

Examining the Roles of the National Assembly in Promoting Good Governance and Nation-Building in Nigeria: The Journey So Far

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Abstract

The legislature is an institution which represents the common and collective interests of the citizens through the enactment of laws and the exercise of oversight functions on the activities of the executive arm of government. For stable and sustainable international peace, nation building and good governance requires building effective societal, economic and political structures that meet the needs of the people. In the quest for nation building in a democratic state like Nigeria, the exercise of effective legislative oversight function is crucial. It acts to provide checks and balances in cases when the executive branch operates unconstitutionally. It also aims at ensuring that all relevant societal groups are included in and benefit from the nation building and development exercise and that government policies and budgets are implemented in an effective, efficient, transparent and accountable manner. The power of oversight is constitutionally provided to the Nigerian legislature to enable the National Assembly curtail corruption, inefficiency, or embezzlement in the executive or administration of laws within its legislative right and in the disbursement and administration of funds appropriated by the Acts. Unfortunately, the Nigerian legislature's capacity to carry out its oversight functions remains ineffective because the legislature and culture is at its infancy and often confronted by many challenges. The focus of this paper is to examine the roles of the national assembly in promoting good governance and nation building. This paper further recommends that the citizens elect upstanding individuals with no histories of corruption and greed.

Keywords: National Assembly, Governance, Nation Building, Good Governance, National Assembly, Dividends of Democracy.

Introduction

In every democratic nation there are fundamental principles that form the foundation of good governance (Odalonu, 2020). In nearly all democratic systems, there are three fundamental arms of government, namely the legislature, executive and the judiciary. The legislature makes laws, the executive implements them and the judiciary interprets them. This is to avoid the concentration of power in a single authority. When only one arm makes, interprets and implements laws, it is often a slippery slope towards tyranny. Certain principles guide operations of the three arms so as to ensure accountability. They include: legislative oversight, separation of powers, as well as checks and balances. Each

arm of government performs its defined functions and serves to check the activities of the others. They perform complimentary roles, all working together to promote the rule of law and to ensure that the citizens of a nation enjoy good governance (PLAC, 2016). In the light of the above, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 provided for division of power amongst the legislative, executive and judicial arms of government in sections 4, 5, and 6 respectively. In other to meet the socio-economic needs of the people and to ensure good governance, there is the need for checks and balances amongst the various arms of government (Okoro, 2017).

The state of the legislature has been identified as the strongest predictors on the survival of any democratic apparatus (Okoosi-Simbine, 2010). Legislature is an essential constituent for any democratic government and major factor in its sustenance. In fact, its existence predates the advent of modern democracy. It has been noted that the emergence of the legislature dates back to the twelfth century as a product of medieval Europe. (Loewenberg, 1995). The existence of legislature comprises representatives of the people as a hallmark of a democratic government. And it differs in composition from one system of government to another. For instance, in a parliamentary system, members of the legislature are fused with members of the executive while in the presidential system; the legislature and executive are separated from other arms of government by different individuals to promote good governance (Ewuim *et al*, 2014). In some countries like Nigeria, legislators are elected into office, while in other countries they are appointed. Despite the differences in legislatures across the world, there is a common structural character that distinguishes them from other arms of government in a democracy: the relationship among members is not that of authority but that of equality of members since they derive their authority from being representatives of the people (Saliu and Muhammad, 2010; Ewuim *et al*, 2014).

It is widely acknowledged that an effective legislature is essential to democracy, the rule of law, human rights, as well as economic and social development. There are different perspectives about the roles and responsibilities of the legislative arm of government in ensuring good governance. However, the core legislative, representative and oversight functions of the legislature provide an essential contribution to the quality of Nigeria's democracy and governance as a whole (Dogara, 2016; Ogbonna, 2018). The pertinent question therefore is to what extent has the legislative arm of government in Nigeria especially the National Assembly carries out their avowed responsibilities of promoting good governance through qualitative legislation, effective representation and diligent exercise of their oversight functions?

