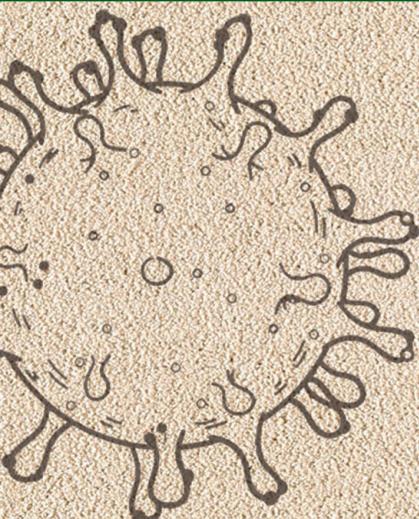


# PARLIAMENTS AND PANDEMIC: SHIFTS IN CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION

A PROGNOSIS ON  
NIGERIA POST-COVID-19



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A Legislative Intelligence Forecast Entry (LIFE) | Q2, 2020

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# | About OrderPaper Nigeria

**O**rdersPaper is Nigeria's flagship organization intervening with firm footprints in the Transparency, Accountability and Good Governance (TAGG) space of the country through civic technology and other multi-media avenues. Founded in 2015 as Nigeria's premier multi-platform organization focused on reporting, tracking and archiving activities of the legislature in the digital age, **OrderPaper** is the first, authentic and independently-driven medium of interface between citizens and elected representatives in Parliament; and is firmly committed to deepening democratic growth and development in the country. OrderPaper Nigeria is non-partisan, non-aligned and non-discriminatory; and is founded on and guided by TRUTH, BALANCE, FAIRNESS and the pursuit of EQUITY. In the TAGG-tech community, **OrderPaper Nigeria** is a pioneer and globally acclaimed innovator. The organization has designed, developed and deployed two novel mobile applications for constituency projects and budget implementation tracking; and another for citizen engagement on transparency and accountability issues in the country's opaque and hazy extractive sector. These apps are called **ConsTrack** and **RemTrack**, respectively.

For all enquiries on this work and other activities of **OrderPaper Nigeria**, kindly email [\*info@orderpaper.ng\*](mailto:info@orderpaper.ng)

# | About LIFE Service

**T**his Legislative Intelligence Forecast Entry (LIFE) is a Quarterly that predicts trends and offers policy mapping of the National Assembly of Nigeria in the period under preview. This is the first in the Series and focuses on the Second Quarter of 2020. **OrderPaper Nigeria** started LIFE Service as a weekly advisory published on our website every start of the week. You can subscribe to our mailing list to receive these and other signature as well as routine reportage of the parliament in Nigeria.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

**T**his inaugural edition of LIFE Service Quarterly has benefitted from the hard work of different teams at OrderPaper Nigeria whose tireless efforts are hereby put on record. All members of the Legislative Intelligence Unit deserve special appreciation. Special thanks to **Lizzy Chirkpi, Titilope Fadare and Majeed Bakare** of the Editorial Unit; **Theo Godson and Seun Badejo** of the Creative Imaging Unit; and lastly but certainly not the least, **Ofordile Tony-Okeke**, the ebullient Director of Operations, who coordinated the entire work. We also acknowledge members of the Editorial Advisory Board and our partners for their inputs.

*Cover Design and Layout by Ugochukwu Nnakwe*

# | FOREWORD

**By Rt. Hon. Ali Ahmad**

**C**COVID-19 reality is an unusual global phenomenon that has caught the whole of humanity unprepared. Like most pandemics, the catastrophe wrecked on our normal lifestyles has not abated, but some sectors have started to roll out COVID-sensitive ways of delivering their vital services as they manage the Pandemic. While this management is easier for some sectors that have limited public iteration, it is not so for others such as the judiciary and the parliament where public engagement is key to their legitimate functioning. Through the Nigeria Judicial Council, the Judiciary has started offering its services by rolling out measures and directions to stakeholders in the sector. For the legislative arm however, where citizen participation is even far more pervasive, parliaments have begun to operate but not without compromising that cardinal principle of participation.

In the first in a series of **Quarterly LIFE** (Legislative Intelligence Forecast Entry) Briefings, **OrderPaper Nigeria** anticipates and designs how parliamentary business such as oversight, appropriation, investigative and public hearings can be conducted with citizen participation during lock-downs. It draws insight from multiple resources including technology to ensure participation of citizens on how they are governed or are not excluded on how their money is spent.

As one of the most visible Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Nigeria solely focusing on parliamentary practice and procedure, the organization in this Paper has been able to show responses of parliaments from other countries and envision creative measures that may be developed into protocols, guidelines and standing orders for parliaments in Nigeria.

This Paper will go a long way in providing guidance to parliamentary stakeholders and, in the process, assist in growing our democracy. I strongly recommend it to policy makers, Members of Parliament, and the general public who will be impacted by actions and inactions of the parliament.

***Rt. Hon. Ahmad, Ph.D, is former Speaker, Kwara State House of Assembly; and former Chairman, Committee of Justice of the Federal House of Representatives***

# LIST OF ACRONYMS

- AfDB - African Development Bank
- AIDS - Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
- APC - All Progressives Congress
- CARES - Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act
- CBOs - Community Based Organizations
- CERB - Canada Emergency Response Benefit
- COVID-19 - CoronaVirus Disease of 2019
- CSOs - Civil Society Organizations
- FCT - Federal Capital Territory
- GDP - Gross Domestic Product
- HIV - Human Immune Deficiency Virus
- IMF - International Monetary Fund
- IPU - International Parliamentary Union
- LIFE - Legislative Intelligence Forecast Entry
- MDAs - Ministries, Departments and Agencies
- MERS - Middle East Respiratory Syndrome
- NCDC - Nigeria Centre for Disease Control
- NJC - National Judicial Council

OPEN - Online Parliamentary Engagement Nigeria

PDP - Peoples Democratic Party

SARS-CoV-2 - Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus

SSS - State Security Services

TAGG - Transparency, Accountability and Good Governance

WFP - World Food Program

WHO - World Health Organization

YPP - Young Progressive Party

ZIP - Zonal Intervention Projects

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The way and manner public service is delivered has been impacted significantly by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) which has ravaged nations of the world across continents. While virtually all affected countries still grapple to come to terms with the spread and containment of the deadly disease, Parliaments have been burdened to continue to legislate and perform oversight and appropriation functions in spite of curtailment of parliamentary spaces as necessary response to large-scale lockdowns imposed in many jurisdictions. These have been made possible with the aid of technology and other necessary and sometimes creative ways of observing social and physical distancing.

There is, however, a broken link in the conduct of parliamentary business that this scenario does or has not adequately addressed, especially as far as Nigeria is concerned. And this has to do with the incorporation of inclusion requirements and citizen participation in the lawmaking process. While the National Assembly has recalled itself from a month-long forced recess and appears to be sorting out ways to keep functioning, its doors are not adequately opened to citizens. In other words, the space for inclusion and citizen participation is either totally closed in some cases or minimally opens in other instances. The democratic and constitutional requirement for Parliament to receive inputs from the

citizens they represent and serve during making of laws has been left to large-scale discretion. The conduct of public hearings and constituency meetings has taken a new turn when allowed.

There is no doubt that this is impacting adversely on the requirements or expectations of robust citizen engagements in the legislative processing of bills, appropriation and performance of oversight functions. The controversy which has attended the introduction and swift consideration of the Control of Infectious Diseases Bill, 2020, in the House of Representatives, is a case in point. The initial shutting out of citizen inputs through a public hearing not only increased the controversy surrounding the bill but also created room for insinuations about its objectives and the motive of its sponsors.

There is therefore an overriding need to address the yawning gaps around inclusion and citizen engagement by the National Assembly and state legislatures during this COVID-19 era and beyond. This is the main thrust of this briefing paper, aptly couched as a Legislative Intelligence Forecast Entry (LIFE). This brief gives a bird's-eye view of how the National Assembly anticipated and reacted to the outbreak of the coronavirus in the country. It highlights how the pandemic has changed the way the bi-cameral legislature currently conducts its business and goes further to anticipate the changes that may become lasting features and characteristics of the parliament in Nigeria. This paper brings a comparative approach to the Study by highlighting how Parliaments of other countries responded (and are responding)

to COVID-19 and what emergency legislations and interventions they have been able to put in place to support the response and containment measures by the Governments of their various countries. As a solution-driven intelligence intervention, this paper wraps up by introducing an innovative citizen-parliament engagement model conceived and being implemented by OrderPaper Nigeria to help address the gap in inclusion and citizen participation brought about by the pandemic.

This Paper is the first in the series of Quarterly LIFE (Legislative Intelligence Forecast Entry) Service designed to help provide mapping and guidance to policy makers, the business and economic community as well as civil society leaders across board. It is by all means a useful guide for end-users of policy instruments and the general citizenry. It is a modest contribution by OrderPaper Nigeria to the body of knowledge on the Parliament and the growth and development of democracy. It is our expectation that the thoughts and ideas expressed herein provide basis for further expansion of the civic space in the country.

**Oke Epia**

**Executive Director,**

*OrderPaper Nigeria*

*May, 2020*

# 1. BACKGROUND

## 1.1 THE LEGISLATURE IN NIGERIA

The legislature is generally referred to as a deliberative assembly of people with the power to make, change, and repeal laws; as well as powers to represent the constituent units and oversight the Executive arm of Government. The development of the legislative institution in Nigeria can be traced to 1861 when the colonial government officially occupied Lagos<sup>1</sup>. As a means of governing the colony of Lagos, the colonial Governor established a Legislative Council to oversee the affairs of the Colony. The ten hand-picked members of the legislature had only two members who were Nigerians. The Legislative Council did not perform any lawmaking function but served as an advisory body to the colonial governor.

