

The Contributions of Bayelsa State House of Assembly to the Development of Bayelsa State and Nigeria

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Abstract

The Bayelsa State House of Assembly (BSHA), since its establishment in 1996, has played a central role in Bayelsa State's governance and development, addressing critical issues such as transparency, environmental sustainability, and human capital growth. This study critically examines the BSHA's contributions to socio-economic development and Nigeria's legislative ecosystem, focusing on its legislative, policy, and budgetary functions. Through key laws like the Transparency Law and Right to Education Law, the BSHA has driven impactful reforms, enhancing governance and resource allocation in essential sectors. However, its potential is constrained by challenges including executive dominance, political interference, and limited resources. Leveraging secondary data and content analysis, the research uncovers the Assembly's influence at the national level, particularly in fostering intergovernmental collaboration and leadership development, with notable members advancing to prominent national roles. While the BSHA's contributions are significant, overcoming institutional and external constraints through targeted reforms is imperative to maximize its legislative independence and long-term impact on governance and development.

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Background of the Study

The Bayelsa State House of Assembly (BSHA) is a key legislative institution that plays a central role in the development of Bayelsa State and its contributions to Nigeria's broader governance framework. Established in 1996, the BSHA embodies the principles of democratic governance by legislating policies, providing oversight of the executive branch, and representing the people of Bayelsa State. Its legislative contributions, including laws passed on education, healthcare, and environmental protection, have been pivotal in addressing critical developmental challenges in the state (Johnson, A. S, 2018). However, understanding the extent to which these legislative actions have driven development requires a systematic review. This study interrogates the BSHA's contributions by examining the effectiveness of its legislative framework in shaping development outcomes while also situating its work within the broader Nigerian legislative system.

Beyond legislation, the BSHA's oversight and budgetary contributions have significantly influenced Bayelsa State's governance and development trajectory. As the body responsible for scrutinizing the activities of the executive, the BSHA has a critical role in ensuring transparency and accountability in public resource management. Its oversight functions are particularly important in a resource-rich state like Bayelsa, where oil revenues create unique governance and economic challenges (Johnson, A. S, 2018). Additionally, the BSHA's involvement in the approval and appropriation of the state budget is instrumental in ensuring that public funds are directed toward impactful development projects. Despite these significant roles, questions remain about how effectively the BSHA's oversight and budgetary powers are exercised to address issues such as poverty, environmental degradation, and unemployment. This study seeks to explore the depth of these contributions and their tangible impact on Bayelsa's socioeconomic development.

At the national level, the BSHA also contributes to Nigeria's legislative ecosystem through intergovernmental relations and national policy advocacy. As part of a federal structure, the BSHA's work influences legislative coordination and policymaking across different levels of government. Its contributions to national development extend to promoting economic policies, fostering legislative-executive collaboration, and addressing issues of federal importance such as revenue allocation and regional development (Aribo-Abude, 2020). Furthermore, Bayelsa's strategic position as a key oil-producing state situates the BSHA as a vital stakeholder in discussions around national resource governance and fiscal federalism. By examining the interplay between the BSHA's roles at the state and national levels, this study aims to highlight its broader impact on Nigeria's development while also addressing its unique challenges in navigating the complexities of intergovernmental relationships.

Despite its contributions, the BSHA operates within a challenging political and institutional environment that affects its capacity to achieve its developmental mandate. Internal challenges, such as inadequate resources, lack of technical capacity, and limited

autonomy, often hinder its effectiveness. Externally, the dominance of the executive and political interference undermines its ability to function independently (Monday, 2023). These constraints not only affect the legislature's performance but also limit its ability to address the developmental needs of Bayelsa State and its contributions to Nigeria. This study critically examines these challenges, aiming to provide evidence-based insights into how they can be addressed to enhance the BSHA's operational efficiency. By exploring the opportunities for reform and capacity-building within the BSHA, this study contributes to the broader discourse on strengthening legislative institutions as drivers of sustainable development in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The Bayelsa State House of Assembly (BSHA) has played a pivotal role in the legislative governance of Bayelsa State since its inauguration in 1999, enacting a significant number of laws aimed at fostering development. During its first term (1999–2003), the BSHA received 80 bills, passing 33 into law, and in its second term (2003–2007), 43 laws were enacted out of 58 bills considered (Soluap, n.d.). By 2013, the Assembly had enacted 133 laws, reflecting its active legislative involvement in governance. While specific data beyond 2013 is limited, these figures underscore the Assembly's active legislative role in Bayelsa State's governance (Soluap, n.d.). Despite this record, the extent to which these legislative efforts have translated into tangible development outcomes remains unclear. Bayelsa State continues to grapple with challenges such as poor infrastructure, limited access to quality healthcare and education, environmental degradation, and youth unemployment. These persistent issues raise questions about the efficacy of the Assembly's legislative contributions and the extent of its impact on the state's socioeconomic development. This study is necessary to critically evaluate the BSHA's legislative activities and their role in addressing Bayelsa's developmental challenges.

