

## Legislator's Jumbo Pay, Cost of Governance and the State of Education in Nigeria: Issues and Contradictions

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**Abstract** *The revelations made by Mallam Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, concerning the wages and allowances of federal legislators in Nigeria and the controversy it generated prompted this academic research. The findings in this study however show that the salaries and allowances currently being enjoyed by federal legislators in Nigeria is a breach of Section 70 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which makes it clear that a member of the Senate and House of Representative shall receive such salary and other allowances as the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission may determine. Further investigations also reveal that spending 25 percent of Nigeria's federal budget overhead cost on the National Assembly alone has created income inequality which has widened the gape between the income of civil servants and political office holders in the country. Further findings also show that excessive spending on recurrent expenditure such as the huge legislators jumbo pay and servicing of domestic debts spent on over heads have contributed to the neglect of the education sector and other critical sectors of the economy which has equally affected the cost of governance in Nigeria. The systems political theory was applied while analyzing and explaining the subject-matter. In terms of methodology and scope, descriptive analyses and secondary sources of data (textbooks, published articles and journals) were relied upon. Nevertheless, to ensure equity and fairness in income allocation and distribution in Nigeria, we recommend that the federal government through the Revenue, Mobilization, Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) should moderate, harmonize and fix salaries in line with due process and existing laws. In order to reduce the cost of governance in the country, budgetary allocations to the education sector should also be increased in order to meet the manpower needs and infrastructural challenges facing the sector.*

**Keywords.** Federal legislators, Education sector, Income, salaries and Allowances.

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### Introduction

The salaries and allowances of legislators at the federal level in Nigeria no doubt led to wide spread condemnation, reactions and counter-reactions throughout the country. While some believe that the huge allowances and salaries (Jumbo pay) is a disservice to the nation, majority of Nigerians argue that the jumbo pay being enjoyed by federal legislators in Nigeria is having negative effect on the education sector and other critical sectors of the economy. Thus, public reactions showing the consequences of unregulated salaries and allowances on the economy forms the major thrust of this paper.

## Methodology and Scope

This section of the paper provides a description of the sources of data used and the applicable methodology. Most of the data used for this study were culled from published scholarly works (textbooks, journals, published reports and articles) and descriptive analysis. Emphasis was placed on the consequences of federal legislators' jumbo pay on the cost of governance, the education sector and the economy as a whole.

## Theoretical Framework

The systems political theory was applied in order to explain the impact of legislative actions on other critical sectors of the economy (education, health, social welfare, etc). The theory deals with inter-relationship and inter-dependence among institutions, groups and sub-systems operating within a particular system or environment. Thus, the Nigerian State epitomizes what system scholars describe as input, output, feedback and conversion box which is the regulatory mechanism. Input here refer to contributions and demands made by groups, individuals and institutions (formal and informal). It is important to note that political actions and policies usually attract actions and reactions which could be positive or negative depending on prevailing circumstances and variables. It therefore imply that the controversy generated by the jumbo pay enjoyed by federal legislators in Nigeria, if not checked or regulated, could spark-off crisis in other sectors hence, creating instability within Nigeria's political system. It will be recalled that increase demands for better wages and salaries by the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT), Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and other unions in Nigeria is a fall out of the jumbo pay saga. Thus, affirming the fact that the systems theory involves a dynamic process which produces negative or positive results depending on the input and output process.

Advocates of the systems theory further argue that with good government policies and programmes in place through an effective input and output mechanism, instability and conflict within any system will be checked, controlled and minimized. This theory is ideal and appropriate in this context because the legislature is an important arm of government in Nigeria. Consequently any unchecked conflict arising from the legislator's jumbo pay could constitute a threat to other arms of government and other sectors of the economy as well. Notable system scholars include David Easton, John Locke, Almond and Verba.

