

**The Roles of the Committee System in Enhancing Legislative Efficiency in Nigeria:
The Case of Kwara State House of Assembly**

By

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ABSTRACT

The need for efficiency in the performance of the myriad of legislative and other related functions, with which the modern assemblies are saddled, makes the utility of the committee system indispensable to modern legislatures. In almost all forms of democracy, where representative legislatures are tolerated, committees are always made integral part of the internal operational mechanism. However, the way and extent to which the legislatures of various states participate and shape policy making vary from state to state. The nature and power of the legislatures equally have implication for the operation of the committees in various states of the world. Hence, this study examines the extent of effectiveness of legislative committees in Nigeria. The committees of the Kwara State House of Assembly serve as laboratory for the purpose of testing the degree of efficiency of the body. The study discovers that legislative committees are relevant and useful as they enhance the efficiency of their parent body (whole house). Legislative committees in Nigeria are, however, operating under certain constraints which, if removed, will further enhance their performance.

Key words: Nigeria, Kwara State, Legislature, Committees, Constitution, Fourth Republic

INTRODUCTION

One of the notorious features of the legislatures, in the opinion of Okon and Essien (2005), is the committee system. The legislative assembly across the world has a tradition of dividing the whole house into smaller units with each unit carrying a definite responsibility. The division of the whole house into smaller units has the basic objective of promoting efficiency in the performance of the legislative and other related roles of the assembly. This, perhaps, is the underlying reason for the utility of the committee system in virtually all forms of liberal representative democracy and even under authoritarian regimes. The utility of the committee system evidently transcends the boundary of parliamentary and the presidential systems, because under the authoritarian regime of the communist state of the defunct Soviet Union, the committee system of organizing assembly into units for efficiency was never discountenanced (Blondel, 1973). This suggests that in all form of governments that claim to operate one form of democracy or the other and where the legislative assembly is present, irrespective of the enormous hurdles and bumps before it, find the committee system indispensable. This is rightly captured by Kousoulas (1982) who avers that in large legislatures, as well as small ones, much of the work is done by committees, and this partly compensates for the limitation inherent in a large membership.

The relevance of the legislative committees was, therefore, not lost on the ‘wise men’ who gathered to design the government operational manual that ushered in the Nigerian Fourth Republic on May 29th, 1999. The Nigerian legislative assemblies, both at the center and the constituent units have, therefore, found indispensable the division of the whole House into smaller units where detailed attention is given to issues or bills under consideration in the legislature. However, the legislative assembly in Nigeria has suffered long hiatus due to the predatory tendency of the successive military governments. Considering the fact that the existence of a representative assembly is antithetical to military dictatorship, the legislative institution is often dissolved after every successful military putsch in the country. This has meant a ‘start it all over again’ whenever the military has exhausted its will to rule and relinquish power for a democratically elected civilian ruler to step in. The implication of which is that the legislature, bereft of the continuity that could nurture it to maturity, has retained its post independence toddling status.

Against this background, the Nigerian legislature of the fourth republic was established to foster good and efficient government. The legislatures, realizing the enormous task on their shoulders, the mammoth of public expectation, and the constitutional provision, divide the law makers into smaller units so as to be well positioned to discharge their law making function along side other auxiliary responsibilities, especially overseeing the administration as constitutionally required. Consequently, this study examines the impacts of the committee system in enhancing legislative efficiency in Nigeria using the Kwara State House of Assembly as a case study. Kwara State is one of the 36 States making up the Nigerian federation. The study adopts content analysis and descriptive analytical methods. The data for the study was derived from both the secondary and the primary sources. The secondary sources composed of textbooks, journals, and newspapers, while the primary source are derived from interview with stakeholders, personal observation of the writer, reports of the various committees, and the legislative hansard.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Committees are microcosm of the legislatures (Mackintosh, 1985:15), or what Woodrow Wilson called the little legislatures (Cummings & Wise, 1997). This is reflected in the constitutionally permitted delegated decision making authority to the committees by the larger assembly who merely converge to sanction the conclusion of the committees (Lawrence & Oppenhermer, 1981:157). The committee system is a check point for a detailed, clause by clause examination of the content of a bill (McConnell, 1967:43; *Passing legislation in the United Kingdom*, 2000). Committees and sub-committees are where congress does most of its works. Policies are shaped, interest groups heard, and legislation hammered out (Cummings & Wise, 1997). In assembly, where legislature possesses a measure of independence, policies may be shaped through private member initiatives. Also, amendments may be proposed to existing legislation or modification of executive initiated bills may be carried out. In all these, the place and role of the committees cannot be over emphasized. Legislative committees interact with civil society through public hearings, so as to be better informed about certain developments. Public hearing by committees may equally aim at gauging public opinions or knowing what policies are acceptable to the public or some targeted groups. The final content of bills passed into law in the assembly is, thus, the products of the ground work undertaken and perfected by the legislative committees.