In addition to its legislative contributions, the BSHA is responsible for reviewing and approving the state's budget and shaping policies that influence development. These budgetary and policy functions grant the Assembly significant power to direct resources toward impactful initiatives. However, despite these powers, Bayelsa State remains plagued by resource mismanagement, underutilization of public funds, and widespread inequality (Soluap, n.d.). Questions arise about whether the BSHA has been able to effectively prioritize and implement budgetary and policy decisions that address the state's pressing developmental needs. Moreover, the lack of comprehensive documentation and analysis of its post-2013 legislative actions underscore the need for a systematic review of its recent contributions. This study investigates how the BSHA's budgetary and policy decisions have contributed to the state's growth, focusing on sectors such as infrastructure, education, healthcare, and environmental management, while identifying gaps that may hinder sustainable development.

The BSHA faces several challenges that affect its ability to perform its legislative and developmental roles effectively. Internally, factors such as limited resources, insufficient technical expertise, and operational inefficiencies may impact its capacity to enact and

oversee impactful legislation. Externally, the influence of political dynamics, including the relationship between the legislature and the executive, may shape the BSHA's autonomy and decision-making processes. These challenges necessitate a detailed examination of how they affect the Assembly's functions and its ability to address developmental needs in Bayelsa State (Ogbotubo and Fiemotongha, 2024). This study investigates these issues to better understand the institutional and external constraints influencing the BSHA's operations and their implications for governance and development. This research seeks to approach the subject with a focus on understanding the interplay between these challenges and the Assembly's performance without presupposing outcomes. By exploring factors such as resource allocation, legislative independence, and the broader political and institutional context, the study aims to highlight areas that may require strengthening. To this end, the aim of this study is to provide a platform to assess how these constraints shape the Assembly's ability to fulfill its mandate, ensuring that the findings are grounded in evidence rather than preconceptions.

Research Questions

1. How has the Bayelsa State House of Assembly (BSHA) contributed to the development of Bayelsa State and Nigeria?
2. What are the internal and external challenges and constraints faced by the BSHA, and how do they impact its ability to fulfil its mandate effectively?

Objectives of the Study

1. To evaluate the contributions of the Bayelsa State House of Assembly (BSHA) to the development of Bayelsa State and Nigeria.
2. To analyze the internal and external challenges and constraints affecting the BSHA's performance and their implications for governance and development.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the role of the Bayelsa State House of Assembly (BSHA) in promoting development within Bayelsa State and contributing to Nigeria's governance framework. By examining the Assembly's legislative, budgetary, and policy-making contributions, the research will shed light on its impact on critical areas such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, and economic development. This is particularly important given the state's unique position as an oil-producing region, which necessitates effective governance to ensure equitable resource allocation and sustainable growth.

Furthermore, the study addresses the challenges and constraints faced by the BSHA, offering insights into the institutional and external factors that limit its effectiveness. Policymakers, legislators, and stakeholders in Bayelsa State and beyond will benefit from the findings, which will provide evidence-based recommendations to strengthen legislative processes and enhance governance. Scholars and researchers will also find value in the study's contribution to the existing body of knowledge on sub-national

legislative systems in Nigeria. Ultimately, the research aims to inform strategies for improving the BSHA's capacity to drive development and fulfil its mandate, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on legislative efficiency and sustainable development.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The theoretical scope of this study focuses on legislative governance and its role in development, exploring how the Bayelsa State House of Assembly (BSHA) contributes to socio-economic growth and its challenges within a legislative-executive framework. It will also adopt theories explaining legislative-executive relations and institutional performance. The geographical scope is limited to Bayelsa State, Nigeria, with additional consideration of the BSHA's contributions to national development. The study will focus on understanding how its activities impact governance and development within the state and its interactions with national legislative frameworks. The time scope spans from 1999, marking the return to democracy in Nigeria and the inauguration of the BSHA, to the present. This period allows for an analysis of legislative trends, contributions, and challenges across multiple Assembly tenures. The study's limitations include potential gaps in access to detailed post-2013 legislative data and reliance on secondary sources, which may restrict comprehensive evaluation of more recent activities. Additionally, the research is focused on qualitative analysis, which may limit the scope for quantitative assessments of development outcomes. Despite these limitations, the study aims to provide a robust, evidence-based understanding of the BSHA's role and its developmental implications.

