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#OpenNASS: 5 Years of Sustained Advocacy for a Transparent & Accountable National Assembly

'The problem with Nigeria is not the lack of institutions but the challenge has always been that the existing institutions have under-performed or have been hijacked, domesticated and used for certain group interests.' - Femi Falana (SAN).

#OpenNASS is an advocacy campaign that demands an open, transparent and accountable National Assembly. We firmly believe that legislators who represent their constituents must provide adequate information on their activities. The campaign started in 2013 with a protest tagged #OurNASS and with BudgIT's focus on the National Assembly budget in 2014, #OpenNASS was coined. The goals of #OpenNASS was harmonized to include the demands during the #OurNASS protest. They are:

1. Make public the breakdown of National Assembly's budget.
2. Replace voice voting with electronic voting so citizens can track their representatives.
3. Maintain a functional website and make public the attendance records at plenary.
4. Work with the Revenue Mobilisation Allocation and Fiscal Committee (RMAFC) to review and reduce allowances of legislators.
5. Provide an audit for the N1.15 trillion (\$5.75 billion) it received from 2005 – 2014.

Today makes it exactly 5 years since the protest to the National Assembly demanding openness. EiE, BudgIT and several other CSOs which include Youth Initiative for Advocacy Growth and Advancement (YIAGA Africa), OrderPaper, Socio-Economic Right and Accountability Project (SERAP), Connected Development (CODE) to mention a few have consistently engaged the National Assembly on issues cutting across the 5 demands.

Over the last 2 years, EiE in partnership with Viamo (formerly Voto Mobile) has focused on the first 3 goals. This has relied strongly on getting citizens to sign petitions using the toll-free hotline 55052 and online. As of August



31st, thirty-one thousand and thirteen (31,013) Nigerians have signed the petition demanding an open and transparent National assembly.

Campaign Milestones and Unresolved Issues

1. Budget

The OpenNASS campaign commenced under the leadership of Senator David Mark in the 7th Assembly but failed to yield results during his tenure. In May 2017, after protests, several FOI requests, petitions, countless engagements online & offline and several promises, the 8th Assembly led by Bukola Saraki published details of its N125 billion budget for the first time in 7 years (2010 – 2017).

In response to this act, EiE and BudgIT organized a “datathon” during which citizens rigorously reviewed the budget and proposed the reduction of the 2017 budget from the sum of N125 billion to N52.5 billion. The streamlined budget was sent to the leadership of the National Assembly and then Acting President, Prof Yemi Osinbajo, but there was no acknowledgement or response.

To further disdain the Nigerian people, the National Assembly’s 2018 budget was increased by N14.5bn to N139.5 billion. This seems to institutionalize the additional N10 billion that was released to the National Assembly in 2017 by the former Minister of Finance, Mrs Kemi Adeosun, making their total budget N135 billion.

Despite promises to ensure their budget is public as standard practice and several requests from the campaign, the National Assembly has refused to publish the details of their 2018 budget! It should be noted that the National Assembly’s budget is a statutory transfer and not subject to the revenue performance of the country. The published 2017 budget was higher than the individual budgets of 10 states in Nigeria (Adamawa, with a population of 4.2 Million citizens – N120.4bn; Niger, with a population of 5.6 Million citizens – N116bn; Anambra, with a population of 5.5 Million citizens – N115.5bn as examples). With Senator Shehu Sani’s N13.5 million running cost disclosure, questions need to be asked regarding what these monies are used for.

2. Electronic Voting

According to the Nigerian 1999 constitution, for any amendment of the constitution, two thirds of the Senate (73 out of 109) and House of Representatives (240 out of 360) votes are required. Therefore, during the voting on the constitution review bill on the 26th & 27th July 2017, the National Assembly was required to utilize electronic voting rather than voice voting. However, 426 days after the amendment, the results of how each member voted have not been published. Citizens do not know how their representatives voted on issues that concern them especially regarding certain contentious bills such as the bill on devolution of power to states and 35% affirmative action for women in federal and state cabinets both of which were rejected.

Conversations with elected representatives would have been held by citizens if the exact voting records were made public. Just recently in the United States, six state legislators in Oklahoma who voted against a bill that would have increased teachers’ salaries were all voted out of office in their primary runoff



elections. The #OpenNASS campaign thus advocates for the use of electronic voting rather than voice voting so that citizens can track their representatives.

3. The NASS Website of Errors and Nonexistent Plenary Attendance Records

The National Assembly has failed to maintain a functional website with list of dead members still appearing on the website as legislators. Also, defected members still have their details wrongly captured. The website also doesn't provide information on the activities of representatives elected to serve their constituents. Parliamentary documents (such as acts, bills, hansards, notice and order papers) are neither up to date nor easily accessible.

Indeed, an arm of government that cannot maintain a website with accurate and up-to-date information clearly leaves much to be desired. Although, the Constitution states that one-third of the members of the chambers form a quorum, however, it has been observed that several members under the guise of committee meetings and other responsibilities fail to attend plenary sessions. This lays credence to the demand that their attendance records are also placed on their websites.

Beyond the listed three demands, we will continue to request for an audit of the N1.5 trillion received by the National Assembly between 2005 and 2014. We will also demand clarity on what 'extra' allowances members get beyond the approved figures from the Revenue Mobilisation Allocation and Fiscal Committee (RMAFC).

With the recent selfish and unconstitutional defections by several legislators across party lines, it becomes more difficult to fathom whose interests they serve – citizens or their selfish interests! They were to resume yesterday, September 25th after their summer recess, but they have now postponed it to October 9th to finish party primaries. Even though they reconvened to resubmit the Electoral Act Amendment that was returned by Mr President, they are yet to pass the budget for next year's general elections putting the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) under undue pressure.

We thus use this medium to again reiterate the need for the National Assembly members to heed to the demands of thousands of Nigerians to be open, transparent and accountable. The National Assembly is a critical institution in our democracy and we will ensure that it is repurposed to serve all Nigerians, not just a few.

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Enough is Enough Nigeria (EiE) (www.eie.ng) is a network of individuals and organizations committed to instituting a culture of good governance and public accountability in Nigeria through active citizenship. EiE's #RSVP - Register | Select | Vote | Protect | is a key voter education campaign. EiE Nigeria was an integral part of the #OccupyNigeria movement in 2012 and is very active in the #OpenNASS and #OfficeOfTheCitizen campaign.

BudgIT (www.yourbudgit.org) is a civic organization that applies technology to intersect citizen engagement with institutional improvement, to facilitate societal change. A pioneer in the field of social advocacy melded with technology, BudgIT uses an array of tech tools to simplify the budget and matters of public spending for citizens, with the primary aim of raising standard of transparency and accountability in government.