget has increased by 44.2 percent in 2012 from the 2009 levels, the legislator population has remained steady at 469 members. This compares to the Nigerian population which has grown to 167 million people from about 151.8 million in 2009, having to make do with capital expenditure growing at a rate well below the ability to have any meaningful impact in their lives. There is also the fact that the capital budget is rarely implemented at 100 percent, meaning that if the actual money spent on Capex, which is often close to the 50 percent mark, was used to compute the comparison between NASS budget and Capex, it would paint a much worse picture.

Put differently, with the kind of money steadily flowing into the national coffers since 1999 before the recent oil price crashed Nigeria has no excuse not to have delivered world-class infrastructure such as constant power supply, roads, hospitals and potable water to the people by now. But the untenable excuse has been that government's resources are lean, even when the three tiers of government regularly share more than N500 billion every month. How can they have money for development when all they are interested in is to have an unusually high retinue of unnecessary aides and hangers on?

Public officials' lavish lifestyle is pushing the economy along a perilous path. There is an urgent need to make a clean break with the past. Before the cancerous growth renders the nation totally comatose, all those in authority – especially the President, governors, ministers, federal and state lawmakers, and local government chairmen – must take practical steps to halt its rapid onslaught on the polity by immediately reducing the number of aides in their employ, thus freeing up resources to undertake capital projects for the benefit of the majority.

Things have been painfully the same since the return to civil rule in 1999: short-sighted and selfish leaders have mostly used Nigeria's huge oil revenues and proceeds from tax, which were estimated at more than N56 trillion under Jonathan, to cater for themselves and their large army of aides, while the majority wallow in poverty, unemployment, ill health, avoidable deaths and disasters.

In 2011, the United Nations Development programme placed Nigeria 156th out of 187 surveyed, saying that Nigeria has been recording constant high economic growth rate that has not produced commensurate employment opportunities and reduction in poverty among citizens. In 2012, the M.O Ibrahim Index for Africa Governance, ranked Nigeria 43 out of 52 countries assessed. Nigeria's overall score of 42.0 was no match to African average score of 51.9. UK-based Economist Intelligence Unit ranked Nigeria as the worst place for a baby to be born in 2013. Nigeria is 80th out of 80 countries surveyed. Infant and maternal mortality is among the highest in the world. Expensive and frivolous lifestyles of the leaders that glorify waste and financial recklessness are responsible for the horrible economic situation of the country.

It is also the belief of many Nigerians that the remuneration the legislators are getting is way too much for the work they do. For instance, Section 63 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria states that "The Senate and the House of Representatives shall sit each sit for a period of not less than one hundred and eighty days in a year". Section 68 (1) of the Constitution also states the minimum number of sittings a legislator must attend, failure of which could lead to his removal. According to the mentioned section, "a member of the Senate or of the House of Representatives shall vacate his seat in the House of which he is a member if:(f) without just cause he is absent from meetings of the House of which he is a member for a period amounting in the aggregate to more than one-third of the total number of days during which the House meets in any one year. In other words, a lawmaker would not lose his seat provided he attends as much as one hundred and twenty days in one year, which amount to four months.

It is also an open secret that a good percentage of the electorate does not feel the impact of the legislators representing them. In some constituencies, their representatives in the National Assembly are more or less outright strangers as the people never get to see them. In other places, they are seen as demi-gods. If the lawmakers choose to commission projects in their constituencies, it always appears as if the constituency is being done a favour by the lawmaker.

Findings from studies by Eme, et. al(2014) have also revealed that despite being well remunerated, legislators have discovered other means of generating additional personal revenue by putting their positions into "good use". At the committee levels, it has been alleged severally that gratifications have been given.

There are also insinuations that Ministries sometimes have to “settle” before their budgets would be approved by the legislature. Those favoured by certain policies pushed by the legislature are also said to “appreciate” members. A former legislative aide once disclosed that he was sent to collect an envelope containing \$ 500,000 which was eventually shared by 5 lawmakers. The fund was apparently given for a favour done earlier.

Over the years, Nigeria’s legislature has had to cope with scandals, a lot of which border on corruption. But the former Senate Leader, Victor Ndoma-Egba however rose in defence of the legislature. In his opinion, there is nothing fantastic in what lawmakers earn. Speaking recently, he said, I have kept a file of my pay slips from the day I came to the National Assembly. I am operating from an office. I have staffers. What I am doing here is official. So, if I am given N10, 000 to buy stationery, the same amount that is given in the executive or judiciary, while in the executive or judiciary theirs is for stationery, my own N10, 000 is allowance. For the executive and judiciary, money to travel for official duty is travel allowance, but when it comes to legislature, it becomes part of my jumbo pay( Eme, & Onyishi,2013) .