Literature Review

Overview of the Nigerian Legislative System

The Nigerian legislative system is a bicameral framework at the federal level, consisting of the Senate and the House of Representatives, while state legislatures operate as unicameral assemblies. These legislative bodies are tasked with lawmaking, oversight of the executive, and representation of the people, playing a critical role in Nigeria's democratic governance (Ojo, 2019; Fagbadebo, 2021). The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides the legal foundation for these institutions, assigning specific responsibilities to both federal and state legislatures. The Constitution emphasizes the principles of separation of powers, enabling the legislature to function independently in lawmaking, budget approval, and policy formulation (Olaopa, 2020).

State legislatures, including the Bayelsa State House of Assembly (BSHA), are integral to governance at the sub-national level, given Nigeria's federal system. They address localized issues by passing laws that reflect the peculiarities of their regions, such as environmental policies in oil-producing states like Bayelsa. However, the effectiveness of these state legislatures is often constrained by political interference and limited institutional capacity, which affects their ability to fulfill their constitutional mandates (Ogundiya & Baba, 2017; Arowolo, 2022). These challenges underscore the need for empirical research into the contributions and limitations of state legislative systems in Nigeria's governance framework.

History and Structure of the Bayelsa State House of Assembly

The BSHA was established in 1996 following the creation of Bayelsa State from Rivers State. It is a unicameral legislative body comprising 24 members representing the state's constituencies. The structure of the BSHA reflects Nigeria's broader legislative framework, with leadership positions including the Speaker, Deputy Speaker, Majority Leader, and Minority Leader (Soluap, n.d.; Osunkoya and Basiru, 2019). These roles are critical in facilitating legislative activities, ensuring the smooth passage of bills, and overseeing the implementation of policies. Since its inauguration in 1999, the BSHA has been actively involved in lawmaking, oversight, and representation. Between 1999 and 2003, the Assembly considered 80 bills, passing 33 into law, while in the subsequent term (2003–2007), it enacted 43 laws from 58 proposed bills. By 2013, a total of 133 laws had been enacted, demonstrating its active engagement in governance (Soluap, n.d.; Etekpe et al., 2015). Despite this legislative productivity, questions remain about the impact of these laws on the state's development, particularly in addressing persistent challenges such as poverty, infrastructure deficits, and environmental degradation. Understanding the BSHA's history and structure is crucial for evaluating its legislative contributions and identifying areas for institutional improvement.

Roles and Functions of the Bayelsa State House of Assembly

The BSHA performs three primary roles: lawmaking, oversight, and representation. Its lawmaking function involves drafting, debating, and passing bills that address the unique challenges of Bayelsa State. These include laws on environmental management, public health, and education, tailored to the needs of an oil-producing region (Bayelsa State Oil and Environmental Commission, 2023). For instance, laws aimed at regulating oil exploration and mitigating its environmental impacts are critical in a state heavily reliant on oil revenues. The oversight function enables the BSHA to monitor the executive's activities, ensuring accountability and transparency in public resource management. Through its committees, the Assembly reviews the implementation of laws and policies, evaluates budget performance, and investigates allegations of misconduct within the executive branch (Soluap, n.d.). Representation is another key function, where legislators advocate for their constituencies, addressing issues such as resource allocation, youth empowerment, and community development. However, these functions are often constrained by resource limitations and political interference, which reduce the Assembly's effectiveness in addressing the state's developmental challenges.

Theoretical Framework: The Principal-Agent Theory

The theoretical underpinning for this study is the Principal-Agent Theory, a framework that explores the dynamics of delegation and oversight in institutional relationships. In the context of governance, this theory conceptualizes the legislature as the principal and the executive as the agent. The principal delegates authority to the agent to implement laws, execute policies, and manage public resources, based on the understanding that the agent will act in the best interests of the principal and, by extension, the public. However, the Principal-Agent Theory also acknowledges that the interests of the agent and the principal may not always align, necessitating mechanisms for monitoring and

accountability (Bernhold & Wiesweg, 2021; Ramadhan et al., 2022). This theory is particularly relevant to legislative-executive relations, where effective oversight by the legislature is essential to ensure that the executive fulfills its mandate transparently and efficiently.