Therefore, a legislative committee is a group of members appointed or elected to perform a particular task in connection with the work of the assembly (Gondin, n. d.). Gondin's view is in tandem with that of Commonwealth, which conceived committee as the formation or constitution of a group of members of parliament who are specially named to address a specified mandate whose terms of reference and remit are spelt out (CPA, 2002). Ojagbohunmi (2006) avers that legislative committee entails the subdivision of a house of parliament, the membership of which is usually appointed to perform some functions or carry out certain assignments for the parent body, that is, the legislature as a whole. Evident from the definitions is that a group of people is, or may be set aside, among members of parliament and assigned a specific responsibility under the rules of the house, without any other rights than those conferred by the house that establish such a committee. Hence, it behooves the committee to operate according to the procedure of the whole house (CPA, 2002). The body, therefore, is given a role which is ultimately aimed at not only lessening the pressure of work on the floor of the house, but also at increasing the efficiency of the house in its overall responsibilities. A committee may be formed at the beginning of a session in the form of a standing committee or constituted as in when a certain development requiring some special arrangement or skills compelled the need for an ad-hoc arrangement to proffer solution or respond to an emerging development.

Committees, by this, are task oriented bodies with a clearly defined purpose and direction, which act on behalf of the whole house, who in fact confer legitimacy on it to get some specific legislative responsibilities sorted out in a more manageable and efficient manner. This, perhaps, prompted Ojagbohunmi (2006) to argue that committees are usually composed of legislators, delegated to perform some work of the parent body more closely and in detailed manner, where the assembly would otherwise not have had enough time to carry out such responsibilities. The importance attached to the roles of the committee might have prompted Lawrence and Oppenheimer (1981) to observe that (congressional) 'policies making is committee centered'. This position rightly lends credence to the view of Woodrow Wilson who opines that whatever is to be done must be done by or through the committees (Cohen, 2002:78). This might have equally made Blonded (1973) assert that 'committees seem so natural to the existence and working of many legislatures...that it is difficult to believe that assemblies could have worked for a long time without organized committees'. The committee system is, therefore, a filtering device and a legislative stethoscope by which policy proposal and other related activities are not only scrutinized but also utilized to access the desirability, feasibility, sustainability,

and healthiness of governmental policies. Thus, due to the importance of the committees to the legislative assembly, the committees may be given different powers to meet current or contingency circumstances. By this, the committees have become part and parcel of the internal operational mechanism devised by assemblies to enable them cope with their widening and demanding tasks of legislative, oversight, and investigation with efficiency and effectiveness (CPA, 2002).

The committee system may be utilized for exigency purpose, in which case it is appointed in response to a particular development at any given point in time under an ad-hoc arrangement. Some special committees are also a feature of the legislative assembly. Such special committees are constituted to address issues of a specialized kind in most cases. However, in the case of Nigerian Senate, special committees (about seven) have always taken the shape of standing committees, especially between 1999 and 2007. There are regular or standing committees under which the whole house is divided into various units, with each unit having a responsibility of overseeing the corresponding administrative unit or department of government. This, in the opinion of Laski (1967), enables a legislative assembly to bring its members into some organic connection with the executive departments. Hence, the best way to make the committees realize the goals, therefore, is to avoid an unnecessarily large number of people in a committee. A committee should be made up of some dozen of members selected, not so much as party representatives, though party representation may not be discountenanced, but the guiding principle of constituting committees must be predicated on its ability to add value to the legislative processes and activities. Laski, therefore, concludes that while a number of committees may be set up, each should deal with a single department of government. However, different types of committees have been identified in different legislatures across the world. For instance, there may be standing committees, such as a committee on selection or ways, means, and subject committee. A committee may be specially constituted as ad-hoc committee. It is typical of Britain to utilize the select and the standing committee to ease the burden on the house. By this, the standing committees are set up to intervene at a certain stage in the course of the legislative process and to scrutinize bills. The composition of the committees often reflects the strength of parties in the house. The select committees are not legislative committees, but rather empowered to investigate activities of governmental agencies or departments, to inform the house and the public on the development in the ministries and steps being taken to bring under control any identifiable problem (Mackintosh, 1985; CPA, 2001; Jennings, 1969).