Statement of Problem

The national assembly of any nation occupies a central position and plays a major role in the machinery of government in a democratic state. Suffice it to say, they being vested with enormous powers to make laws and also enjoy some discretionary powers to shape and/or influence public policy. The significance of the national assembly in a democracy is further

underscored by the fact that they are composed of politicians who claim to represent the very interests of the people. Despite constitutional provisions, enormous financial resources and huge potentials of Nigeria, including the social and economic policies that have been implemented by successive administrations, good governance and national development in Nigeria continues to be elusive and almost unattainable. The situation becomes worrisome especially when indices of good governance and nation building remained very low as witnessed in these periods of poverty, insecurity, economic recession, unemployment and insurgency.

Objectives

The main objective of this paper is to examine the constitutional roles of the national assembly in promoting good governance and nation building. This paper laments the failure of the Nigerian government to promote dividends of democracy and show much evidence of good governance despite the fact that Nigeria has experienced uninterrupted democratic governance since 1999 which has not translated into any meaningful progress. Therefore, the paper is optimistic that if the constitutional roles of the national assembly are strictly adhered to, there will be light at the end of the tunnel.

Theoretical Framework: Human Development Theory

The impact of democratic stabilization from the National Assembly on National development will be analyzed on the pivot of human development theory. It seeks to understand the factors responsible for either negative or positive change in the life of man (Sen, 1998). It does this by looking into the extent of growth in the economy, social justice, and capacity development as a precursor for a fulfilled life and argues that development cannot be achieved through economic improvement alone rather, through multidimensional (e.g., social, cultural, political) needs of the people (Lawal and Ntagu, 2021). For Sen, these expectations could be measured by looking at average achievements of people in a country at the basis of index. This is further categorized into long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living. Human centred development grants people freedom to make life choices as welfare is provided for all on the basis that all are entitled to good life (Sen, 1998). As an important component of human development, social needs and welfare ensures healthy existence, educated population, and society that is adequately provided for. One of the basic assumptions of the theory is that, good health, knowledge and skills are indispensable human capital in the development process and therefore a livelihood asset. It argues that societies that are challenged by unhealthy population, illiteracy, and lack of social amenities cannot by any means develop, as productivity and income generation for the individual and the state in general requires participation of all, the national assembly in this regard becomes highly important and useful.

The Nigerian Legislature: Historical Perspective

The development of the legislative institution in Nigeria can be traced to the nineteenth century, when the British colonial government officially occupied Lagos. As a means of governing the colony of Lagos, the colonial Governor established a Legislative Council. Of the ten hand-picked members of the legislature, only two were Nigerian. The Legislative Council, however, did not perform any law-making function but served as an advisory body to the colonial governor (Obasa, 2016; Abegunde, 2016).

Then in the twentieth century in 1906, the Lagos was absorbed into the Southern protectorate by the proclamation of the Governor. The Northern and Southern protectorates were amalgamated to form the colony and protectorate of Nigeria in 1914. After the amalgamation, the Nigeria Council was established as a new legislative body. Thirty-six members were appointed by the colonial government to represent business and other interests. As an improvement to Nigerian representation in Legislative Council, six members of the Nigeria Council were Nigerians.

The Council could only perform the role assigned to it by the colonial government. And so, it lacked legislative powers and was unable to perform legislative functions. As an improvement to the composition and functions of the legislature, the 1922 Clifford Constitution made provisions for elections of four Nigerians out of the total Council of forty-six members, while the remaining forty-two were either appointed, selected or nominated by the Colonial Governor to represent business and private interest in the colonial administration. The subsequent Nigerian constitution, that is, 1946 Richard Constitution and 1951 Macpherson Constitution retained the provision for legislature and improved on it by increasing the number of elective Nigerians into the Legislative Council (Abegunde, 2016).