A key tenet of the Principal-Agent Theory is the presence of asymmetrical information, where the agent often has more information about policy implementation than the principal. This asymmetry can create opportunities for the agent to deviate from the principal's objectives, leading to governance inefficiencies or the pursuit of self-serving interests by the executive (Ramadhan et al., 2022). To mitigate these risks, the legislature employs various oversight mechanisms, such as budget reviews, public hearings, investigative committees, and legislative questioning. These tools enable the principal to monitor the agent's activities, reduce information gaps, and hold the executive accountable for its actions. In the context of the Bayelsa State House of Assembly (BSHA), the Principal-Agent Theory provides a useful lens for examining how the Assembly oversees the executive's activities, particularly in ensuring that public funds and resources are managed effectively to promote development in the state.

The application of the Principal-Agent Theory also highlights the challenges faced by legislative bodies in performing their oversight functions. Factors such as resource constraints, lack of technical expertise, and political interference can weaken the principal's capacity to monitor and control the agent effectively (Petrova & Andersson, 2024). In many cases, the executive's dominance in legislative-executive relations further exacerbates these challenges, undermining the legislature's autonomy and its ability to enforce accountability. For instance, in resource-rich states like Bayelsa, where the executive manages substantial oil revenues, the legislature's oversight role becomes even more critical in ensuring equitable resource distribution and effective policy implementation. However, the dominance of the executive and the potential for political interference may limit the Assembly's ability to fully exercise its powers. By applying the Principal-Agent Theory, this study aims to critically evaluate the BSHA's oversight functions, exploring how it navigates these challenges to fulfil its mandate and contribute to governance and development in Bayelsa State.

Review of Existing Literature on the Contributions of State Legislatures to Development

Empirical studies on the role of state legislatures in development highlight their potential to drive socioeconomic progress through lawmaking, budgetary oversight, and policy formulation. For example, a study by Ogundiya and Baba (2017) on state legislatures in Nigeria found that legislative actions significantly influence education and healthcare outcomes by prioritizing resource allocation and enacting supportive policies. Similarly, Onyango (2020) emphasizes the importance of legislative oversight in ensuring that state budgets are effectively implemented, particularly in resource-rich states like Bayelsa.

In the context of Bayelsa State, research by Amede & Ejumudo (2021) identifies the BSHA's legislative efforts in environmental management as a critical contribution to addressing the state's ecological challenges. Laws aimed at regulating oil exploration and mitigating environmental degradation have played a role in improving the quality of life for affected communities. However, the study also notes that implementation gaps and weak enforcement mechanisms often limit the impact of these laws. This underscores the need for a more robust legislative framework to ensure policy effectiveness.

Other studies have examined the challenges faced by state legislatures in Nigeria, highlighting issues such as political interference, resource constraints, and limited technical capacity (Olaopa, 2020; Okon, 2023). These challenges often hinder the ability of state assemblies to perform their functions effectively, reducing their impact on development. For instance, Arowolo (2022) notes that executive dominance in many Nigerian states undermines the legislature's autonomy, leading to suboptimal governance outcomes. This highlights the importance of strengthening institutional capacity and legislative independence to enhance the contributions of state legislatures to development.

In conclusion, existing literature underscores the critical role of state legislatures in driving development through lawmaking, oversight, and representation. However, challenges such as resource constraints, political interference, and weak institutional capacity often limit their effectiveness. This study aims to build on these insights by providing a comprehensive analysis of the BSHA's contributions to Bayelsa State's development and identifying strategies to address its challenges. By doing so, it contributes to the broader discourse on the role of sub-national legislatures in promoting sustainable development in Nigeria.