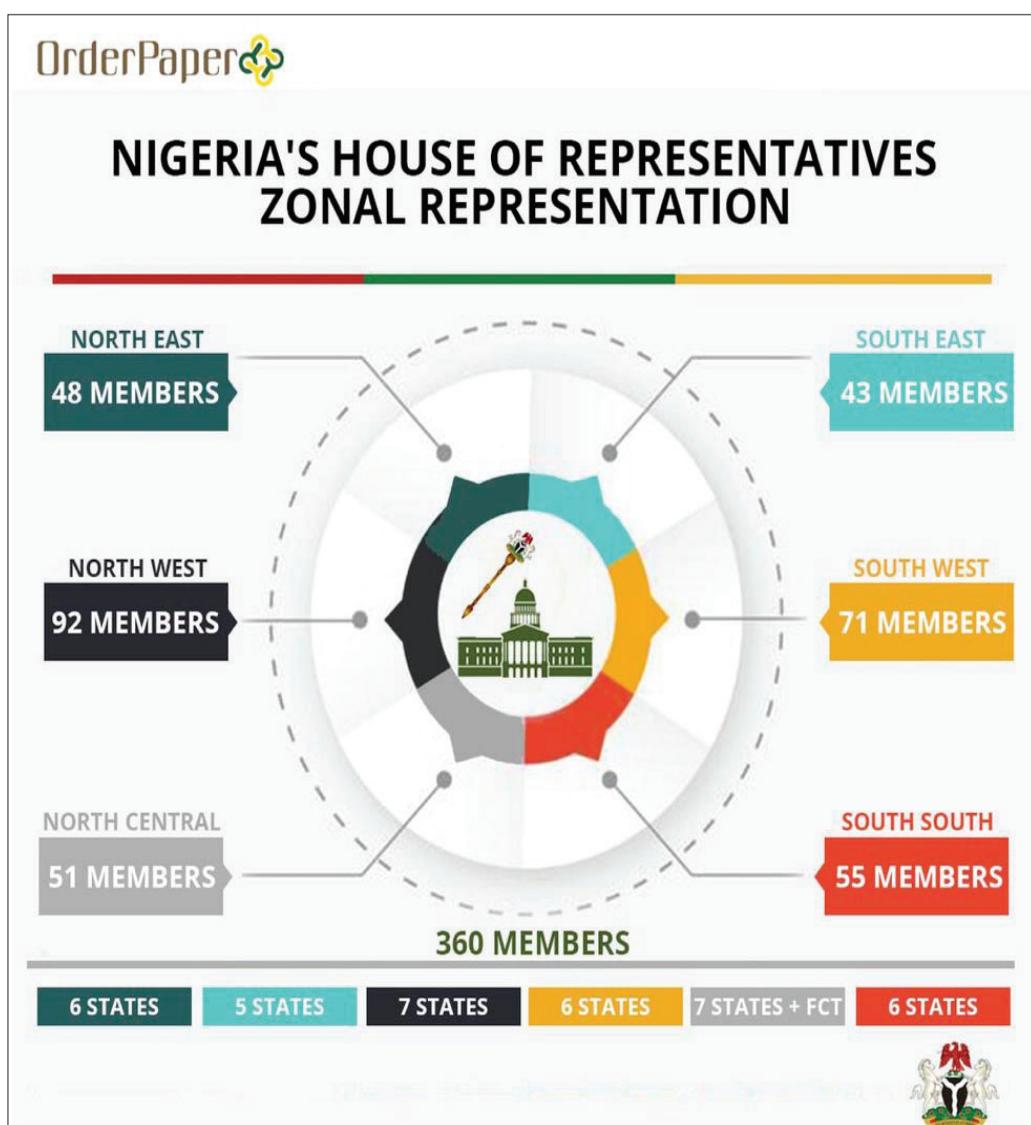
The term “legislature” has been given different names across nations of the world. In the United Kingdom it is referred to as “Parliament”, “Congress” in the United States of America, and the “National Assembly” in Nigeria. The National Assembly of Nigeria is a bicameral legislature established under Section 4 of the Nigerian 1999 Constitution (as amended). It consists of 109 members of Senate and a 360-member House of

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1. *The Legislature: Overview and Performance in Nigerian Second Republic Ayeri, V. and Soremekun, K. (ed.)*

Representatives. The legislature is modeled after that of the United States. Each state is represented by three (3) Senators while the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) has a lone Senator. The Senate, often referred to as the upper legislative house, symbolizes the equality of the States that make up the federation. Representation in the House of Representatives, conversely tagged the lower chamber, is on a proportional basis per landmass

Figure 1



and population. Thus, some states have more members than others, a fact that reflects on the geopolitical composition as seen in Figure 1.

The powers, duties, and functions of Nigeria's legislature are well spelled out in the 1999 constitution (as amended), specifically in Section 4 which stipulates that the legislative powers of both the National Assembly and the States Houses of Assembly must be exercised for purposes of achieving good governance. The National Assembly has three key functions, viz: Lawmaking; Oversight; and Appropriation. This arm of government is empowered by its own rules to establish committees to examine bills and provide oversight over the conduct of government business in the Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) as well as other publicly funded entities.

The concurrence of both the Senate and House of Representatives is required to make laws. Should the President delay or refuse assent to a bill, the National Assembly may pass the law with the approval of two-thirds of both chambers and overrule the veto; in which case the President's consent will not be required.

## 1.2 THE 9th NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

In line with Section 64 (3) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), President Muhammadu Buhari on the 30th of May 2019 proclaimed the holding of the first session of the 9th National Assembly. The first session which held on the 11th of June 2019 saw both Chambers inaugurated and members elected Presiding Officers. Senator Ahmad Ibrahim Lawan, representing Yobe North Senatorial District of Yobe State, emerged as the President of the 9th Senate defeating his sole challenger, Senator Ali Ndume from Borno State<sup>2</sup>. Senator Ovie Omo-Agege representing Delta Central Senatorial District of Delta State was returned elected Deputy President of the Senate after he defeated former occupant of the position, Senator Ike Ekweremadu from Enugu State. In the House of Representatives, Honourable Femi Gbajabiamila, representing Surulere I Federal Constituency, emerged as the Speaker<sup>3</sup> having defeated Honourable Umar Bago from Niger State. Honourable Ahmed Idris emerged Deputy Speaker after he was nominated and returned unopposed.

The 9th National Assembly, shortly after inauguration composed standing committees as governed by the Standing Orders of each house. While the Senate has sixty-nine (69) Standing Committees<sup>4</sup> to enable

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2. <https://www.orderpaper.ng/breaking-ahmed-lawan-emerges-9th-senate-president/>

3. <https://www.orderpaper.ng/breaking-gbajabiamila-emerges-speaker-at-second-attempt/>

4. <https://www.orderpaper.ng/full-list-lawan-announces-chairmanship-of-69-senate-committees/>

it to perform legislative, oversight, and internal administrative tasks, the House of Representatives has 109 Standing Committees<sup>5</sup>. As at the 27th of April 2020, a total of one thousand one hundred and fifty-one (1151) Bills have been introduced in the Ninth (9th) National Assembly<sup>6</sup> with three hundred and twenty-nine (329) Bills in the Senate and eight hundred and twenty-two (822) Bills in the House of Representatives.

### 1.3 LEGISLATIVE GOVERNANCE OF NIGERIA'S HEALTH SECTOR

Nigeria, according to a Discussion Paper for the World Bank, in terms of percentage of the budget, Nigeria spends less on Health than nearly every other country in the world<sup>7</sup>. The World Health Organization (WHO) standard of 15% annual budget on health has never been adhered to by Nigeria. The National Assembly provides legislative governance for the health sector at the federal level. This it does through annual appropriations and performance of oversight on the activities of the Federal Ministry of Health, and its Agencies and Parastatals. The House of Representatives currently has three committees that oversight the Health sector in Nigeria, namely: Committees on HIV, AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malarial Control; Healthcare Services; and Health Institutions while the Senate has two committees focusing on the healthcare sector -

5. <https://www.orderpaper.ng/breaking-mild-protest-as-gbajabimila-announces-109-standing-committees/>

6. <http://placbillstrack.org/>

7. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/782821529683086336/pdf/127519-WP-PUBLIC-add-series-NigeriaHFSFINAL.pdf>

Primary Healthcare and Communicable Diseases; and Health (Secondary and Tertiary) respectively.

## 1.4 THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses. Some cause illness in people and others in animals. COVID-19, the disease caused by a “novel coronavirus” which originated in 2019 from Wuhan China, is a new disease that has not been previously identified in humans. The virus is now known as the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). On the 11th of March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared the COVID-19 a pandemic<sup>8</sup>. The virus appears to spread easily among people, and more information continues to be discovered over time about how it spreads. It is known to spread from person to person among those in close contact (within about 6 feet, or 2 meters). The virus spreads by respiratory droplets released when someone with the virus coughs, sneezes, or talks. These droplets can be inhaled or land in the mouth or nose of a person nearby. It can also spread if a person touches a surface with the virus on it and then touches his or her mouth, nose, or eyes. Although there is no vaccine available to treat or prevent COVID-19, there are advised precautionary steps to reduce the spread of the infection.