At the Nigerian independence in 1960, the Western Parliamentary system of government with bicameral legislature was adopted. At the federal level there were, Senate and House of Representatives, so that proper scrutiny of bills could take place before laws were passed. At the regional levels, the House of Chiefs and House of Assembly existed concurrently. The Senate of the First Republic was made up of 44 members while the House of Representatives had 312 members elected nation-wide to serve in the first republic National Assembly. Both the Second and Third Republics retained bi-cameral mode of legislation at the federal level but was renamed as the National Assembly.

At the state level, the bi-cameral system practiced in the First Republic was replaced with unicameral legislature known as House of Assembly (Abegunde, 2016). In the second republic, elections were conducted in the nineteen states of the federation to both Senate and House of Representatives. There were 450 members of the House of Representatives while the Senate was made up of 96 members. This was made up of one member from each of the territorial constituencies which the nineteen states were divided. The reason for this was to allow for equal representation in line with the principle of federalism and practice of federal character (Abegunde, 2016). The Fourth Republic witnessed a change and improvement in the National Assembly representation. Each of the thirty-six states in the

country was divided into three geopolitical zones i.e., North, Central and South. It is mandated for each of the zones to elect a senator to the Senate and one senator representing the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) to have equal representation. The bi-cameral legislature in the fourth republic composed of 360 members of House of Representatives and 109 members of the Senate. Membership of House of Representatives from each state are based on the numeric strength of each state, representation was not based on equal number from the states like in the Senate (Abegunde, 2016).

The Nigerian Legislature can be classified into colonial and post-colonial. The colonial legislature covers the legislative institution in place between 1861 and 1959, while the postcolonial legislature is the legislative institution established since the political independence in the country in 1960 till present (2024). The period under post-colonial legislature can be categorized into the republics. In the First Republic (1963-1966 i.e., the parliamentary system) it was characterized with fusion of powers between the executive and legislature. In the Second Republic (1979-1983 i.e., presidential system), the major feature of government in this republic was the introduction of separation of power among the three organs of government. The Third Republic legislature was under the military regime (1992-1993) and the last which is the Fourth Republic legislature is the current democratic regime which started in 1999 and is still ongoing.

Conceptual Discourse

Legislature

The legislature makes the laws, that defines rights and obligations of the people and of various arms of government, and defines rules of conduct of various actions and functions affecting the well-being of the collective good of the society (Odalonu, 2020). The legislature is the collective of the representatives of the people elected under a legal framework to make laws for the betterment of the society. It is also defined as "the institutional body responsible for making laws for a nation and one through which the collective will of the people or part of it is articulated, expressed and implemented" (Okoosi-Simbine, 2010). Awotokun (1998) states that legislature is "an arm of government made up of elected representatives or constituted assembly people whose duty is to make laws, control the activities of the executive and safeguard people's interest". The legislature controls through legislation all economic, social and political activities of the nation. It also scrutinizes the policies of the Executive and provides the framework for the judiciary to operate (Ihedioha, 2012).

The legislature performs three basic roles namely: lawmaking, representation and oversight. It makes laws for the good governance of the country, carry out representative functions on behalf of the people that elected them and carry out oversight on the executive arm of government which include the Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), to ensure that government is held accountable to the people from where it derives its sovereignty (Ihedioha, 2012; Dogara, 2016). This makes the legislature possibly the most important organ of government as no society can exist without codified laws.

There are two types of legislatures. These are: unicameral and bicameral legislatures. A unicameral legislature has only one chamber based upon popular representation and is responsible for the entire function of law making. This kind of legislature is good for smaller countries with relatively homogenous ethnic nationality. Countries with unicameral legislature include Ghana, Turkey, Greece, Spain, Denmark, Sierra Leone, Romania, New Zealand, Sweden, etc., while bicameral legislature refers to the legislature with two legislative chambers or houses. In other words, a bicameral legislature consists of two chambers, namely, the Upper and the Lower Houses.

Members of both Upper and Lower Houses are directly elected as in Nigeria and some other countries such as the Senate in the United States. In Britain, members of the Upper House, the House of Lords, are nominated while members of the House of Commons are elected. Examples of countries with bicameral legislature include; USA, Nigeria, Britain, South Africa, etc. In Nigeria, there are 109 senators elected based on three Senators to represent each of the country's thirty-six states and one senator to represent Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory. There are also 360 members in the House of Representatives elected on the basis of population.