The standing committees in Canada, New Zealand, and Jamaica also perform legislative role as Bills go straight to them for review after the first reading. New Zealand, apart from the utility of standing committee for legislative purpose, has the subject committees, which perform such responsibilities ranging from initiating enquiries, invite persons, paper and records, and commonly takes submission from the public. Committees scrutinize estimates and examine government performance through financial review (CPA, 2001). Other countries of the world, like Uganda, have standing, sessional, and select committees; but the committees in Uganda have enormous resource constraint hampering their efficiency. In South Africa, the legislative process appears more democratic as it is open to the public so that informed contribution will be harvested and, thus, make the executive accountable. The United States utilizes the standing, special or select, ad-hoc, and conference committees, as the congressional policy making power, in fact, rests on the committees. McConnell (1967) observes that fundamental control over the legislative process occurs not in the floor but in the standing committees of congress. The central committee of the Supreme Soviet of the defunct Soviet Union played a preponderant legislative role, sometime in concert with the council of ministers before the demise of communism. The legislative committees in Nigeria take the form of standing, special, ad-hoc (or sub), and conference committees. Bills proceed straight to the appropriate committee of the house after second reading in the various Nigerian assemblies. Of course, in Nigeria, the committee of the whole house, chaired by a person other the speaker of the plenary session, considers and debates a bill for the purpose of making necessary amendments after the third reading. The Italian experience in committee system appears more far reaching because of detailed activities that are assigned to specialized committees. Besides the standing committees, there are rules, elections, and library committees in the Italian Parliament (Adams & Barile, 1961; Schapiro, 1977; Price, 1981; CPA, 2001).

The effectiveness of the committees largely depends on its composition. For instance, Smith (1980:176), Moodie (1961), and Gondin (n.d.) found a common front in accepting that a committee of small size performs better than where the size is relatively larger. This is because, as Smith (1980) argues, a number of small groups are less amenable to government control than a single large one. Moodie (1961) further observes that, a small size standing committee will not only encourage a more intimate atmosphere, but also particularly favorable to the back bencher members of parliament who are able to air their views on issues at that stage of deliberation. Gondin further asserts that committees should, however, be large enough to be reasonably representative of the primary assembly, yet it should

be small enough not to become unwieldy for dealing with details. When a committee is made of small number of people and the body enjoys some degree of continuity over a relatively long period of time, a degree of specialization results (Smith, 1980). The practice in Nigeria appears to partly reflect the foregoing view point; this is because legislative committees in Nigeria are often of average size or made up of less than or about a dozen legislators. On the other hand, committees in Nigeria, especially at the national level, have suffered incessant dissolution and reconstitution, thus, resulting in a rather short span. While representation in committees has usually not been an issue in the Nigerian National Assembly, for instance, the non-consideration of a reasonable number of legislators from opposition parties as chairmen of committees have always attracted negative reaction. The reaction of a member of Action Congress (AC) to the composition of committees of the house of representative in July 2007 rightly lends credence to this. The complaint of the AC legislators bordered on the failure of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) dominated lower chamber to consider any member of AC even for just a chairmanship slot of a committee. The All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), according to the complainant, was lucky to have been allocated two chairmanship slots, while the AC had two Vice Chairmanship slots allocated to them. It suffices to point out that in both the Nigerian Senate and the House of Representatives the PDP have overwhelming majority of over 80 percent. This might have greatly influenced the sharing of offices in the assemblies.

However, some certain factors are considered indispensable, if committees will be strong enough to perform their functions. These conditions, which must necessarily exist, as Smith (1981) points out, include: where the composition does not reflect the majority in the assembly – alternatively where party discipline is weak; where committees are relatively small and specialized, rather than an ad-hoc, and in which members serve together for a long period with a chairman who is independent. In the opinion of Cummings and Wise (1997), a number of factors may equally affect a committee's degree of independence, influence in congress, and success in managing legislature. These, according to them, include: (a) member goals which reflect the benefits desired by each committee member; (b) environmental constraints that relate to the outside influences that affect a committee – this may be the other member of the house, the executive branch, client groups, and other major political parties; (c) the strategy adopted in pursuing interest of members and of the committee, and (d) decision making process are the internal rule for each committee.