Methodology

Method of Data Collection

This study adopts a qualitative approach, relying on secondary data as the primary method of data collection (Borgstede & Scholz, 2021). Secondary data sources include official documents, records, and publications from the Bayelsa State House of Assembly (BSHA), as well as relevant academic literature and government reports. These sources provide comprehensive insights into the legislative, budgetary, and policy-making functions of the BSHA. By examining bills, laws, committee reports, and legislative proceedings, the study gathers evidence on the Assembly's contributions to the development of Bayelsa State and Nigeria. In the same vein, documents related to budgetary processes, oversight activities, and policy decisions are reviewed to assess the impact of the Assembly's legislative actions on socio-economic development. Publications such as state government reports, legislative briefs, and press releases from the BSHA serve as critical resources for understanding the Assembly's operations. Academic studies and policy analyses on sub-national legislatures in Nigeria supplement these sources by providing contextual and empirical perspectives. This method of data collection is particularly suited to the study's objectives, which include

evaluating the BSHA's contributions to development and analyzing the challenges it faces. By focusing on existing records and documents, the study provides a historical and institutional perspective on the Assembly's legislative activities. Moreover, this approach ensures that the analysis is grounded in evidence, enabling a thorough exploration of how the BSHA's functions intersect with governance and development outcomes. The use of secondary data also aligns with the study's qualitative nature, which prioritizes depth of analysis over numerical representation (Lim, 2024).

Data Analysis

The study employs content analysis as the primary method of data analysis for this study. Content analysis is a systematic and objective technique used to identify, categorize, and interpret patterns, themes, and relationships within textual data (Krippendorff, 2018). This method is particularly effective for examining legislative documents, policy reports, and other qualitative data, as it allows the researcher to draw meaningful insights about the BSHA's contributions to development and its operational challenges. Through this approach, the study identifies key legislative activities, such as the enactment of laws, oversight functions, and representation efforts, and evaluates their impact on governance and socio-economic outcomes in Bayelsa State. The analytical process involves coding and categorizing the data into thematic areas aligned with the study's objectives. This thematic organization facilitates a structured and detailed examination of the Assembly's activities, ensuring that the analysis addresses the research questions comprehensively (Hussain et al., 2023).

Data Analysis and Discussion

The Contribution of Bayelsa State House of Assembly to the Development of Bayelsa State

Legislative Contribution

Over the years, the BSHA has enacted numerous laws aimed at fostering socio-economic growth and addressing the unique challenges faced by the state. These legislative efforts have been instrumental in shaping the developmental trajectory of the State. A significant legislative contribution of the BSHA is the enactment of the Bayelsa State Income and Expenditure Transparency Law of 2012 also known as the Bayelsa State Transparency Law. The law was enacted to institutionalize transparency and accountability within the state's financial management systems. This legislation mandates the monthly publication of the state's income and expenditure statements, ensuring that financial operations are accessible to the public and subject to scrutiny. The law extends this obligation to local government chairmen, requiring them to disclose their financial activities regularly. This comprehensive approach aims to foster a culture of openness across all levels of government, thereby enhancing public trust and promoting good governance.

The implementation of this law has led to the institutionalization of monthly transparency briefings, where detailed financial reports are presented to the public. These briefings cover various aspects of the state's finances, including revenues, expenditures, and budget performance. For instance, in October 2024, the Bayelsa State

Government conducted a transparency briefing for the months of August and September, reaffirming its commitment to fiscal openness. During these sessions, officials provided insights into the state's financial health, discuss budgetary allocations, and address public inquiries, thereby reinforcing accountability and enabling citizens to engage meaningfully with governance processes. The emphasis on transparency has garnered recognition for Bayelsa State at both national and international levels. The state's adherence to the Transparency Law has been lauded as a model for other regions, highlighting the positive impact of open governance on development.

It is however important to note that despite the commendable strides made through the Bayelsa State Income and Expenditure Transparency Law, its implementation has faced several challenges over the years. These challenges have hindered the law's full potential in promoting transparency, accountability, and effective resource utilization for the state's development. One significant challenge has been inconsistent compliance with the law's provisions. While the law mandates the regular publication of income and expenditure reports, there have been instances where financial disclosures have been delayed or omitted entirely. This inconsistency undermines public trust and limits the ability of citizens and civil society organizations to hold government officials accountable. The lack of timely disclosures often results from administrative inefficiencies and a shortage of technical expertise in financial reporting systems, which hamper the state's ability to adhere strictly to the law's requirements.

Similarly, limited public access to financial reports and information dissemination channels has been identified as another critical issue hindering the effective implementation of the law. Although transparency briefings are conducted, the distribution of detailed financial data to the broader population remains inadequate. The reports are often made available to a select group of stakeholders, such as civil society organizations and media representatives, leaving the majority of the population without sufficient access to critical information. This limitation not only curtails widespread public engagement but also weakens the feedback mechanisms necessary for enhancing fiscal accountability and governance. Within the government also, there are political interference and resistance from vested interests. Some public officials view the law as a threat to their discretionary power over financial management, leading to deliberate non-compliance or manipulation of disclosed data. This resistance undermines the spirit of the law and compromises the integrity of financial disclosures, ultimately reducing its impact on governance and development outcomes.