Governance

The term governance is used extensively and, in many contexts, but is difficult to capture in a simple definition. In a natural resource context, governance is used to refer to the body of formal and informal policies, and the arrangements developed between relevant stakeholders, to manage and to make decisions about a particular resource. Governance provides the framework by which groups, such as communities, define their interests, rights, responsibilities and the ways in which they will interact with each other and with institutions of authority to manage a particular resource.

Gill (2009) defined Governance as the dynamic interaction between people, structures, processes and traditions that support the exercise of legitimate authority in provision of sound leadership, direction, oversight, and control of an entity in order to ensure that its purpose is achieved, and that there is proper accounting for the conduct of its affairs, the use of its resources, and the results of its activities. Gill further identified seven generally accepted, interrelated pillars of democratic governance, and consequentially "good," governance as follows: legitimacy, participation (or engagement), responsible stewardship, ethical conduct, transparency, predictability and accountability.

Florence *et al.* (2015) viewed governance as the use of State resources and power in an accountable way to achieve and promote the well-being of the citizenry. It, therefore, implies that when the power and resources are not well managed for the welfare of the citizen, there is bound to be a problem. Ogundiya (2010) sees governance as the way in which governments exercise power for the management and distribution of a country's social and economic resources. It is the process by which a state's affairs are managed effectively in the areas of public accountability, fiscal responsibility, administrative and the political responsibility, responsiveness, and transparency, all of which must show the

interest of the governed and the leaders (Kola et al., 2017). According to Gould (1972) cited in Akindele *et al* (2012); Momodu and Matudi (2013) governance refers to the act of exercising control over others, inducing others to behave in specified ways as required by law.

In same vein, Odo (2015) posits that the scope of governance is wide as it includes all the day-to-day activities of the government, such as the exercise of authority on the economic, political and administrative levels in the nation. According to Odo, institutional and structural arrangement, decision-making processes, policy formulation and implementation capacity, development of personnel, information flow and the nature and style of leadership within a political system are part of the governance. Governance strictly refers to the administration of a state. Therefore, the ultimate objective of governance is to efficiently and equitably deliver public good to the citizens of a state and this is what is referred to as good governance (Momodu and Matudi, 2013).

Good Governance

Good governance has been defined by various scholars and institutions in different ways. It has come into regular use in political science, public administration and, more particularly, development management. It appears alongside such terms as democracy, civil society, participation, human rights and sustainable development (Akindele et al, 2012).

Good governance is seen by Ifiemi (2016) and Obasa (2016) as the process of making and implementing decisions. Good decision-making process and good governance share several characteristics: They all have a positive effect on various aspects of the government including consultations with the people, policies that are people-oriented, and programmes that provide the platform for developing society. Similarly, Auslan (2005) defined good governance as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development.

According to Otoghile *et al.* (2014) good governance is the proper exercising of authority, the ability to solve problems and resolve conflicts, efficient management of resources development, and high level of responsiveness to the needs and the interest of the citizens. Good governance is integral to economic growth, the eradication of poverty and hunger, quality education and sustainable development. The issue of good governance is a problem that has crippled the growth of many countries in the world particularly Nigeria. Good governance is, among other things, about being participatory, transparent and accountable.

Good governance is described as the government of the society (Kola *et al.*, 2017). This is more so, since effective governance means the capacity of the state, through its power of determinism or, authoritative allocation of scarce critical societal resources – to deliver the basic necessities of life to the governed and, equally facilitate the process of economic development (Akindele et al, 2012). Good governance has also been defined as the process of allocating resources through the instrumentalities of the state, for the attainment of public good. Thus, good governance includes institutional and structural arrangements,

decision making processes, policy formulation and implementation capacity, development of personnel, information flows and the nature and style of leadership within a political system (PLAC, 2016).