A close observation of recent development in the congress of the United States, however, suggests a declining relevance of the committees. This decline is evidenced by the way committees hearings are stage-managed. The tendency for few committee members to sit on behalf of the whole members, and invite expert to volunteer opinions upon which committee's decisions are based to the exclusion of the larger members (backbenchers) is on the increase. Committee members, especially the new ones, are growing disillusioned about their committee due to the aforementioned development. Coupled with this is the large number of legislators in committees as some are as large as comprising of over seventy members (Cohen, 2002). Assessing this development against the criteria set for strong committees by Smith (1980), it is little surprising that the congressional committees are not only losing their relevance and utility, but also now being by-passed by the two American Houses in processing bills for passage. This might have prompted Cohen (2002), to argue that 'the congressional committees have lost their long-standing pre-eminence as the center of legislative ideas and debates'. The implication of the emerging decline in the utility of the American congressional committees is that it may soon be held with disfavour like those of the parliamentary systems of the Western European countries, where pervasive executive control over legislative procedure has eroded, in large part, its independence and initiatives (Blondel, 1980). The committees' effectiveness may, however, be constrained, especially in fulfilling its parliament oversight function, when it does not enjoy executive's support for materials and fund needed.

PROVISION FOR COMMITTEES IN THE NIGERIAN CONSTITUTION

That the utility of the committee system in the legislature of the modern states is indispensable is not in doubt. The relevance of such miniature assembly was, therefore, not lost on the successive framers of the Nigerian constitutions. Hence, specific provisions were inserted into the 1999 constitution of Nigeria on the necessity to create committees both for special and general purposes. Such constitutional provisions although appear discretionary; because of the phrase 'may appoint a committee', its relevance is underscored by its constant use by the legislative assemblies.

Consequently, Section 62, Sub-section 1-4, and Section 103, Sub-section 1-3 clearly spell out the nature of committees that can be constituted and for what purpose a committee could be constituted, the procedures for constituting the committees, and the limit of the power the committees may exercise.

This is evident, for instance, in the content of Section 103, Sub-sections 1-3 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which states that:

103 – (1) A house of assembly may appoint a committee of its members for any special or general purposes as in its opinion would be better regulated and managed by means of such a committee and may by resolution, regulation or otherwise as it thinks fit delegate functions exercise by it to any such committee.

(2) The number of members of a committee approved under this section, their term of office and quorum shall be under this section, their term of office and quorum shall be fixed by the House of Assembly.

(3) Nothing in this section shall be considered as authorising a House of Assembly to delegate to a committee the power to decide whether a bill be passed into law or to determine any matter which it is empowered to determine by resolution under the provisions of this constitution, but such a committee of the House may be authorized to make recommendations to the House on any such matter.

The provision for committee at the state under Section 103, Sub-section 1-3 is a reproduction of the provisions for committees in the National Assembly under Section 62, Subsection 1 - 4 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria, with the only difference being the substitution of the phrase “The Senate or The House of Representatives” with “a House of Assembly”. These constitutional provisions, therefore, remain the cornerstone upon which the committee system of the Nigerian legislative assemblies leaned.

THE ROLES OF THE COMMITTEES IN ENHANCING LEGISLATIVE EFFICIENCY

A survey of extant literature on legislative studies suggests there are three main activities, which are in fact reflective of the miniature assembly status of the committees. These activities include legislative, investigative, and oversight responsibilities (Cummings & Wise, 1997; Greenberg & Page, 1995). The degree to which any of these functions is performed by the legislative committees varies from country to country. For instance, while scrutiny of administration, by ways of inquiry and hearings, serves as legislative investigative mechanism in the United Kingdom and the United States committees, the legislative committees of most other states of the world, as Smith (1980) argues, tend to concentrate on

legislation while avoiding becoming involved in matters of administration, perhaps due to the poorly developed hearing technique. Perhaps, this seeming ethnocentric view of Smith's appeared vitiated by recent development in some of the legislatures that Smith considered irredeemably weak. A justification for this is evidenced by the roles that the legislative committees have played in a country like Nigeria and maybe other countries, especially on the return of the latest democracy.