Moving away from the Bayelsa State Transparency Law, within the realm of education, in a bid to promote human capital development, the BSHA passed the Right to Education Law, which obliges parents and guardians, as well as the government, to ensure that children are enrolled in school up to the age of 18. This legislation underscores the Assembly's dedication to human capital development by aiming to increase literacy rates and equip the youth with essential skills for future employment. By prioritizing education, the law seeks to lay a foundation for sustainable development and economic

growth in Bayelsa State. Environmental management has also been a focal point of the BSHA's legislative agenda. Given the state's vulnerability to environmental challenges, the Assembly has enacted laws aimed at regulating activities that impact the environment, such as oil exploration and waste management. These laws are designed to mitigate environmental degradation and promote sustainable development, ensuring that economic activities do not compromise the ecological balance of the state. By addressing environmental concerns, the BSHA contributes to the long-term health and well-being of its citizens.

Budgetary contributions

The BSHA plays a pivotal role in the state's budgeting and appropriation processes, significantly influencing Bayelsa's developmental trajectory. As the legislative arm of the state government, the BSHA is constitutionally empowered to scrutinize, amend, and approve the annual budget presented by the executive branch. This function ensures that proposed expenditures align with the state's developmental priorities and the welfare of its citizens. It was in line with this duty that in October 2024, Governor Douye Diri presented a budget proposal of ₦689.4 billion, titled the "Budget of ASSURED Prosperity," to the BSHA for consideration and approval. The Assembly's review process involves detailed examinations of revenue projections and expenditure plans, allowing for adjustments that reflect the state's socio-economic objectives.

The BSHA's involvement in budgeting extends beyond mere approval; it encompasses active participation in setting fiscal policies and priorities. By engaging in debates and consultations, the Assembly ensures that budgetary allocations address critical sectors such as infrastructure, education, healthcare, and environmental management. For example, during the presentation of the 2024 budget, Governor Diri highlighted the Assembly's earlier approval of the 2024-2026 Medium Term Expenditure Framework and Fiscal Strategy Paper, which guided the budget's formulation. This collaborative approach between the executive and legislative branches facilitates a comprehensive assessment of the state's financial health and developmental needs, promoting transparency and accountability in public resource management. The BSHA's budgetary decisions have a profound impact on Bayelsa State's development. By allocating funds to priority areas, the Assembly influences the pace and quality of socio-economic progress. For instance, increased budgetary provisions for infrastructure have enabled the construction and rehabilitation of roads and bridges, enhanced connectivity and stimulating economic activities. Similarly, substantial investments in education and healthcare have improved human capital development, contributing to poverty reduction and overall well-being. The Assembly's oversight function ensures that allocated funds are utilized effectively, with mechanisms in place to monitor and evaluate the implementation of budgeted projects and programs. However, the BSHA faces challenges that can impede its budgetary contributions to development. Constraints such as limited technical expertise, political interference, and resource limitations can affect the Assembly's capacity to perform its budgetary functions optimally. Addressing these challenges is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of the

BSHA's role in budgeting and appropriation. Strengthening institutional capacities, promoting legislative independence, and fostering a culture of accountability are essential steps toward ensuring that the Assembly's budgetary decisions translate into tangible developmental outcomes for Bayelsa State.

Policy Contributions

As the legislative arm of the state government, the BSHA is constitutionally empowered to enact laws and establish frameworks that guide the executive branch in policy execution. This legislative authority enables the Assembly to influence various sectors, including education, healthcare, infrastructure, and environmental management, thereby shaping the state's developmental agenda. Through its legislative functions, the BSHA not only creates policies but also ensures their alignment with the socio-economic needs of Bayelsa State's populace. A notable example of the BSHA's policy contribution is the enactment of the Right to Education Law under Governor Henry Seriake Dickson's administration. This legislation obligates parents, guardians, and the government to ensure that children are enrolled in school up to the age of 18. By mandating compulsory education, the law aims to enhance literacy rates and human capital development, which are critical for the state's socio-economic progress. The BSHA's role in passing this law underscores its commitment to fostering an educated and skilled workforce, essential for sustainable development.