Despite all the differences, a common understanding of the term good governance is that, it is the exercise of power and decision-making for a group of people bearing in mind the principles of accountability, effectiveness and efficiency, participatory, transparency, responsiveness, consensus-oriented, and equitable (ECA, 2012). Thus, good governance is characterized by participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, equity, inclusiveness, effectiveness, efficiency and accountability (Ewuim *et al.*, 2014).

Functions of the Legislature

The legislature performs numerous functions in democratic nations. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA, 2012) in its study on the "Role of legislature in promoting good governance in Africa" – explain that:

The parliament or legislature plays an important role in the life of a nation. It thus performs three main functions:

- a) make new laws, change existing laws and repeal laws that have become outdated or obsolete;
- b) represent and communicate the views and wishes of the citizens in decision making processes;
- c) oversee the activities of the executive so that the government is accountable to the people.

These functions are further explained below:

a) Law-Making - The fundamental and primary function of the legislature is to make laws for the well-being of the people as well as for the order and security of the country. Such laws are made in accordance with the constitution of a country and in line with the standing laws and procedure that the assembly has stipulated.

Law-making is an extensive process which involves passing of motions into resolutions and bills into laws with the main aim of contributing to national development and defending the sovereignty of the country. Although the extent of legislative involvement in law-making vary from weak under parliamentary democracy to strong under the presidential system, the executive in both systems submit it proposal to the assembly for deliberation (Fashagba *et al.*, 2014; Abegunde, 2016).

Thus, law-making is the primary and most important function of the legislature. It is through laws that policies of government are laid down for implementation. Laws are enacted in accordance with the prescribed procedures (Ifiemi, 2016).

b) Representative function - Legislative institution is a mechanism in which the special interests and diverse territory of the population are represented and guaranteed (Ewuim *et al.*, 2014). This function derives from the status of the legislature as a body composed of

elected representatives of the people. Individual members of the legislature in a democracy are representing different constituencies. The theories of representation, especially the mandate theory, require them to mirror the interests and aspiration of their constituents, which forms the basis of their elections.

As the major link between the government and the governed, they are expected to visit their constituencies regularly and consult with the voters in order to feel their pulse, gauge public opinion to better represent them in the legislative chambers. For the whole country to be adequately represented in governance, the country was divided into three hundred and sixty (360) constituencies. The representation in the House of Representatives is based on constituency, that is, one member representing each constituency.

Thus, Population plays a very important significant role in the delimitation of the constituencies. For instance, Lagos and Kano with huge population have a total 24 members each in the House of Representatives, while a state like Bayelsa has only six members. Contrary to the method of constituency representation in the House of Representatives, each of the thirty-six states in the country was divided into three zones each not minding the unequal population of the states. Each state is represented by three senators; this implies that a senator is representing each of the zones and one representing the Federal Capital Territory.

This therefore brings the total number of the Senate members to one hundred and nine (109). In this arrangement, both the members of Senate and House of Representatives representing their constituency are constitutionally required to present the interests and concerns of their constituencies during policy-making in their various Assemblies. Also, members of the parliament perform their representational function through financial support, distribution of food, provision of employment, training of youth in vocations, provision of facilities for small scale business for those that have been trained in one vocation or the other (Abegunde, 2016).

c) Oversight Functions - Legislative oversight function is the supervisory responsibility that the legislature carries out on the executive and government ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) in order to ensure that they comply with legislative enactments as well as judiciously utilizing their budgets in order to effectively meet their policy mandates (Momodu and Matudi, 2013).

It is the responsibility of the legislature to conduct investigations into the activities of government ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs). The oversight function of the legislature is to ensure maximum compliance with due process by the public office holders. This however, involves scrutiny and monitoring of duties of public office holders in ministries, departments, government agencies and parastatals. But to make it more effective a standing committee responsible for relevant government ministry is usually mandated by other members to closely oversee, monitor and if need be, scrutinize the accounts and documents of government agencies in relation to the enabling legislations. A standing committee can also organize public hearings or summon government officials to

appear before it to clarify certain issues or defend decisions already made, or proposals under consideration by the agency concerned.