On a general note, committees perform the valuable roles of division of labor and specialization, as legislators become specialized and more knowledgeable in their areas possibly than the bureaucrats in the executive arm, especially in the developed countries. Committees are forum for reconciling inter-political party's conflict and differences and are natural arenas for political bargaining and legislative compromise. This, perhaps, explains why Cummings and Wise (1997) observe that if a committee has approved a bill, other members generally assumed that the committee has considered the legislation carefully applied its expertise and made the right decision. This further lends credence to the view of Woodrow Wilson who argues that congress does not involve in serious discussion but merely meet to sanction the conclusion of the committees.

While committees basically process legislation, they combine this with other responsibilities, such as educating the public on important issues through hearings and investigations (Cummings & Wise, 1997). Committees provide a bridge between the government and the people, especially through their investigative role. They also constitute effective tools for reviewing and scrutinizing public account, investigate and debate political issues and travel far and wide to seek for evidence (CPA, 2001). The legislature also performs the important task of oversight. Oversight function, according to Greenberg and Page (1995), involves ensuring that watchful eyes are kept on the executive arm so as to ensure that provisions of the laws that the assembly has passed are not only implemented but also to prevent possible abuse of power by its officials, including the president.

THE CASE OF KWARA STATE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

Further attempt will now be directed at examining, on empirical basis, how some of the roles have been utilized as legislative instruments in the Kwara State House of Assembly to enhance legislative efficiency. An analysis of the legislative Hansard of the Fifth Kwara State House of Assembly, between

(June 2003 and June 2007), appears to suggest that the committees have had their hands full of activities that ultimately affect the overall performance of the legislature. For instance, between June 2003 and June 2007, the fifth legislature of Kwara state, considered and passed 51 bills. Nineteen of the bills were private member bills, while the remaining ones were executive initiated bills. Of interest to us is that all the bills that were passed went through various committees' scrutiny for necessary detailed clause-by-clause examination. While eight of the passed bills were amendments to existing laws, a good number had a public hearing conducted on them, and were handled by the appropriate committees of the house. A good example of this was the Kwara state independent electoral commission bill, 2004. The involvement of the committees in the process was enormous, as they were saddled with the responsibilities of inserting acceptable modifications and amendments, as well as deleting clauses considered unacceptable as evidenced by the Chief Appointment (amendment) bill 2003 that was given a complete overhauling.

Apart from the legislative activity of the committees, their oversight and investigative responsibilities occupied a central stage during the period. By this, the various standing committees of the fifth legislature were actively busy between June 2003 and June 2007. This is evidenced by the volume of reports submitted to the House by the various committees and sometimes ad-hoc or joint committees that looked into the various petitions from individuals, groups, or organizations. Between June 2003 and June 2006, the committees handled one hundred and one (101) activities relating to legislative, investigative, and oversight functions. Sixty three percent (63%) of the reports were basically investigations into various expressed grievances by the citizens of the state. The members of the public, who in one way or the other had their right trampled, petitioned the House for necessary intervention. The petitions were investigated by the relevant committees of the House into administrative injustices perpetrated either by the executive or its official and department. The reports of the investigations often contain recommendations on appropriate compensation due to the aggrieved person(s). The aim of legislative investigation is to rectify and/or compensate the individuals whose right had been trampled.

Also, twenty two percent (22%) of the 101 reports submitted by the committees were essentially oversight related activities. On the spot assessment of projects budgeted for in the 2004, 2005, and 2006 Appropriation Acts were sometimes undertaken with a view to ensuring that the executive faithfully implement the budget as approved by the legislature.

Seven of the 101 reports were legislative in nature, part of which were amendments to existing laws or introduction of a set of new laws. The remaining nine reports in the legislative Hansard were activities that were extra-legislative, like the reports of the official launching of Health Reform Foundation of Nigeria (HERFON), held on July 22nd at Abuja and the report of the 3rd Lagos State House of Assembly Public Lecture held on Tuesday, June 29th, 2004 at the Sheraton Hotel, Lagos.