## Public Perception of Nigerian Legislator's Jumbo Pay (Salaries And Allowances) Showing the Issues and Contradictions

In a newspaper report captioned "National Assembly Epitomizes Backwardness"-Sagay, published in The Punch Newspaper of Monday, 20<sup>th</sup> December 2010, Prof. Itse Sagay noted that it cost about Two Hundred and Ninety Million Naira (N290,000.00) annually to maintain each member of the National Assembly and regretted that this is happening in a country where virtually every amenity does not work and where average earning of 80 percent of the populace is below three hundred naira (N300.00) per day. Whereas the earning of a Nigerian Senator per day is more than the yearly income of a doctor; it is more than the salary of 42 Army Generals or 48 Professors or 70 Commissioners of Police or more than twice the pay of the United States President Barak Obama or nine times the salary of US Congressional Representative. Reacting further, he expressed regret that while man in Africa has remained mentally, emotionally and intellectually stunted at all levels, man in other parts of the world has been liberated from the animal feeding frenzy. The outcome of the later is the development of science, technology, creation of resources and the march forward of civilization. According to him "That is why others produce and Africans everywhere consume. The man in Nigeria is the typical African man who has remained at the animal level, absolutely refusing to grow or develop. This is what the national Assembly is daily epitomizing as all their legislation is geared towards more feeding for themselves either in terms of money, power or influence. Not a thought is spared for any legacy.

The idea of adding value to the society into which they were born never occurs to them", he concluded. The Civil Liberty organization (CLO) through its Executive Director, Ibuchukwu Ezike, in a report published in The Punch Newspaper of 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2010, stated "Law making process in Nigeria and indeed in most countries of the world should be on part time basis. This will reduce unnecessary cost and discourage parasitic dependence, corruption and waste of public funds, especially as our law makers have failed to use their oversight roles to curb corruption and executive lawlessness", he noted. In a related development, the President-General, Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC), Mr. Peter Esele, in a report captioned "Legislators' pay should reflect salaries, allowance of Nigerian workers"-Esele published in The Punch Newspaper of Wednesday the 12<sup>th</sup> January, 2011, noted that the jumbo pay for legislators and other political office holders in Nigeria is very regrettable, especially when you compare their pay with the state of the Nigerian economy, living standards of those they represent, life expectancy in Nigeria, the perceptual income and the salaries paid to Nigerian workers, Nigerian professors etc. He added that it is more unfortunate when compared with the United State President, Barak Obama's salary of \$400,000 per annum. According to him, Nigerian Senator collects forty million naira (40,000,000.00) per quarter while each member of the House of Representative receives about \$1.2 million dollars per annum". Similarly, former members of the National Assembly and prominent civil rights activists in the country have described the jumbo pay of Nigerian law makers as a conspiracy between the federal executive and the legislature. In a report captioned "jumbo pay: executive, legislature taking Nigerians for a ride-Ex-Senators, others" published in Saturday Punch of 25<sup>th</sup> December 2010, former members of the Senate Dr. Femi Okurounmu, and Chief Olabiyi Durojaiye contended that the take-home pay of the federal law makers had become an impediment to the growth of the nation. Okurounmu, a senator between 1999 and 2003 under the Umbrella of the Alliance for Democracy (AD), described the remunerations of the federal legislators as not only sacrilegious, but also outrageous while Durojaiye also described the "extra-ordinarily high pay of the law makers as portraying the nation in bad light. According to them, a senator earns about fifteen million naira every month while a member of the House of Representatives earns about ten million naira a month.

### **Analysis Showing the Impact of Federal Legislators Salaries and Allowances on the Economy**

This section of the paper relied on the views and positions of eminent Nigerians and scholars as expressed in newspapers, journals and other government bulletins/publications. While commenting on the legality and constitutionality of the federal legislators salaries and allowances, renown Lagos lawyer and activist stated unequivocally that the jumbo pay currently being enjoyed by federal legislators in Nigeria is a breach of Section 70 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which allows the Revenue Mobilization, Allocation and Fiscal Commission to fix and determine the salaries and allowances of public servants including political office holders in Nigeria. In a newspaper report captioned "law makers activities are informed by selfish interest", Falana, published in The Punch Newspaper of Thursday, 30<sup>th</sup> December, 2010, Femi Falana stated, "I have challenged the law maker's Jumbo pay in court. I want the court to declare that the National Assembly has no powers to fix salaries while all excesses collected by the law makers so far, should be forfeited to the state, he noted. In his contribution, Mallam Sanusi Lamido Sanusi state clearly that Nigeria as a country cannot continue to spend its revenue on re-current expenditure especially when the nation is experiencing debt crisis. According to him increasing overheads leads to pressure on inflation and we at the CBN have a challenge of stabilizing the system, especially the interest rates, he added. Reacting further in a news report captioned "legislators' jumbo pay: Sanusi refuses to back down. Tells House of Representatives, my figure is right, published in The Punch Newspaper of 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2010, the dynamic and fearless C.B.N governor maintained his earlier position when he said "I believe it is extremely important for the central Bank of Nigeria to express its opinion which should not be taken as a insult or attack. I was speaking about the growth prospect of the Nigeria economy. I spoke about the structure of government finance. More and more of our revenue is being spent on overheads which also lead to pressure on inflation,"