Since it has the responsibility to appropriate and allocate funds to the various government institutions for their operations, it naturally follows that the legislature must oversee these institutions to ensure that the public get value for their money and ensure that these institutions are run in accordance with the laws of the land (Obasa, 2016). The oversight function of the legislature exists as a corollary to the law-making process. For instance, the legislature controls the executive in financial behaviour and appointments of key officials such as Ambassadors, Ministers/Commissioners amongst others (Ewuim *et al.*, 2014).

The Role of Legislature in Promoting Nation-Building and Good Governance in Nigeria

Good governance is imperative for social and economic progress. It involves justice, equity, protection of life and property, enhanced participation, preservation of the rule of law and improved living standard of the populace. Governance is termed bad when it fails to achieve these purposes. Good governance is about the performance capacity of a government or as it relates to leadership capability. Failure of governance, therefore, could expressly mean failure of leadership (Obasa, 2016). Good governance brought about by the representative democracy as epitomised by the legislature ordinarily should reflect the wishes and aspiration of the electorates.

According to Burke, it is the legislators in any vibrant democracy are the true representative of the people. Members of the parliament are elected representatives of the people. In particular, Section 4(1) under Part II of the Constitution states inter alia: "The Legislative powers of the Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be vested in a National Assembly for the Federation which shall consist of a Senate and a House of Representatives". It goes further, in Section 4(2), to state as follows: "The National Assembly shall have power to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the federation with respect to any matter included in the Exclusive Legislative List".

The Exclusive Legislative List, which is contained in Part I of the Second Schedule to the Constitution deals with specific items which only the National Assembly has the sole prerogative to legislate upon, to the exclusion of the States and Local Governments. For example, the items, which are 68 in number, include defense, aviation, currency, customs and excise duties, citizenship, drugs and poisons, copyright, insurance, external affairs and meteorology (Ihedioha, 2012; Okoro, 2017). Furthermore section 88(1) empowers the National Assembly to investigate into any matter which it has powers to make laws and the conduct of individuals, authority or Ministry in respect to the execution of such laws.

The combined effects of the above sections and other incidental sections in the Constitution, Standing Orders of the National Assembly, extant enactments and age long parliamentary practices and tradition form the premise of legislative oversight by the National Assembly. (Okoro, 2017). As a separate organ of government, it plays a crucial role in ensuring the entrenchment of good governance in the State (Ifiemi, 2016)

Through deliberations the legislature reflects public opinion on various issues. It acts as the most effective forum for articulation and expression of public opinion. Legislature acts as a link between the public and the government (Ifiemi, 2016). Furthermore, for the legislature to enhance good governance, Ifiemi (2016) asserts that the following must play out visibly:

- a. The legislature is empowered to look into the needs, business and occupational engagements of the people and make adequate laws that will directly affect the living standards of the people, positively. However, this cannot be achieved if the legislature is made up of people who are rubber-stamped lawmakers. It is against this background that the electorates should endeavor to ensure that those elected to the legislature are not mere rubber-stamp. Where there are credible legislators with integrity, the principle of checks and balances works here, the underlying word is credible representation.
- b. Ostensibly, government is in continuum; hence the legislature is expected to intermittently review, and if necessary, amend existing laws to ensure that the needs and desires of the people are met in line with the dynamics of society. The will of the state is formulated and expressed through laws made by the legislature.
- c. Some laws are archaic and overtaken by time and events. Such laws are reviewed to meet the present needs of the people, so it is incumbent on the legislature to make necessary amendments to such laws. By the same token, the legislature plays a major role in gauging, collating and presenting the views and needs of the people they represent. This is usually achieved through the articulation of the needs and aspirations of the people. It behooves the legislature to determine the development agenda of government.
- d. More importantly, the legislature helps in identifying the problems and challenges of the people that require attention and assist in overcoming bureaucratic inertia. Legislators achieve this by opening constituency offices where they are needed.