One of the investigative oversight activities of the committees, by which the efficiency of the legislative assembly is not only facilitated but also enhanced, is the supervision of a ministry to which a committee is specifically assigned. A clear case in point is the intervention of the house committee on works and transport in the Moshe Bridge in Kaima Local Government of the state. At the sitting of the House on Thursday, June 8th, 2006, a member of the legislature representing Bani/Adena/Gwara constituency, Hon. Abubakar Mohammed Sukababa raised a matter of urgent public importance on the floor of the house on the need to take action in order to save the bridge from total collapse. The bridge, according to Sukababa, if allowed to collapse will cut his people (constituency) off from other parts of the state as the area is in the extreme end of the state. The speaker of the House responded in earnest by mandating the House committee on works and transport to carry out an inspection visit to the site and determine the level of its deterioration, as well as what should be done to save the bridge from total collapse and to report its finding and recommendation to the House. Consequently, the committee invited and obtained relevant information from the Comptroller, Federal Ministry of Works, Ilorin since the road in question is a federal road. The need to have expert advice equally prompted the co-optation of an engineer from the State Ministry of Works and Transport, in person of Engineer. S. J. Abdul. The committee, under the chairmanship of Hon. Ahmed A. Mohammed, which embarked on the oversight visit on Friday, June 9th, 2006, just two days after the issue was raised on the floor of the House, was not only able to get first hand information from the Comptroller of the Federal Ministry of Works in Kwara State on what steps had been taken to save or build a new bridge, but equally recommended some solutions as follows:

1. That in order to solve the problem of Moshe bridge, concrete approach slabs, reinforcement of the two abutments; replacement of the iron guard railings, filling of pot holes and such other works be put in place immediately by Federal Ministry of Works, Ilorin to serve a temporary measure before the construction of the new standard bridge.

2. That having discovered that narrow bridges abound in Kwara State, including that of Moshe in Kaiama Local Government, new standard bridges be constructed in Kwara State by the Federal Government to replace the sub-standard ones and this should be vigorously pursued by both the state government, as well as members of the National Assembly from Kwara State.

Also, the investigative activity of the House committee is further evidence by the numerous responses to petitions to the House. Procedurally, when motions for investigation has been presented and accepted, it behooves the appropriate committee of the legislature to handle the issue at hand. A case in point was the one involving one Mr. C. A. Bello, a retired teacher who lodged a formal written complain to the House on an alleged non-payment of his 18 months federal pension's arrears. Specifically, the highlights of the petition as stated in the report of the committee on education include:

- i. Payment of federal share of pensions to local government pension board in February, 2003.
- ii. Retired teachers are suffering as a result of non-payment of pension arrears.
Government owes the retired teachers 18 months arrears.

Consequently, the petitioner wanted the House to intervene by:

1. Ensuring the payment of 18 months pension arrears.
2. Implementation of 142 per cent pension increase for retired teachers.

The House committee on education was mandated to investigate and recommend as appropriate, steps to take to ensure payment of the pension arrears to the affected persons.

In order to get necessary, adequate, and accurate information, the committee on education took evidence from some identifiable stakeholders among whom were:

- i. The Chairman, Local Government Service Commission;
- ii. The Chairman, State Primary Education Board;
- iii. The Secretary, State Pension Board; and
- iv. The Secretary, Local Government Staff Pension Board (LGSPB).

After collecting their facts and figures and analyzing them, it was discovered by the committee that the Federal and State governments were not fulfilling their pension payment obligation to the workers (teachers). The lackadaisical attitude of the state or its agency was discovered to be contributing to the inability to pay pensioners. This is due to the delay by the state, as the Secretary of Local Government

Staff Pension Board, Mr. David Adeyinka pointed out, to effect the directive of the federal government that the payment of pension to the teachers who served before March 31, 1976 be transferred to the local government pension board in June, 2002. The committee came out with the following recommendations after a thorough investigation:

1. The federal government be requested to make special contribution to the LGSPB to settle the pension owed.
2. State and local government be implored to contribute their shares of the pensions fund on regular basis.
3. The federal government be requested to release the amount outstanding against her to LGSPB so that pensioners could get their allowance.
4. That the state government should adopt contributory pension scheme in the state.