The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), was established formally by law in 2018 by the National Assembly<sup>9</sup>, is Nigeria’s national public health

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8. [https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/transcripts/who-audio-emergencies-coronavirus-press-conference-full-and-final-11mar2020.pdf?sfvrsn=cb432bb3\\_2](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/transcripts/who-audio-emergencies-coronavirus-press-conference-full-and-final-11mar2020.pdf?sfvrsn=cb432bb3_2)

institution with the mandate to lead the preparedness, detection, and response to infectious disease outbreaks and public health emergencies. The Federal Ministry of Health through the NCDC has activated a National Emergency Operations Centre at the highest level and is leading the national public health response<sup>10</sup>. The NCDC is also working with State governments across the country. As at the 26th of April 2020, Nigeria has had One Thousand Two Hundred and Seventy-Three (1273) confirmed cases of COVID-19 in thirty-three states out of which we have had Two Hundred and Thirty-Nine (239) people discharged and recorded forty (40) deaths<sup>11</sup>.

The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic is first and foremost a public health emergency, but also a significant economic threat. The COVID-19 pandemic has been projected to lead to recession and depression in many parts of the world. In analyzing the economic and food security implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Food Program (WFP) listed Nigeria as one of the countries to be most vulnerable<sup>12</sup> economically and according to Nigeria's Minister of Agriculture Muhammed Sabo Nanono, there exists an imminent problem of food insecurity in the country<sup>13</sup>. Incidentally the Senate has just introduced a Bill to establish a Food Reserve Agency<sup>14</sup>.

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9. <https://ncdc.gov.ng/ncdc>

10. <https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/advisory.php>

11. <https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/>

12. [https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000114205/download/?\\_ga=2.9461629.997447719.1587986954-1758324558.1587986954](https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000114205/download/?_ga=2.9461629.997447719.1587986954-1758324558.1587986954)

13. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-food-africa-insigh/how-africa-risks-reeling-from-a-health-crisis-to-a-food-crisis-idUSKCN2260M2>

14. <https://www.orderpaper.ng/covid-19-senate-moves-for-the-establishment-of-food-reserve-agency/>

The current state of the global economy poses more difficulties ahead for Nigeria as the oil price for a barrel is below US\$25 as of the 27th of April 2020 with projections that it will dip further going by the price war among key players in the global industry. Already an interim report presented by the Chairman of a joint committee comprising chairmen of Senate Committees on Finance, Appropriations, National Planning and Petroleum Resources (Upstream) recommended, among other things, a review of the Appropriation Act 2020. The review process has commenced as led by the Ministry of Finance, Budget and National Planning<sup>15</sup>. Demand for Nigeria's major export - oil - has reduced drastically as our top oil export destinations<sup>16</sup> (India, Netherlands, Spain, Brazil, South Africa and the United States of America) are all battling the pandemic and are under various degrees of lockdown as at April, 2020.

The anticipated downward review of the budget due to COVID-19 by the National Assembly and contractions in public spending could be devastating on unemployment and poverty. According to statistics, Nigeria ranks Forty-One (41) among Two Hundred and Fifteen (215) countries with an unemployment rate of about 16.5%<sup>17</sup>. Nigeria has also been rated as the poverty capital of the world with an estimated **ninety-six (96)** million people living on less than \$2 a day threshold<sup>18</sup>.

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15. <https://www.orderpaper.ng/COVID-19-senate-mulls-review-of-2020-budget-over-oil-price-crash/>

16. <https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/country/NGA>

17. <https://www.indexmundi.com/g/r.aspx?c=xx&v=74>

18. <https://worldpoverty.io/map>

## 2. NATIONAL ASSEMBLY'S REACTIONS TO COVID-19

### 2.1 Overview

As Nigeria and the rest of the world continue to battle the deadly coronavirus (COVID-19) disease, this Section records the responses of the National Assembly to the pandemic. It highlights the activities that happened before the shutting down of plenary for over a month (March 24–April 26, 2020); the engagements between leaders of the legislature and officials from the Executive; and the partial resumption of plenary in response to easing of a lockdown order imposed on parts of the country, including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), by President Muhammadu Buhari.

Both the Senate and the House of Representatives took notable measures to help the Executive arm of Government in combatting the pandemic even before the country recorded her index case on February 27, 2020 in Lagos. Several motions and one bill were debated in both chambers during the period under review just as there has also been noticeable political posturing across the aisle.

The legislature started to weigh in on the COVID-19 disease since the last week of January, 2020. On January 29 to be precise, the House of Representatives adopted

a motion which urged relevant government agencies and the Ministry of Health to beef up vigilance and commence screening of travellers at the country's ports of entry. The next day, the Senate passed a resolution which called for increased funding for the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) to enable it effectively tackle the virus.

Between January and March, the House of Representatives made a total of fourteen (14) interventions while Senate recorded sixteen (16). These interventions included debates at plenary, engagements by committees and the leadership of both houses. It is also noteworthy that members of the National Assembly also announced donations of their salaries to help the government efforts against the pandemic. See **Figures 2 and 3**.

Figure 2

## COVID-19:

# TIMELINE OF INTERVENTIONS BY NIGERIA'S HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

### Interventions at plenary

January 29

Urged Ministry of Health, Nigerian Immigration Service, Federal Airport Authority of Nigeria to beef up screening at all entry points into the country

February 4

Threw out motion which called for evacuation of Nigerians in China, the then epicenter of corona virus

March 3

Announced a 2 weeks adjournment of plenary for fear of infection of members

March 4

Following public backlash, denied adjournment of plenary

March 10

Resolved to set up a committee on adverse effects on crude oil, Nigeria's economic mainstay

March 17

Urged Federal Government to halt flights from high-risk countries

March 18

- Resolved to shut out visitors
- Urged Federal Government to shut worship centres.

March 24

- Introduced and passed economic stimulus bill in rare speed
- Commended Dr. Allison for detecting index case in Lagos
- Asked Federal Government to convert school hostels to isolation centres
- Embarked on 2 weeks break from plenary

February 4

Committee on Healthcare Services met with management of the NCDC led by its DG, Chikwe Ihekweazu, over steps taken to address both Lassa fever and coronavirus outbreaks

March 21

PDP caucus asked Federal Government to reduce Value Added Tax (VAT); and offer free electricity to citizens

March 23

Following leaked presidential memo which accused some legislators of shunning screening at airports, Spokesman of the House, Ben Kalu, asked members to abide by the rules

March 24

Spokesman of the House, Ben Kalu, told media that no member had been diagnosed with the virus

March 25

Leadership of the National Assembly led by Senate President Ahmad Lawan and Speaker Femi Gbajabamila met with officials from the Executive over the economic effects of coronavirus

March 31

Speaker Gbajabamila announced that members would donate March and April salaries to relief fund

### Interventions by Leadership, Committees & Caucuses

#### Factfile:

- These interventions were between January & March, 2020
- Caucuses and individual members have made donations & advisories to relevant publics, during the period

Figure 3

## COVID-19:

# TIMELINE OF INTERVENTIONS BY NIGERIA'S SENATE

### Interventions at plenary

- January 30**  
Charged Federal Government to give the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) more funds to tackle pandemic
- February 6**  
Raised alarm over export of face masks to China, accuse airport officials of collusion
- February 27**  
Lamented lax screening of inbound passengers at airports
- March 17**  
Called for upgrade and decongestion of correctional centers to curb spread of virus
- March 18**  
  - Appealed to President Muhammadu Buhari to address Nigerians
  - Urged convocation of the National Council of Health to harmonize nationwide responses to the pandemic
- March 19**  
  - Suspended public hearings and banned visitors to the National Assembly
  - Senators who returned from abroad urged to get tested for the virus
- March 24**  
Suspended plenary until April 7, 2020

### Interventions by Leadership, Committees & Caucuses

- February 18**  
Senate President Ahmad Lawan hosts China's Ambassador to Nigeria where the latter said no Nigerian had been infected in his home country
- February 28**  
Committee on Primary Healthcare and Communicable Diseases, Sen. Chukwuka Utazi, in an exclusive interview with OrderPaper Nigeria, advised the Federal Government to set up a war room; and impose flight ban on China
- March 3**  
Senate President Ahmad Lawan in company of Senate leadership hosts the Minister of Health and management of the NCDC to receive briefing on preparedness to tackle Coronavirus in Nigeria
- March 4**  
Senate President Ahmad Lawan led a delegation of senators on an oversight visit to the Disease Isolation Centre located at the University of Abuja Teaching Hospital, Gwagwalada
- March 17**  
  - Senate President Ahmad Lawan lamented, during plenary, lack of testing centres in the South-east zone and the entire Northern part of the country
  - Senate President Ahmad Lawan received World Bank Country Director for Nigeria on a courtesy visit and asked for assistance for Nigeria due to impact of coronavirus
- March 24**  
Senate Spokesman, Godiya Akwashiki, told the media that no Senator had been diagnosed with the virus
- March 25**  
Leadership of the National Assembly led by Senate President Ahmad Lawan held meeting with some Ministers and Head of agencies from the Executive to brainstorm on the impact of Coronavirus on the economy.
- March 26**  
  - Senate President Ahmad Lawan urged Federal Government to provide relief for poor Nigerians
  - Mandated the Senate Committees on Appropriation, Finance and National Planning to oversight the NCDC on the strict application of the N6.5billion released for the fight against the pandemic
- March 30**  
  - Leadership announced donation of half of monthly salaries of senators to tackle pandemic
  - PDP caucus commends President Muhammadu Buhari over nation-wide address

**Factfile:**

- These interventions were between January & March, 2020
- Caucuses and individual members have made donations & advisories to relevant publics, during the period

## 2.1.1 INITIAL PUSSYFOOTING AND A STIMULUS BILL

There are some notable interventions during this period worth highlighting. The House of Representatives, for instance, on February 4, 2020, debated a motion that called for the evacuation of Nigerians stranded in China due to the Coronavirus outbreak. The motion entitled, “Urgent need to evacuate and quarantine Nigerians living in China,” and sponsored by the spokesperson of the House, Mr. Benjamin Kalu (APC, Abia) was rejected. The debate witnessed a mild drama and some of those who opposed the motion expressed concerns about importation of the virus from the proposed evacuees.