Similarly, PLAC (2016) reiterate that in a democratic regime good governance has three principal characteristics: Participation, transparency and accountability:

1. Participation: This essentially has to do with involvement and inclusiveness of the citizens in the affairs of government. The public plays a significant role in choosing their leaders and representatives. In the Nigerian context, the legislature provides for public participation in the legislative activities and processes when it calls for memoranda from the public and when it conducts public hearings. This enhances citizen's access to the legislature and contributes to good governance. In the House of Representatives, in particular, the mechanism of Public Petitions Committee, guarantees that citizen's grievances are presented and ventilated before the representatives of the people.

2. Transparency: It envisages that activities and decisions of government are open to public view and scrutiny. When we open our committee and government meetings to the press and the public, when our budgets and expenditures are reviewed by citizens; when our

courts and legislative chambers admit the public; when our laws, rules and decisions of government are open to discussion, they are seen as transparent and there is less opportunity for any authority to abuse the system. This position is further reinforced by the Freedom of Information Act, initiated and passed by the National Assembly to aid good governance and accountability. This law specifically makes public records and information more freely available to any citizen.

3. Accountability: This denotes the degree to which government or any of its agencies are held responsible for its actions. In the legislature, members of parliament give periodic account of their stewardship to their constituents during constituency briefings. The four-year tenure also ensures that political office holders render accounts of their stewardship to the electorate especially before any possible renewal of mandate. Besides, the increasing demand for good governance within the political framework of democracy by international organizations and the civil society make the oversight functions of the legislative arm of government imperative to the deepening of democratic governance

The legislature also serves a number of other objectives and purposes such as:

1. Improve the efficiency, economy and effectiveness of governmental operations;
2. Evaluate programmes and performance of MDAs;
3. Detect and prevent poor administration, waste, abuse, arbitrary and capricious behaviors or illegal and unconstitutional conduct;
4. Inform the general public and ensure that executive policies reflect the public interest;
5. Gather information to develop new legislative proposals or to amend existing statutes, ensure administrative compliance with legislative intent and prevent executive encroachment on legislative authority and prerogatives.
6. Hold the executive branch accountable by scrutinizing whether the government's policies have been implemented and whether they are having the desired impact.
7. Provide financial accountability by approving and scrutinizing government spending by highlighting wasteful expenditure within publicly – funded services. In political systems where legislatures are able to accomplish these objectives, legislative oversight becomes not only an indispensable and powerful instrument, but also an indicator of good governance (PLAC (2016)).