In another instance, one particular case which called to question the integrity and competence of Kwara State legislature to effectively and dispassionately perform its oversight function was the screening and confirmation of the candidate nominated for the position of Chief Judge (C.J.) of the state in 2006. The investigative power of the House committee was called to task when a member of the public petitioned the House alleging falsification of age by the newly appointed Chief Justice of Kwara State. According to the petitioner, the new Chief Judge reduced his age from above 70 years to a range that would allow him take up the position. The weight of the allegation, which suggests an imminent scandal, compelled the leadership of the House who had just confirmed the appointment to set up a committee to investigate the claim of the petitioner. The committee was mandated to find out if there was substance in the age falsification allegation. The committee swung into action by gathering information through a visit to Kano State and Maiduguri in Borno State, where the newly appointed Chief Judge had served. Also, the Chairman of the Civil Service Commission and the Attorney General of Kwara State were invited along side the petitioner to state their case. The invitation of the chairman, Civil Service Commission, was contingent on the petitioner's claim that the new Chief Judge, Justice Saka Yusuf, had started a career and worked as a civil servant in the states in the early 1970's and with a civil service file suggesting the current age of the new C.J. to be above 70 years.

The committee completed and presented its report to the House after two months of inauguration. The investigation, which attracted public attention and wide coverage, found the claim of the petitioner to be

baseless and, therefore, upheld the appointment of the new Chief Judge, Justice Saka Yusuf as the Chief Judge of Kwara State in 2006.

EVALUATION OF THE PERFORMANCE OF THE COMMITTEES

From the foregoing, the impacts of the committees in enhancing legislative efficiency cannot be overestimated. By this, the importance of their activities is self evident:

- The various committees of the House have bills, relating to their committees, referred to them for detailed clause by clause examination before they were passed to laws.
- Using the yardstick of Blondel (1973), as set in his work, “Comparative Legislature”, it is evident that the committees have, in no small measure, contributed to the overall legislative efficiency of the House. About 85 percent of the committees’ activities, as reported in the Hansard covering the period 2003 to 2007, are detailed matters that relate to seeking fair treatment, redress, and compensation for the individual members of the various constituencies of the members of the legislative assembly. Specifically, unjust administrative actions, in the form of non-payment of salary and pension, invasion or attempt to invade private properties, negligence and abuse of official power, were activities that were investigated and appropriate recommendations made. However, while Dare (2007), the Director of Information of the Kwara State House of Assembly, and the Speaker, Hon. Isa Bio Ibrahim, on the occasion of the third anniversary as the Speaker of the House, observe that such recommendations are not just paper work, as the executive and its implementing agencies often implement whatever recommendations is presented to them by the House, most motions raised by legislators on the floor of the House suggest that the executive arm often fails to implement most of the recommendations.
- The fact that 22 percent of the committees’ activities relate to oversight responsibility of the House, does not only suggests evident intervention in administration contrary to the observation of Smith (1980), but also reveals a follow up task by which the legislature ensures that policies and laws passed by the assembly is faithfully and satisfactory implemented by the relevant government departments or agencies. This is to ensure judicious use of public fund and make the impact of democratic governance felt by the people who have long suffered massive and pervasive deprivation under successive military dictators.

CONSTRAINTS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEES

One major constraint hampering the effectiveness of legislative committees in Kwara State is the ignorance of members of the executive arm. Most members of the executive arm, especially the commissioners, for instance, consider as affront an invitation for a chat by the legislature. Oversight by committees is, therefore, often considered an interference in the work of the ministry by any commissioner whose ministry is under search light. Obviously, any commissioner who is summoned often reports such 'interference' to the chief executive who in turn employs 'diplomatic' means to erode the capacity of the legislature to effectively undertake its oversight responsibility.

The second constraint of the committee in Kwara State legislature is the attitude of the civil servant or policy implementing agencies toward executing the recommendations of committees. The civil servants, who were used to taking orders from the executive alone under the military regimes, have largely remained unattuned to the reality of the roles of legislature under a democratic regime. Most recommendations to the ministries are left to gather dust on the shelves of the ministries, as revealed by some legislators during their numerous adjournment debates. Most times the civil servants often complain that their inability to implement recommendations made by legislative committees was due to lack of directive from the appropriate arm of the executive. A change of attitude is, therefore, required if the essence of oversight will be realized; otherwise the morale of members of committees will be negatively affected.