In another dramatic twist, the House of Representatives on the 3rd of March 2020, adopted a resolution to adjourn plenary for two weeks to enable members to sensitize their constituents on the outbreak of the coronavirus; and to allow for the management of the national assembly to put certain facilities in place within the premises to check the spread of the disease. However, the spokesperson of the House would later ‘clarify’ that media reports of adjournment were a misrepresentation of facts and that the House was still open for business.

The House of Representatives, however, scored a positive point in public perception when it speedily passed an Economic Stimulus Bill same day it was

introduced. The bill has at least three key benefits: (i) help employers retain workforce by offering tax rebates; (ii) provide moratorium on mortgages; and (iii) provide import duty waivers for medical equipment and supplies. (See Figure 4) The Senate needs to concur to the bill before it can be sent to the President for assent

Figure 4

**OrderPaper**

## Covid-19: What You Should Know About the Emergency Economic Stimulus Bill

Objectives	Benefits	Exemptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To provide temporary relief to companies and individuals to alleviate the adverse financial consequences of a slowdown in economic activities brought on by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria</li> <li>To protect the employment status of Nigerians who might otherwise become unemployed as a consequence of management decision to retrench personnel in response to the prevailing economic realities</li> <li>To eliminate additional fiscal bottleneck on the importation of Medical Equipment, Medicines, Personal Protection Equipment and other such medical necessities as may be required for the treatment and management of the Covid-19 disease in Nigeria</li> <li>To cater to the general financial wellbeing of Nigerians pending the eradication of this pandemic and a return to economic stability.</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Duly registered employers who do not retrench staff as at 1st of March 2020 till the rest of the year ending 31st of December, 2020, are entitled to 50 percent tax rebate</li> <li>All payment of mortgage obligations on residential mortgages obtained by individual contributors to the National Housing Fund deferred for a period of 180 days effective from the 1st of March 2020</li> <li>Import duty waiver granted on Medical Equipment, Medicines, Personal Protection Equipment and other such medical necessities as may be required for the treatment and management of the Covid-19 disease in Nigeria from the 1st of March 2020 until the 31st of December, 2020</li> </ol>	<p>*Petroleum Profit Tax</p> <p>*Employers cannot benefit tax rebate in circumstances:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where an employee dies of natural causes</li> <li>Where employee voluntary leaves the employment or has already indicated interest to leave the employment before 1st of March 2020</li> <li>Where the employee breaches the Labour Act Cap L1 LFN 2004</li> </ol>

**Factfile**

- Short title: Emergency Economic Stimulus Bill, 2020
- Sponsor(s): **Hon. Femi Gbajabiamila** & 9 others
- Legislative stage: Passed first, second and third reading stages in a day

to allow implementation of the measures provided.

In the Senate, a motion by Senator Ifeanyi Ubah (YPP, Anambra) accused airport officials of aiding smuggling of face masks out of the country, a situation he claimed, had led to increase in the price of the items. However, on March 18, 2020, the Senate made two key resolutions on COVID-19: one was a call on President Buhari to address the nation on the pandemic; and the other was for the convocation of the National Council of Health to ensure a nationwide coordination in the response to the disease. On the 24th of March, 2020, both the Senate and House of Representatives adjourned plenary for an initial period of two weeks. On the eve of resumption on April 7th, the National Assembly further extended its shutdown ostensibly in deference to the total lockdown order imposed on the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) (and the two States of Lagos and Ogun) by the President.

## 2.1.2 OPPORTUNISTIC POLITICS

The opposition in the National Assembly led by the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has latched on the COVID-19 pandemic to highlight its perceived shortcomings of the All Progressives Congress (APC)-led Federal Government. Specifically, the PDP caucus in the House of Representatives has been vociferous in accusing the administration of poor response to the outbreak of the virus in the country.

On another occasion however, the Senate opposition caucus however gave a rare commendation to the Buhari administration for addressing the nation and ordering a phased lockdown to combat the pandemic<sup>19</sup>. This typical behavior of politicians to extract every opportunity for political capital is likely to influence inter-party relations in the National Assembly within the prism of the pandemic and beyond.

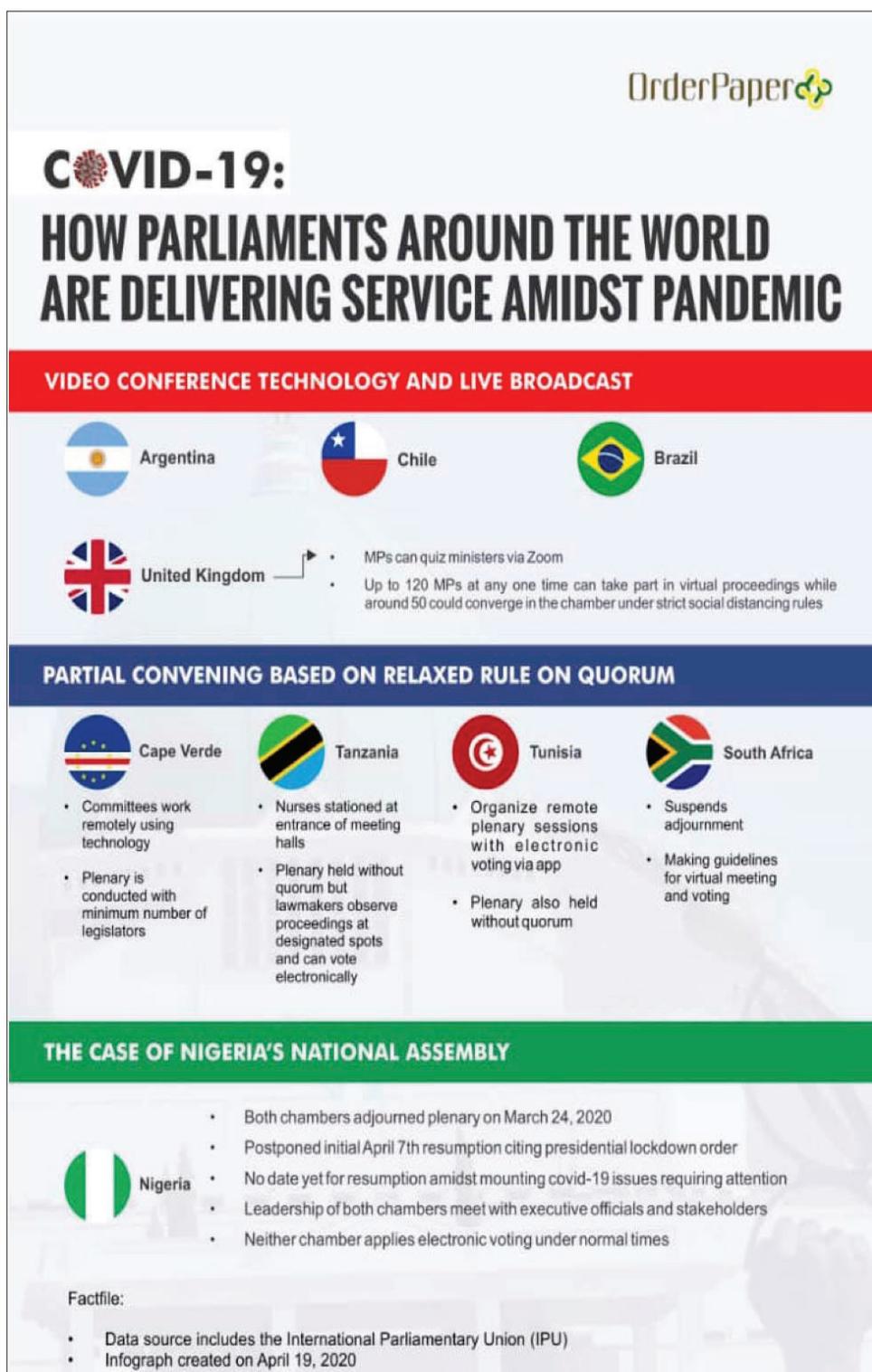
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19. <https://www.orderpaper.ng/buharis-broadcast-a-step-in-the-right-direction-says-pdp-senate-caucus/>

### 3. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The one-month closure of the federal legislature stalled deliberation on several COVID-19 issues that required urgent national attention. The Parliament ostensibly relied on guidelines released by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), including social distancing, to shut its doors on the 24th of March, 2020 as the sprawling National Assembly Complex usually witnesses an influx of at least a thousand persons in its premises daily. A lockdown order by President Buhari which affected the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) was a further basis to keep the doors shut as an earlier announced April 7, 2020 resumption was put off. It was not until April 26, 2020 that the National Assembly resumed plenary apparently in response to growing calls that the Parliament could not afford to stay shut when pressing national issues required swift attention. But while the National Assembly remained closed to plenary, the Parliaments of some other countries adopted several creative measures to keep legislative business ongoing. They achieved this by adopting several precautionary measures including social distancing and technology, as contained in a special report by the International Parliamentary Union (IPU). *See Figure 5.*

Figure 5



## 3.1 Brazil, Chile and Argentina

According to the IPU report, Brazil had adopted the use of video conferencing and virtual management tools to conduct plenary after it “passed a new resolution which enables the Parliament to work remotely during a public health emergency using video-conferencing and virtual management tools. The system allows MPs to register to a session and shows all phases of the legislative process including the bill under discussion, amendments, the results of each voting round, speeches, and committee agendas.” The report further adds that the Chamber of Deputies (513 members) and the Senate (81 members) are holding remote sessions that are live cast to the public through the Parliament’s media and digital platforms. Brazil is a South American country with a population estimate of 209.5million (according to the World Bank) which is not very far from Nigeria’s 200million.