he concluded. Specifically, the central bank governor recalled that in 2009, about 20 percent of the national revenue was used to service domestic debts spent on overheads, in 2010, he disclosed that the percentage jumped to 26 percent, an indication that it would rise again in 2011, he warned. It will also be recalled that the details of the federal legislators salaries and allowance was first made public by former president Olusegun Obasanjo and Mallam Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, governor, Central Bank of Nigeria.

From the foregoing analysis, it is obvious that the federal government is spending heavily on re-current expenditure (salaries and allowances of legislators and political appointees) at the expense of capital projects and human capital development which actually propels growth and development of the economy. The legal battle between Mr. Femi Falana and the federal government over the legality of the federal legislator's salaries and allowances coupled with the increased demands for salaries by workers in other sectors of the economy confirms the fact the salaries and allowances of federal legislators in Nigeria is creating negative effect on the economy especially as it concerns the morale of workers in the education sector. Also affirming this fact, Senator Olabiyi Durojaiye, a member of the National Assembly from 1999 to 2003, stated that teachers are neglected and the police are not well paid whereas, these two sectors are crucial in the development of any country. In a newspaper report captioned "Jumbo Pay: Legislators Should not Earn More than Teachers, Police, published in The Punch Newspaper of Monday, 21<sup>st</sup> of February, 2011, the former senator categorically stated "I believe that if we want to have a very stable society, these two sectors (education and security) must be catered for. The legislator should not be paid more than these people. The future of the next generation rests on the teachers, and they are unhappy. They are ill-equipped and ill-educated. The condition of service is not conducive for them. Our teachers prepared us, coupled with the home training we received. The police are ill-treated and do not have more than two uniforms. For them, there is no money to buy boots. With these, how will they be able to nip in the bud the issue of kidnapping in Nigeria? If we can organize a national conference, we will achieve a lot," he concluded.

## Conclusion

Available records show that industrial unrest arising from income inequality among workers and political office holders within particular political system could spark-off internal uprising which could destabilize the entire political system including the economy. Thus, there is need for the federal government and its agencies to ensure fairness, equity and justice in the process of fixing and allocating salaries at all levels in order to ensure total and equal development in all the sectors including education. The moderation and regulation of salaries and allowances of all categories of officials and workers in the country will go a long way in checking compliance in the management and control of public finances (resources).

## Recommendations

Cases of unregulated salaries, budget deficits and industrial unrest which are fast becoming common feature of Nigeria's political system can be addressed if the following recommendations are strictly adhered to:

1. Compulsory training and re-training programmes for leaders and intending leaders in Nigeria through periodic seminars and workshops will go a long way in changing the beliefs and attitude of Nigerians. According to His Lordship Rt. Rev. Prof. Emmanuel Iheagwam, Bishop of Egbu (Anglican Communion) in an interview, published in The Source Magazine of 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2007, stated that many Nigerians that hold political leadership positions have not had any leadership training and are neither patient nor ready to learn or serve under more experienced leaders for a while. While expressing the importance of training and experience as pre-requisites for good governance he noted with regret that "once one is conferred with a quack honorary doctoral degree from any of the refuse dumps in and around Owerri Town or even abroad, one automatically feels qualified to become a leader. Political leadership in Nigeria has not only become an all-comers business but also a cash and carry affair," he lamented.

2. Regulatory agencies and authorities in Nigeria should ensure that all salaries and allowances of civil servants, public servants including political office holders conform to due process, constitutional provisions and existing financial rules and regulations. This will no doubt reduce friction and instability within the entire system.
3. The judiciary and anti-corruption agencies in Nigeria should ensure that people including federal legislators who earn unapproved salaries and allowances are investigated and prosecuted without further delay.
4. Efforts should also be made to ensure fiscal discipline through effective public policy formulation and implementation aimed at reducing re-current expenditure and budget deficits.

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