According to Emel (2009) some of the major probes conducted by the Seventh Senate include the popular N274 billion Pension Fund Scam leveled against the then chairman, Pension Task Team, Mr. Abdulrasheed Abdullahi Maina, John Yusuf, B.G. Kaigama and other members of the team. At the heat of the investigation, the then Chairman of the disbanded Presidential Pension Reform Task Team, Maina, accused the Etok-led Senate probe panel on the management of pension funds of demanding N3 billion bribes. Senator Etok, who was thoroughly taken aback by the allegation, denied demanding any bribe from Maina. Etok said that the bribery allegation against the committee was part of orchestrated plot by Maina to divert the attention of the committee from the probe.

The senator voluntarily offered himself for probe. The Senate was agitated by the ugly development. Consequently, in order not to appear to be covering Etok and his committee, the Senate mandated its Committee on Ethics and Public Petitions to investigate the allegation and report back to the Chamber for appropriate action on the matter. However, more than one year after the Senate mandated its Committee to probe into the bribery allegation; the Senator Paul Akinyelure panel submitted its report, clearing Etok and the committee of demanding any bribe. A member of the Committee on Ethics and Privileges hinted that the panel absolved Etok and other members of his committee because the management of the newspaper that published Maina’s allegation failed to prove the allegation against the senators beyond reasonable doubts.

Ideally, democratic governance operates with democratic institutions like political parties, the Judiciary and the legislature, which are adduced by classical democratic theory as bulwarks of democracy. The dominant role of the legislature in democratic governance is much stressed. Therefore, challenges of democratic governance refer to those encumbrances hindering the manifestation of those elements mentioned above. Generally, they are forces and factors; though vary across countries of the world, inimical to democracy and development. As regards Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, these challenges are too numerous. To Ibeanu and Egwu, these challenges include:

Authoritarian rule, the systematic closure of the political space, extreme personalization of power and corruption, gross human rights abuses, political exclusion of women, ethnic minority groups and youths, among other political vices ( Eme,2011:48).

Of course, corruption is considered in this paper as the gravest challenges because it involves the wrong allocation and use of public resources on the one hand, and on the other hand, it deals with moral and legal issues concerning public office holders. Besides, corruption can be a source or/effect of poverty, security crisis, legitimacy crisis, and conflicts, among others. It stifles development as the major end of democracy and promotes other challenges detrimental to the consolidation of democratic gains. For instance, when public funds are misappropriated by public officials, developmental projects suffer and people continue to wallow in abject poverty.

Legislators in Nigeria have grown used to the idea of using their powers to enhance their constituency popularity through adding projects in the budget. The problem posed therefore is not constitutional or legal, it is a political one. Normally, such issues are negotiated easily because the ruling party would produce both the executive and a majority of legislators, and compromise positions can be negotiated at the level of party programmes and structures. In Nigeria, however, parties are very weak and are unable to impose the party will on the executive and legislature. In this context, both sides seek to impose their will and their powers. Legislators in Nigeria have grown used to the idea of using their powers to enhance their constituency popularity through adding projects in the budget. Ibrahim(2016) has articulated this challenge as follows:

First, there is the introduction of constituency projects in which legislators propose specific projects for their constituents, which are implemented by the executives but the legislators get the credit for the projects, and they proudly display on signboards that the projects are their gifts to their constituencies. The second is the significant increase of constituency allowances, apparently to allow legislators respond to regular appeals from constituents for financial help for weddings, burials, ill-health and so on; in addition to other demands for jobs, contracts and every other conceivable request. This is an unfortunate development that we need to remove from our political culture. Third, almost all legislators have developed the more negative attitude of secretly agreeing to the insertion of projects into the federal budget with ministries, departments and agencies in the understanding that monies meant for the projects would subsequently be withdrawn and paid directly to them. It is this third practice that has led to the massive corruption and excessive padding of budgets. The time has come to put a stop to such practices and President Buhari must ensure that his government is not drawn into such destructive practices (Ibrahim, 2016).

When however legislators put aside the public good and negotiate pecuniary benefits using their constitutional powers as a bargaining tool, they are abusing, rather than exercising, their powers of representation.