Chile and Argentina are other South American countries that adopted similar measures as Brazil.

## 3.2 Cape Verde, Tanzania, Tunisia and South Africa

According to the IPU report, at least four African countries are also leveraging technology for parliamentary business. These are Cape Verde, Tanzania, Tunisia, and South Africa.

In adapting to the COVID-19 challenge, the National Assembly of Cape Verde reduced the number of its meetings and some are now held remotely, including those by permanent committees. On Friday, 17th of April, 2020, the parliament during an extraordinary session authorized the President of the Republic to extend the State of Emergency till May 2, 2020 and 43 deputies who attended approved the request.

The East African country of Tanzania has a robust measure of functioning despite the pandemic. It restricted the number of Members who can attend parliamentary sessions to 150 out of 393 Members. Other members follow debates on TV in designated rooms and vote electronically. All Members of Parliament were given tablets that they can use to ask questions online. Also, specially trained nurses are stationed at the entrances to Parliament to check the temperature of all those entering the building.

The Assembly of People's Representatives of Tunisia adopted a resolution setting out 6 measures to prevent the spread of the virus while the parliament is conducting its affairs. The measures include remote plenary sessions and a variation on the rule on quorum.

The Parliament of South Africa had a shut down but opened up to function through the use of technology.

### 3.3 WHAT OTHER PARLIAMENTS ACHIEVED

While the National Assembly of Nigeria kept away from plenary, the parliaments of some of other countries recorded some gains in continuing to perform their functions amidst substantial restrictions. **See Figure 6** for a glimpse of these as also summarized in the examples provided below:

#### The USA

On the 25th of March, 2020, the United States Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, also known as CARES Act. This package puts \$1,200 into the pockets of taxpayers, with joint fillers getting \$2,400. There is also an additional \$500 going to parents for each child.

80 million Americans are expected to benefit from the historic \$2 trillion which the US Senate passed with a unanimous vote of 96-0.

On the 23rd of April, the House concurred with the US senate on another \$484 billion package. The bill includes \$320billion for the Paycheck Protection Programme designed to help struggling small businesses keep their workers on the payroll.

## **Australia**

On the 8th of April, 2020, the Australia parliament approved a \$130billion stimulus package for Scott Morrison's government to pay eligible employers \$1,500 per fortnight for each eligible worker. This bill covers sole traders, full time, part-time, or long term casual workers that have been employed regularly longer than 12 months.

## **Canada**

Canada's federal government also passed Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy designed to help struggling business outfits to keep employees on the payroll. The subsidy will give employers up to \$847 per week per employee for 12 weeks.

This is aside from the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) which is a stimulus package designed for residents 15 years and above to apply for up to \$2,000 in the direct monthly payment for 4 months.

## **Germany**

On the 27th of March, 2020, the German parliament passed the Economy Stabilization fund. This fund has been backed up with 600billion euros. The aim includes stabilizing those businesses outside the finance sector concerning which a threat to their existence would have a significant impact on the German economy.

## **Ghana**

On the 2nd of April, 2020, the parliament of Ghana passed an executive bill for the establishment of the national trust fund. The bill was laid by the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Gloria Afua Akuffo, and was given expedited passage.

According to a press publication on the website of the parliament, “the Fund will receive donations for disbursement to individuals who have been negatively impacted by the disease and also make provisions for how the Fund should be managed.”

## **South Africa**

South Africa’s President, Cyril Ramaphosa, announced a stimulus package of \$26.3billion to rescue the country’s economy. The funds, which represent 10% of the country’s GDP, will be sought from the World Bank, International Monetary Funds, the African Development Bank, and other sources. The rest of the money will be from local sources.

Figure 6



## 4. THE QUESTION OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

The resumption of plenary by the National Assembly on April 26, 2020 assuaged concerns that issues requiring legislations and parliamentary oversight were being left unattended.

### 4.1 Matters of urgent national importance

Although some of these are now receiving attention, there is a limitation to how much the legislature can do since both chambers have elected to sit only once a week. This weekly plenary regime has been reinforced by strict guidelines being implemented by the management of the National Assembly on social distancing and other regulations stipulated by the health authorities<sup>20</sup>.

The National Assembly is expected to engage on a range of issues, including but not limited to review of the 2020 Appropriation Act; consideration and approval of the COVID-19 intervention fund; providing appropriate legislative framework for social welfare programmes and COVID-19 palliatives; and the Economic Stimulus Bill already passed by the House of Representatives

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20. <https://www.orderpaper.ng/covid-19-nass-releases-operational-guidelines-for-relaxed-lockdown/>

and awaiting concurrence from the Senate. A major intervention however, is the need to update the colonial-era Quarantine Act that has been used by governments at both the federal and state levels to contain and curtail the outbreak of the novel coronavirus. The move by the House of Representatives in this regard has generated nationwide interest and widespread disapproval of certain provisions considered inconsistent with civil and democratic liberties.

## 4.2 The controversial infectious diseases bill

Upon resumption from its month-long recess, the House of Representatives introduced a bill to repeal and reenact the Quarantine law. Titled ‘Control of Infectious Diseases Bill, 2020’, the proposed legislation is sponsored by the Speaker, Hon. Femi Gbajabiamila and two others. The 47-page bill was sped through first and second reading same day, in spite of vociferous opposition by some members of the House. The committal of the bill to the Committee of the Whole without any public hearing sparked off widespread condemnation of both the bill and perceived motives of its sponsors. It is worthy of note that the Senate has introduced a similar bill<sup>21</sup>.

Certain provisions of the bill particularly have been identified and criticized as draconian by various

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21. <https://www.orderpaper.ng/breaking-senate-introduces-health-emergency-bill/>

stakeholders, including civil society groups. Concerns were also raised about the disproportionate and wide-ranging powers granted the Director General of the Nigeria Centre for Diseases Control (NCDC). See **Figures 7 - 10**