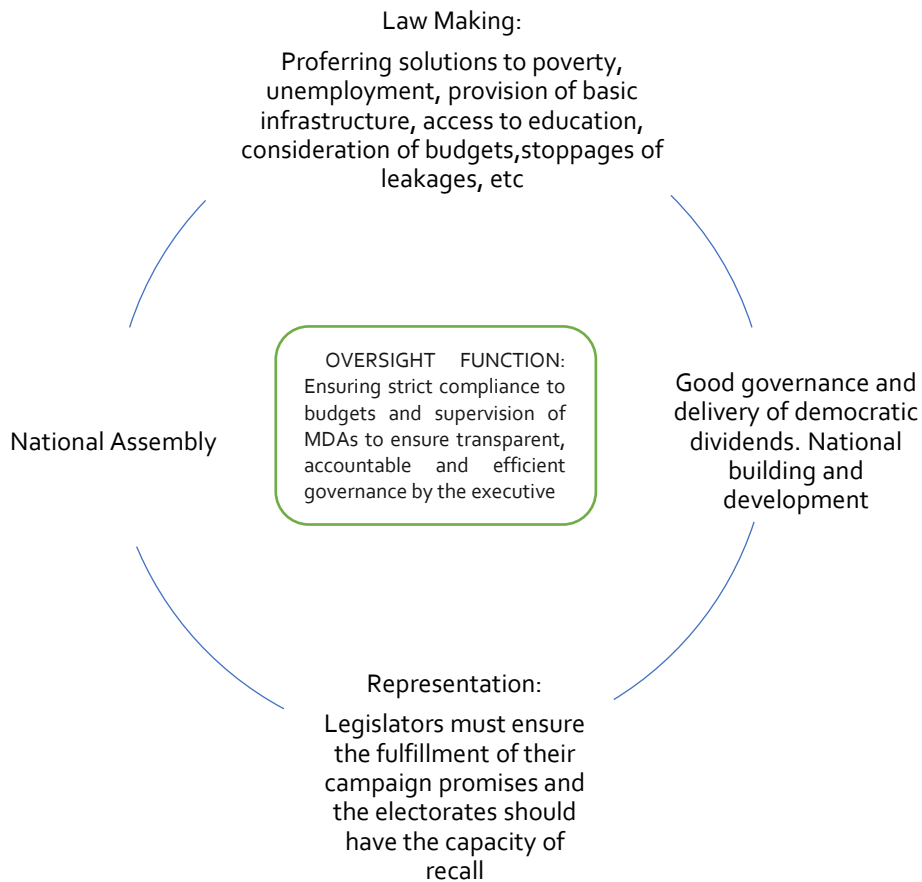


Fig 1: National assembly and good governance model

Source: Aligbe and Momoh (2023)

The figure above describes the triple function of the national assembly namely, law making, oversight and representation. The model therefore, illustrates how the exercise of these functions can translate to the achievement of good governance and nation building.

It is therefore clear that legislatures play critical role in the promotion of good governance in democratic regimes (Momodu and Matudi, 2013). The most important way that legislatures can contribute effectively to good governance is through the exercise of the instrumentality of its oversight function as witnessed in other climes.

Conclusion

The legislature occupies a central role in any democratic setting. Of course, a government may exist without the legislature. Yet, without the legislature, democracy is not possible. The existence of a parliament may not be synonymous with democracy, but democracy cannot exist without a parliament. As is evident, legislature is a veritable instrument and institution for national development whose effectiveness is determined by some local variables. With the roles of the legislatures all pointing towards good governance, it is not

out of place to say that the legislature is the bulwark of any nation (ECA, 2012; Obasa, 2016). There is a global advocacy for good governance as manifested in transparency, accountability, responsiveness, consensus-building and the rule of law. Achieving good governance requires the existence of a strong, effective and efficient parliament. This is so because parliament plays a crucial role in gauging, collating and presenting the views and needs of the people, articulating their expectations and aspirations in determining the national development agenda (ECA, 2012; Obasa, 2016; Ifiemi, 2016). The legislative arm of government has powers to legislate on a broad spectrum of matters that if effectively carried out will translate into good governance for the benefit of all and sundry (Akomoledede and Akomoledede, 2012). A vibrant legislature is more or less the propelling factor to engendering democracy and good governance. The commitment and selflessness of law makers is crucial for any government to achieve the desired change. Also, for good governance to happen there must be a strong and reliable legislature, which is independent, objective, enjoys the support of the electorate and above all to foster democracy and good governance. It is also the duty and obligation of the masses to foster and elect credible and upstanding individuals into prominent offices in the legislative government to ensure proper representation, a reduction in corrupt practices and overall improvement of the society.

Recommendations

- All persons contesting for legislative positions in the country must be thoroughly screened to ensure that they are not corrupt and are actually vying for such positions to represent their constituencies and senatorial districts.
- The legislators should embark on good oversight functions devoid of political bigotry and bickering as this will put the executive and other agencies in check. A situation whereby lawmakers give prior notice to herald their visitation should be discontinued.
- The legislators should always hold a townhall meeting with the citizens to educate them on their resolutions, bills and laws made.
- The principles of checks and balances should be reinforced to serve as a watchdog on assembly members
- The paper also recommends that the nation's democratic institutions need to be strengthened. This promotes the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, including the administrative law and tribunal to enable them prosecute any member genuinely found to contravene the standard practice. If this is done, membership of the national assembly would become less attractive, but rather only attractive to those willing to represent their electorates.

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