### Findings

An indepth look at 2015 the budget showed that the Buhari government inherited a hefty N2trn personnel costs. This included N1.8trn wage bill for government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAS), in addition to N120bn statutory transfer to fund the National Assembly, and other costs. Today the Buhari's budget, like the previous ones by the outgone government did not address major concerns that can stimulate the economy and accelerate development. For instance, for four consecutive years, so much money has been voted for recurrent expenditure, including the jumbo salaries and perks of office of legislators. This has been at the expense of capital expenditure on infrastructure, health, education and other key sectors that can improve the quality of lives of the people. Huge allocations to recurrent expenditure such as personnel costs have little multiplier effect on the economy and general development of the country.

Another major finding is from the study is that the cost of running Nigeria's democracy is too high judging from recent revelations on the wastefulness and profligacy of the National Assembly especially given their alleged penchant for lack of accountability and corruption. Nigerian politicians have turned themselves into instant millionaires just for being in government, paying themselves huge, obscene and unjustified salaries and allowances not commensurate with their very low productivity and without doing anything worthwhile for the country or humanity. For instance, the past sixteen years, the National Assembly have had no visible impacts of their representations on the lives of Nigerians, so why are we funding their expensive lifestyles, and getting zero in return? What kind of legitimate work can anybody do in Nigeria that will fetch such atrocious remuneration or salary? The obscene salaries and perks are what is attracting unscrupulous and dubious political charlatans to the serious business of governance and law-making, and this is why they will always rig elections, commit murder and assassinations to position themselves where they will steal, shutting out genuine and sincere democrats who want to do well for the welfare of their people.

### Recommendations

Implementation has always been the bane of government budgets at all levels. Let there be a departure from this unwholesome trend. We urge the Buhari government to urgently study the details of the 2016 budget with a view to cutting down wastes and undue luxuries enjoyed by political office holders. It is bad that year after year, budget after budget, so much money is expended on jumbo salaries and other emoluments of politicians and their retinue of aides. If this continues, it will be extremely difficult to finance public projects that can stimulate economic growth. Therefore, addressing the challenge of high cost of governance should be prioritised by the government. A big pay cut for all political office holders has become necessary. We call on our lawmakers to further review their battery of emoluments downwards in realistic appreciation of the need to commit more funds to development programmes. They should de-emphasise agitations for unrealistic constituency allowances and reduce their expenditure.

Since the former Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, decried the outrageous pay our lawmakers receive, pointing out that a large chunk of public funds go down as outlay for lawmakers' pay and gamut of allowances. Sanusi declared that 16 per cent of the country's national resources are spent on lawmakers who constitute less than one per cent of the population. It is amazing that

the Revenue Mobilisation Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) has not deemed it fit to do anything reduce the legislators' indefensible pay until President Buhari cautioned on it. It is now for the Commission to back words with action on the issue.

Nigerians should also make use of the Freedom of Information law to find out what members of the National Assembly earn and what the running cost is. This is because it is a common knowledge that the total budget of that all important arm of government is N115billion, both the recurrent and capital budget, if someone can just sit down and divide that one by 360 plus 109 to get your figure, that means they are ignorant.

Another way it can stop is to start by reducing very drastically the remuneration of lawmakers and that of other political office holders in such a way that it will be unattractive to potential rent seekers and looters, and that only people who sincerely want to serve will see such small remuneration as enough motivation to contest elections to these offices and be committed to good governance and delivering desired results. Moreover, Nigeria does not need a full time bicameral legislature. What is needed is a unicameral legislature that will meet for a minimum of 2 months or 4months maximumly a year and afterwards, they would go back to whatever their various professions are.

Finally, President Muhammadu Buhari should live up to his campaign promises of ensuring fiscal responsibility, accountability and putting an end to impunity in all arms of government, including the civil service.

## Conclusion

The Nigerian National Assembly today has developed a fairly bad reputation with the public due to criticisms of their perceived selfishness and focus on excessive benefits to themselves. There are concordant claims that in addition to padding budgets, they have been using their powers of oversight to blackmail ministers and heads of agencies for pecuniary gain. The circle must be broken. Today, our legislators are the highest paid in the world and our ministers are also among the top in the league table of jumbo salaries for executives. In November 2012, the then Governor of the Central Bank, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, had revealed that Nigeria was using 70% of its budget on salaries and emoluments of public servants in the executive and the legislature and made a passionate call for the reduction of these emoluments so that we as a nation can free resources for development. His call was drowned out by anger of our legislators who were furious at his statement that the legislature consumed a significant percentage of overhead costs. It is important that our country returns to the core argument that by paying excessively high salaries and emoluments to top public officials; in particular, permanent secretaries, ministers and legislators, we are mortgaging the rights of our people to development. We need to spend the bulk of available public resources to provide improved infrastructure, health and education to our citizens.

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