Figure 7

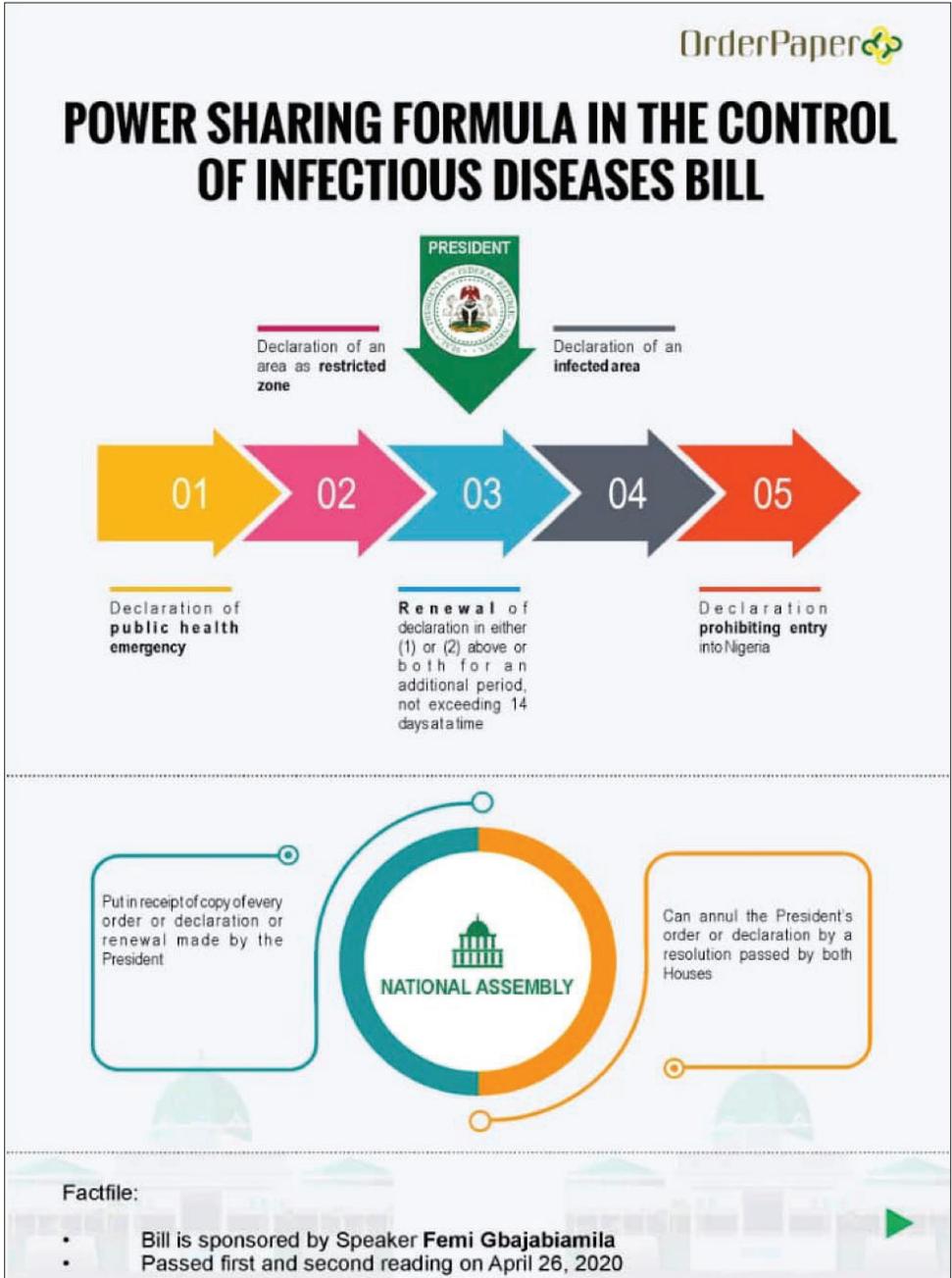


Figure 8



Figure 9

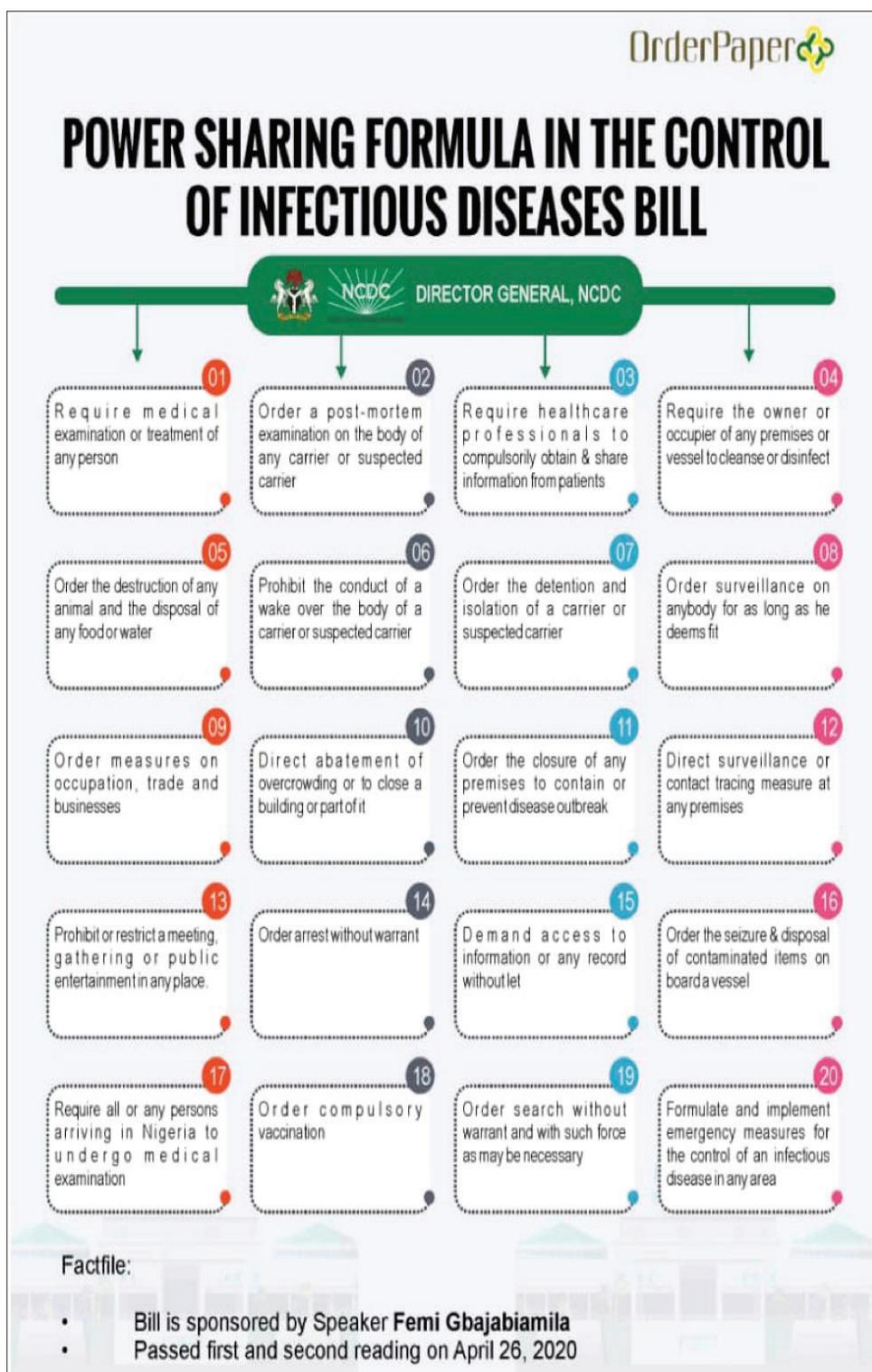


Figure 10

# CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS IN THE CONTROL OF INFECTIOUS DISEASES BILL

**14**

Number of days the President can declare (and renew at a time) (i) a public health emergency; and (ii) an area as a restricted zone

**7**

Number of days within which an appeal against the decision of the NCDC DG can be made to the Minister of Health whose decision is final

**48** Hours

Time within an aggrieved person may file complaint in a Magistrate Court against seizure or thereafter forfeit property so seized to government

**000,000**

## PENALTIES FOR VARIOUS DEFAULT AS FOLLOWS:

1. Provision of wrong information on blood donation- **N2,000,000 or 2 years imprisonment or both**
2. Removal of mark placed on buildings or premises - **N100,000 or a non-custodial sentence**
3. Non-compliance of vessels with NCDC guidelines - **N1,000,000 or to 12months imprisonment or both**
4. Unauthorized disembarking/boarding of infected vessel - **N1,000,000 or 12months imprisonment or both**
5. Serving contaminated food or failure to carry out food analysis for a vessel - **N5,000,000 or 12months imprisonment or both**
6. Importation of vector without permission of DG NCDC - **N5,000,000 or 12months imprisonment or both**
7. Preventing Port health officers from carrying out inspection of ship/vessel - **N2,000,000**
8. Importing human remains or bones other than cremated ashes without medical certificate - **N5,000,000**
9. Failure by Ship Master to assist Port Health officer in carrying out his/her duties - **N1,000,000 or 12 months imprisonment or both**
10. Giving false name to Health officer/Police officer during surveillance - **N50,000**
11. Neglecting or refusing to carry out or obstruction of the execution of any emergency measure - **N1,000,000 or 6 months imprisonment or both**
12. Failure to comply with notice on evacuation - **N100,000**
13. Failure to comply with regulations by the Minister of Health - **N500,000 or 6 months imprisonment or both**
14. First offenders for offences not expressly stated - **N100,000 or 6 months imprisonment or both**
15. Second or subsequent offenders for offences not expressly stated - **N200,000 or 12 months imprisonment or both**

## 4.3 Exclusion backlash

A major public upheaval around the Control of Infectious Diseases Bill, 2020, concerns a lack of inclusion and citizen participation in the legislative process. Given that public hearings are essential component of passage of legislations by the National Assembly, the decision by the House of Representatives to cut out this key element received a wave of backlash by citizens and civil society groups. Incidentally, some members of the House openly sided with the larger section of the public which called for wider consultations and stakeholder inputs on the bill. These pressures paid off eventually as the Speaker announced that a public hearing would be taken on the bill<sup>22</sup>. However, the big question arose: How would the public hearing be conducted in the face of the large-scale restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic?

## 4.4 A shift from the normal

As indicated earlier in this Paper, the National Assembly resumed into a partial lockdown and its Management had issued guidelines that kept over 80 percent of the usual population of staff, aides and service providers away from the complex. Visitors were the worst hit in this arrangement as heavy limitations were on the number of invited officials and stakeholders at any particular time. Even the media representation for

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22. <https://www.orderpaper.ng/breaking-reps-bows-to-pressure-and-will-now-hold-public-hearing-on-ncdc-bill/>

coverage of legislative activities was drastically cut down. See **annexure 1** for the guidelines.

So the next concern was on how the public hearing on the contentious bill would be conducted to guarantee inclusion and adequate participation of stakeholders and citizens. This concern got the attention of the Speaker when he received in audience a delegation of civil society groups. He said among others, that the public hearing would hold for two days with no more than 40 persons allowed into the hearing venue per day; the proceedings would be broadcast live on network TV stations; and that memoranda submitted by groups and citizens would be taken into account. Although a detailed guideline has not been issued as at time of finishing this Paper, there are some questions that invariably come up. Are these measures anything unusual from the normal? Are they sufficient given the widespread discontent and disapproval that have attended the bill? Would this be the kind of rules that would guide the conduct of public hearings going forward?

Given that the National Assembly is tending towards passage of bills without public hearing or at best a limited exercise, there is an emergent need to fill the gaps for inclusion and citizen engagement that arise in the new circumstance. What are the options? How can they be operated and remain operable? Would they legally find integration in the parliamentary process? The next chapter engages these and other questions.

## 5. WINDOWS FOR CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN A NEW WORLD

The fact that the House of Representatives caved in to public pressure and agreed to hold a public hearing on the Control of Infectious Diseases Bill, 2020 is a demonstration of the efficacy of public advocacy in the governance process. But how to ensure that this becomes a gainful continuance in the COVID-19 era and beyond is the more important part.

This would require not just adherence to the COVID-19 guidelines issued by health authorities and the parliamentary bureaucracy but some amount of creativity on the part of individual lawmakers, the institution and citizens themselves. In other words, there is a tripartite understanding and deal-making that needs to happen around inclusion and citizen engagement in these unusual times. There is no doubt that technology plays a key role in addition to increased engagement of traditional media outlets like television and radio.

However, the primacy and currency of social media can be very significant in value addition on the matter. It is expected that lawmakers would find social media platforms as viable and veritable windows of engagements. It is in this regard that **OrderPaper**

**Nigeria** designed the OPEN Series to help bridge the gap.

## 5.1 The OPEN opportunity

The Online Parliamentary Engagement Nigeria (OPEN) Series is a specially created window to bridge the gap between citizens and the National Assembly of Nigeria. It is a response to the need to allow increased citizen engagement with the legislative arm of government with regards especially to the consideration and passage of bills and constituency interfaces.