The legislature, and in fact its committees, are hampered by the meager financial resources available for the enormous task they handle. Inability to finance field trips or tours has, on different occasions, rendered impossible committee's attempt to undertake oversight visit to government's project sites. The problem of non-availability of fund has been blamed on the executive who was alleged to often deliberately starve the legislature of the funds required for the efficient performance of its responsibilities. An improved funding will enhance the capacity of the legislature to effectively perform its oversight function. In the absence of adequate financing of committees, it will be difficult to make the executive accountable.

Also a constraint is the problem of godfatherism in the state. It is no secret that politics in Kwara state has revolved around a single personality. Consequently, no single political office holder has emerged in the state since the second republic (1979-83) without the input of Olushola Saraki (the godfather in the state). The implication of this is that with the emergence of the biological son (Dr. Bukola Saraki) of Dr. Olushola Saraki as the governor of the state from 2003, the members of the legislature were/are expected to give 'blind' support to the son of their benefactor. In fact any opposition or criticism against the governor will be seen as an attack on the godfather. The implication of this is that the committees, being part of the larger assembly, are unable to dispassionately perform their oversight functions as the members are beholden to the father of the governor.

CONCLUSION

The roles of the legislatures have broadened and transformed over time. This has engendered reliance on the committees. For instance, an investigation into any matter or oversight visit to any site by the legislative's committees would have been rowdy, if not impossible, if the whole House were to be involved. The small nature of the committee appears to promote efficiency while saving cost. The trend in the U.S., by which the junior members of congress are relegated to the background, portends a set back for a body that has over the years contributed to the efficiency and effectiveness of the legislative assembly. Individual members who are not known to contribute to debate on the floor of the House may intelligently make a positive contribution to government proposed policy at the committee stage. Since empirical evidence from Kwara State House Assembly suggests that legislative committee enhances the performance of an assembly, despite the enormous constraints it faced, all actions that, therefore, needed to support and improve the committee system in the legislative assemblies should be encouraged. At this point, it is important to point out that in state without a dominant personality, like Olushola Saraki, the legislature may be more effective and its committee system more productive.

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Nigeria adopts a bicameral legislature at the Federal level – Senate and House of Representatives, known as National Assembly. While in the States, the legislature is unicameral – House of Assembly. For the purpose of this paper, focus will be more on the federal level, for ease of convenience. The Auditor General also sends annual reports to the Public Accounts Committees of both chambers of the National Assembly. In addition, Committees engage with MDA’s on appropriation bill, which entails a review of each MDA’s annual budget estimates, defense of such budgets and recommendations to the Appropriation Committee. Quite frequently, the National Assembly conducts oversight inspection visits and confirmation/screening of nominees. In Nigeria, legislature has the mandate and is under obligation to initiate debate and show concern on matters affecting the generality of people in the country. Expectedly such activities should be directed toward reversing declining economy, stabilizing the polity and integrating society with overall aim of enhancing national development. What is the relationship between legislative effectiveness and development in Nigeria? What is the input of legislation over the years as regards the current developmental level of the country? Financial constraint- Insufficient fund tends to impede the efficiency of the researcher in sourcing for the relevant materials, literature or information and in the process of data collection (internet, questionnaire and interview). The legislative system in Nigeria is not a total failure but is merely on lapses. If the Nigerian government should ensure to take the following steps, the legislative system in Nigeria will be what it is supposed to be.

1. Independent Legislature. The Nigerian government should allow the legislature function independently. The Nigerian government needs to ensure that the other arms of government especially the executive arm does not exert its influence on the legislative arm.
2. Do or Die Politics. The saying – “politics is a dirty game should not be so. The legislative process in Nigeria involves both houses of the National Assembly and the President. Typically, once a bill (executive, private, or member’s bill) is introduced in the National Assembly, it goes through a rigorous process before it is enacted into law, which includes three readings of the bill, scrutiny by the relevant committee where amendments may be made, and presidential assent.

I. Background. The role of the regional assemblies was restricted to advising the central government on all proposed bills except finance bills.[16]. This report outlines the structure and role of the Nigerian federal legislature under the current (1999) Constitution. Back to Top.

II. The National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is a bicameral legislature established under section 4 of the Nigerian Constitution. It consists of a Senate with 109 members and a 360-member House of Representatives. The body, modeled after the federal Congress of the United States, is supposed to guarantee equal representation with 3 Senators to each 36 states irrespective of size in the Senate plus 1 senator representing the Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria and single-member district