The OPEN Series has found a vital usefulness in filling the gap of citizen engagement in the COVID-19 era where parliaments across the world are struggling to keep their doors open for business with the consequence of closing spaces for public engagements.

Accordingly, OrderPaper Nigeria, as the country's prime and authentic people-parliament multi-platform interface is implementing OPEN as a series of online engagements whereby lawmakers and the legislative institution will have a window to reach out to constituents and citizens generally and through which the latter can demand and receive participation in the legislative process. OPEN Series will be implemented as webinars and meet-ups hosted on virtual platforms powered by technology.

The inaugural OPEN webinar held on May 18, 2020 and feature the member of the House of Representatives and a policy expert as guest. See **Figure 11** below: The well-received and highly engaging session produced a couple of interesting recommendations as contained in **annexure II**.

*Figure 11*

**OPEN** Online Parliamentary Engagement Nigeria

OrderPaper Nigeria invites you to its special citizens-parliament meet-up

## THE PARLIAMENT AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN THE COVID-19 ERA

Speakers:



**HON. AKIN ALABI**  
Chairman, Committee on Inter-Governmental Affairs  
House of Representatives



**NIMAH ARIGBABU**  
Public Policy Expert



Host:  
**OKE EPIA**  
TAGG-Tech Expert and Executive Director,  
OrderPaper Nigeria

Monday, May 18th, 2020 | 2:00pm (WAT) | [www.orderpaper.ng/open](http://www.orderpaper.ng/open)

▶ Join the conversation via Facebook Live on [www.facebook.com/orderpaper](https://www.facebook.com/orderpaper)

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# POSTSCRIPT

## We have a role in saving our kind

The world has changed in many ways than we are aware of. Slowly.

And for many of us, it took the global incidence of COVID-19 to reveal the disparity between what we think we know of the world and what we truly know.

As a people we have developed a deep lethargy for knowledge at scale. We choose emotions and gut feel over critical thinking. Conspiracies trump scientific evidence.

And it would seem we have as a collection never really believed in the sanctity of evidence, else, one should be worried by how easily evidence has demoted to the same level as beer parlour banter in such a short time – some will argue that it has always been the case.

We allow ourselves to be held back by extreme conservatism, assisted with (unquestionable?) religious beliefs, to the point that, the more than casual observer is starkly reminded of the torture early scientific thought was put through and Galileo Galilee and his theory of heliocentrism – which is the theory that the earth along with other planets and their moons revolve around the sun, a theory that has a firm basis in observations and measurements as compared to the geocentrism which the church favoured at the time and which only has a basis in Judaist poetry, were subject to public ridicule and shaming –

comes to mind.

Today, like in the 1600s, we are faced with theories that have no foundations in logic, critical thinking or evidence. Yet, their protagonists, in their millions drown out the experts and query expertise, relegating science and its processes which had stood the test of time to the background and elevates assumptions based on ignorance.

So, we have seen this before. And we are likely to see it again.

Should we then throw our hands up in informed resignation or in the hope that the axiom that the truth always prevails will hold true?

The answer is no. As there will always be those who will select their gut feel or pseudo-science over what is measurable and truly scientific. As such, we will be joining the ignorant in trampling on knowledge gifted us by our ancestors and on top of which we as a people have relentlessly built.

And a step in the right direction is what the **OrderPaper Nigeria** has done with this Paper and the others I am privileged to know are coming.

It is in your hands now. It is now your noble duty to get it into the hands of the many who may need to read this in order to course correct or the many who have shouted themselves hoarse and may be in need of new ammunition in our battle against ignorance.

**Oluwakorede Asuni**

*Co-Convener: dotCIVICS - [www.dotCIVICS.org](http://www.dotCIVICS.org)*

# ANNEXURE I



## GUIDELINES FOR RESUMPTION OF PROCEEDINGS

### 1. INTRODUCTION

**A**n outbreak of the novel coronavirus began in China in December 2019 and the World Health Organization declared it as a global pandemic on 11th March 2020. However, the first confirmed case was recorded in Nigeria on 27th February 2020 and there has been an increasing number of infections reported by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC). On 23rd March 2020, the Federal Government issued directives for the cancellation of large gatherings, places of worship, social and sporting events for an initial period as a measure to reduce the spread of the disease.

The House of Representatives adjourned sitting from 24th March 2020 to 7th April 2020 in response to the need combat its spread. The resumption date was eventually shifted as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria announced a 14-day mandatory lockdown on the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) as well as Lagos and Ogun States from 30 March 2020. The Federal Government subsequently extended the lockdown by another 14 days from 14th April 2020.

The House has noted the need to resume sitting and attend to proposals before it to assist the Federal Government confront the COVID-19 effectively as well as approve government plans to jumpstart Nigeria's economic and growth development considering the socioeconomic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the citizens of Nigeria especially the lockdown and fall in crude oil prices.

The House has also noted the guidance from the World Health Organization and Nigeria Centre for Disease Control on workplace practices for public and private institutions.

The House recognises that the best way to prevent infection and reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19 is to avoid being exposed to the virus by adhering to basic hand and respiratory hygiene measures and hereby issues these guidelines for re-convening the House of Representatives.

## **2. OBJECTIVES**

- Protect the health and safety of the Members and Staff.
- Advise Members and Staff on protocols for social/physical distancing, face masks and face covering.
- Undertake critical legislative work required to support the Federal Government to effectively tackle the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Execute other crucial legislative work economic growth and development.
- Ensure that the House of Representatives is in compliance with regulations outlined by the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 through the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control.

### **3. NCDC GENERAL GUIDANCE ON WORKPLACE PRACTICES**

- Promote thorough and frequent handwashing, with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and make available alcohol sanitizers, especially at all entrances.
- Wash your hands:
  - before leaving home
  - on arrival at the office
  - after using the toilet
  - before food preparation
  - before eating any food, including snacks
  - before leaving the office
- Cover your nose and mouth with tissue when coughing or sneezing. Used tissue should immediately be disposed in a covered bin followed by washing of hands. Alternatively, sneeze or cough into a bent elbow if no tissue is available.
- Ensure provision of bins.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands to avoid transfer of the virus from surfaces into eye or nose.
- Display signage reminding staff and visitors to maintain good and respiratory hygiene.
- Clean and disinfect the offices and premises daily, especially frequently touched surfaces like tables, door handles, countertops, computers, light, and air conditioner switches.

#### 4. ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES

- Avoid handshakes.
- Use face masks or face covering always as only those properly kitted against COVID-19 will be allowed into the premises of the National Assembly.
- Avoid touching your face.
- No admittance to the gallery.
- Mandatory temperature check will be conducted at the main entrance into the National Assembly by qualified medical personnel. Members and Staff are to fully cooperate on the temperature screening.
- Any Member or Staff whose temperature is above the acceptable range will be advised to seek proper medical advice.
- Members and Staff are discouraged from opening any main door, except their office doors, as the Sgt-At-Arms are to man such doors, open them and disinfect regularly.
- Members and Staff are required to be transparent about their travel history and if recently returned from places with ongoing transmission in the last 14 days must self-isolate whether they have symptoms or not.
- If any Member or Staff feels sick, he or she must stay at home, contact his or her doctor for medical advice and do not come to the National Assembly premises. If symptoms akin to COVID-19 develop, call NCDC on 0800 970 00010.

## **5. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MANAGEMENT**

- Ensure that all Members and Staff are abreast of these Guidelines and other preparedness action plan put in place to reduce the risk of exposure in the National Assembly.
- Work towards equipping the National Assembly Clinic to handle COVID-19 related cases in the event of an emergency.
- Ensure the presence of qualified medical staff dedicated to handle COVID-19 related matters and other emergency health issues. All other general medical cases should be referred to hospitals outside the National Assembly till further notice.
- Provide temperature screening at the entrance gates of the National Assembly and entrance into the Chamber of the House of Representatives.
- Provide ‘Special Pass’ for vehicles of staff and any other persons that have been approved to be allowed into the premises to reduce contact with the security men at the entrance of the National Assembly.
- Discourage the sharing of work equipment, tools, computers, phones, and desks.
- Provide hand sanitizers on each Member’s seat in the Chamber and in their offices as well as strategic locations within the House.
- Ensure that handwashing facilities are functional, and that Members and Staff always have access to water and soap, also ensuring the working environment is kept clean

- A medical doctor should be available at the entrance of the Chamber each day during sitting.
- Enough bins should be placed at strategic locations for disposal of tissue papers: such bins should be emptied frequently each day.
- Provide cleaners with the appropriate cleaning agents.
- Members are advised to notify in advance, the Clerk of the National Assembly and Clerk of the House of Representatives before visiting their offices, to avoid overcrowding in their offices.
- Members are advised to talk with their colleagues more on phone and limit moving around their offices.
- Provide signages reminding staff and visitors to maintain good and respiratory hygiene.

## **6. ACTIVITIES IN THE CHAMBER**

- Maintain physical and social distancing to safeguard the health and safety of Members and Staff.
- Members, including the leadership, are to maintain three (3) empty seats between them.
- Only Two Clerks-at-Table are to sit at a time.
- Clerk and Deputy Clerk will also observe social distancing.
- Members and Staff will wear their face mask on in the Chamber and everywhere in the House premises.
- Members are not to approach the Speaker and the Clerks in the Chamber, and when that becomes absolutely necessary, social distancing must be observed.

## 7. AUTHORIZED PERSONS

The House of Representatives will ensure that only relevant and essential staff will resume work to support the legislative duties of the leadership and members of the House of Representatives.

- Honourable Speaker
- Deputy Speaker
- Honourable Members
- Clerk of the National Assembly
- Clerk of the House of Representatives and Deputy Clerk
- Chief of Staff to the Hon Speaker
- 2 Special Advisers/ Assistants to the Honourable Speaker of his choice
- 2 Special Advisers/ Assistants to Deputy Speaker of his choice
- Secretaries to the Honourable Speaker and Deputy Speaker
- 2 staff of each Member of the Leadership of their choice
- 2 staff of each Member of their choice
- 2 staff of the Clerk to the National Assembly
- 2 staff of the Clerk of the House of Representatives
- Directors of the House of Representatives
- Committee Clerks
- 4 Clerks-at-Table

- Essential Staff involved in production of Order Paper and Votes and Proceedings
- One Staff of each of the Directors
- One Staff of a Committee Clerk who is not a Director
- 2 Sgt-at-Arms staff to be in the chamber
- 2 Sgt-at-Arms staff at the entrance to Chamber
- 4 Police Officers in the House premises
- Cleaners
- Limited number of staff of State Security Services
- Limited Sgt-at-Arms in the National Assembly premises
- With the exception of the Federal Fire Service, all officers and men of other paramilitary organization such as Federal Road Safety Corps, Nigeria Safety and Civil Defence Corps, etc. are to stay away from the premises till further notice.

## **8. ADDITIONAL STAFF FOR ESSENTIAL SERVICES**

- Medical staff as approved by the Clerk of the National Assembly.
- 2 Electronic Media Representatives and 2 Print Media Representatives as approved by the Chairman of the House Committee on Media and Public Affairs and the Director of Information.
- Staff of the Directorate of Estate and Works as approved by the Clerk of the National Assembly to ensure regular supply of electricity, including uninterrupted switch to generating set as may be necessary.

- Other critical essential staff, apart from the Secretaries, as may be approved by the Clerk of the House of Representatives.

## **9. OTHER MANDATORY PROVISIONS**

- All business premises, including Banks will remain closed till further notice.
- All catering services, including in the offices of members of the Leadership are suspended till further notice.

# ANNEXURE II



## OUTCOME DOCUMENT OF THE MAIDEN EDITION OF ONLINE PARLIAMENTARY ENGAGEMENT NIGERIA (OPEN) WEBINAR SERIES

**TOPIC:** THE PARLIAMENT AND CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT  
IN THE COVID-19 ERA

**DATE:** 18TH MAY, 2020

## INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way and manner people interact. It has changed even the way states function, as governments all over the world continue to struggle with balancing economy and a public health emergency. Nations, including the most advanced economies, are struggling to meet public needs, as the novel virus is causing disruptions to the daily lives of citizens globally.

Nigeria as a nation appears to be more vulnerable to the rampaging invisible disease. The response of the government

has exposed many gaps in public service delivery. This experience has led to calls for dialogue on dealing with the COVID-19 era and aftermath. While other nations are experimenting on how to return to some normalcy, Nigeria's experience shows that our 'normal' is too vulnerable to both internal and external shocks with little or no cushion to afford citizens sufficient soft landing.

At the very heart of public discourse is the National Assembly. Even though the arm of government appears to be making efforts to provide direction through legislative interventions, significant gaps persist. And the long-standing gap between parliamentarians and citizens is a readily identified causal factor.

In the current circumstance, lawmakers are significantly cut-off from their constituents due to social distancing and other precautionary measures by health and other regulatory authorities. In some cases, those who are available and visible are seen to be burdened with demands for the provision of palliatives to citizens as the government relief efforts could at best be described as insufficient. Fundamentally, the discharge of legislative functions is done with inconvenient precautions.

As part of measures to fill observed gaps in citizen engagement occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic, **OrderPaper Nigeria** designed a virtual meet for conversation between representatives in parliament and citizens. The platform, entitled **OPEN** – **O**nline **P**arliamentary **E**ngagement **N**igeria – **N**igeria was created to bridge the gap between citizens and the National Assembly as well as State Houses of Assemblies in the country.

The first edition held on Monday, May 18, 2020 on Zoom with support from **dotCivics** and was broadcasted live on Facebook with a live commentary on Twitter. This inaugural edition had **Hon. Akin Alabi**, Chairman Committee on Inter-Governmental Affairs of the House of Representatives; and **Ms. Nimah Arigbabu**, a Public Policy Expert as speakers. They proactively engaged on the topic “The Parliament and Citizen Participation in the COVID-19 era” while scores of participants enthusiastically contributed through comments and questions. At the end of a very stimulating and engaging encounter moderated by **Mr. Oke Epia**, Executive Director, OrderPaper Nigeria, the following observations and resolutions were put forward to advance parliamentary engagement between citizens and parliament:

## Observations

1. A wide gap exists between Citizens and Legislators; a situation further precipitated by the lack of appropriate information on the functions, role, and activities of legislators.
2. False and over-promising by legislators during election campaigns is a major reason for this gap, which has led to growing distrust and disconnect between citizens and parliamentarians.
3. Even though social media can be a very useful engagement tool, both citizens and lawmakers are not using the window of opportunity sufficiently to engage with each other.

4. The Zonal Intervention Projects (ZIP), popularly called constituency projects, scheme needs to be reformed to infuse more transparency, accountability, and most importantly, inclusiveness.
5. Some lawmakers personally provide sundry/personal demands (stomach infrastructure) of constituents leading to accountability gaps in core legislative duties.
6. Citizens do not take adequate advantage of public hearings to ventilate their positions on bills and other legislative activities that affect them.
7. While the process of law-making is tedious and cumbersome, they are necessary to have laws that can survive the test of time and scrutiny.
8. The speakers and participants commended **OrderPaper Nigeria** for the **OPEN** initiative and expressed strong desire for its continuance.

## Resolutions

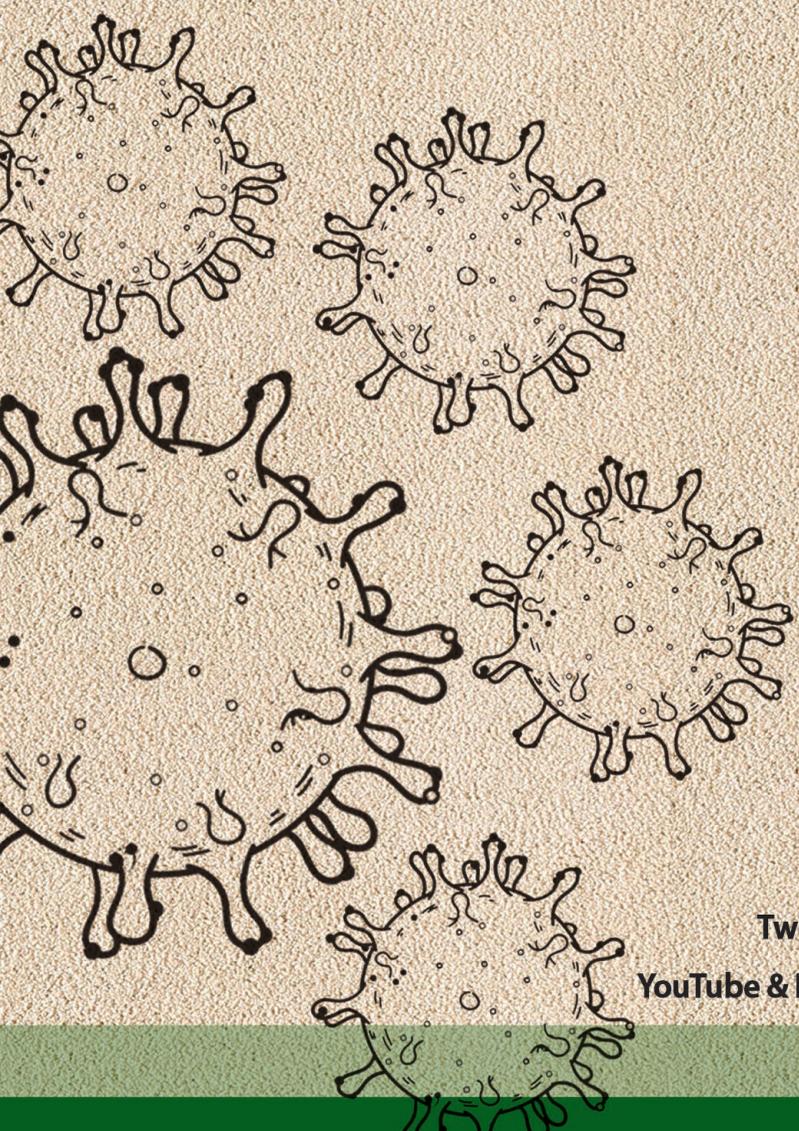
1. Legislators and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) should embark on mass enlightenment and proper education of the masses on the responsibilities and activities of lawmakers.
2. Town hall meetings, where elected representatives must listen and respond to the concerns of their constituents, should be regularly organized with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Community Based

Organizations (CBOs), playing integral roles in the organizing.

3. Lawmakers should do more to encourage more women to contest for elective posts while those elected in parliament should be given more responsibilities.
4. Citizens must submit to reorientation of values and temper their expectations of lawmakers with a focus more on accountable stewardship within statutory confines.
5. Citizens should be encouraged and supported to attend public hearings organized by the Legislature to be able to state their positions on bills and other legislative activities that affect them.
6. COVID-19 has thrown up the imperative to amend the standing orders and statute books of parliaments to accommodate some remote engagements in the performance of legislative duties and citizen engagement.
7. The practice of giving hand-outs or ‘stomach infrastructure’ to constituents by legislator is not sustainable on the long run and should therefore, be discouraged in place of greater emphasis on having lawmakers make the executive arm more accountable.



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