In the healthcare sector, the BSHA has been instrumental in establishing policies that improve healthcare delivery. The Assembly's legislative support facilitated the creation of the Bayelsa State Health Insurance Scheme, designed to provide accessible and affordable healthcare services to residents. This scheme has become a reference point among health administrators in Nigeria, with over 100,000 beneficiaries and funding for 1,771 surgeries since its inception. The BSHA's legislative backing was crucial in institutionalizing this scheme, demonstrating its role in enhancing the state's healthcare system. The BSHA also contributes to environmental policy formulation, addressing the state's ecological challenges. Under Governor Dickson's tenure, the Assembly supported the establishment of the Bayelsa State Oil and Environmental Commission, tasked with investigating environmental degradation caused by oil exploration. This initiative reflects the Assembly's commitment to environmental preservation and sustainable development. By enacting laws that regulate environmental practices, the BSHA aims to mitigate ecological damage and promote the well-being of its citizens. In summary, the Bayelsa State House of Assembly significantly influences the state's development through its legislative and policy-making functions. By formulating and implementing policies in education, healthcare, and environmental management, the BSHA addresses critical developmental challenges. Its legislative actions have led to improved literacy rates, enhanced healthcare delivery, and proactive environmental preservation, collectively contributing to the socio-economic advancement of Bayelsa State.

The Contribution of Bayelsa State House of Assembly to the Development of Nigeria

National legislative contributions

The BSHA over the years has made significant contributions to the state's development through its legislative activities, particularly as it relates to national legislation. By engaging in the legislative process at the national level, the BSHA has played a crucial role in shaping policies that directly impact Bayelsa State's socio-economic growth and governance. One of the primary avenues through which the BSHA contributes to national legislation is by acting as a breeding ground for the state's representatives to the National Assembly. These representatives, including senators and members of the House of Representatives, advocate for the state's interests in national legislative matters. For instance, Senator Konbowei Benson, who served in the BSHA from 2007 to 2019 and held the position of Speaker, transitioned to the National Assembly, where he continues to represent and promote the interests of Bayelsa State at the federal level.

Beyond the above, the house also engages in collaborative efforts with the National Assembly to ensure that federal laws and policies consider the unique needs and challenges of the State. By providing input during the drafting and review of national legislation, the BSHA helps to shape laws that address issues such as environmental degradation, resource allocation, and infrastructural development, which are critical to the state's progress. This collaborative approach ensures that national policies are inclusive and reflective of the diverse needs of Nigeria's federating units. Similarly, the BSHA has been instrumental in the domestication of national laws, adapting them to the specific context of Bayelsa State. By enacting state-level legislation that aligns with federal laws, the BSHA ensures coherence in the legal framework, facilitating effective implementation and enforcement. This process not only reinforces the rule of law but also promotes uniformity in governance practices across different levels of government. Through active participation in the national legislative process, collaboration with federal lawmakers, and domestication of national laws, the BSHA has ensured that Bayelsa State's interests are adequately represented and addressed. These efforts have led to the formulation of policies that foster socio-economic growth, environmental sustainability, and improved governance within the state.

A major issue to note in the contribution of the BSHA is the role it played in the emergence of His Excellency, Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan in becoming Acting Governor, Governor, Vice President and President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Observably, the BSHA has the highest number of impeachment cases, it also had about the highest number of Speakers and one of the highest in terms of law makers who moved to the either the National House of Representatives and the Senate. This is quest commendable.

Intergovernmental Relations

In the course of carrying out its legislative duties, the BSHA has actively engaged in intergovernmental relations, collaborating with the National Assembly and other state legislatures to advance the state's development. This engagement is crucial in a federal system like Nigeria's, where cooperation across different government levels enhances

policy coherence and addresses shared challenges. The BSHA's interactions with the National Assembly have been instrumental in ensuring that federal legislation considers Bayelsa State's unique interests, particularly concerning environmental and economic issues stemming from its status as a core Niger Delta state. By liaising with federal lawmakers, the BSHA has advocated for policies that mitigate environmental degradation and promote sustainable development in the region.

Collaboration between the BSHA and other state legislatures has also been pivotal in addressing common regional challenges. For instance, the BSHA has participated in joint legislative retreats and conferences with neighboring states to harmonize laws and policies, particularly those related to security, economic development, and environmental protection (A case in reference is the onshore-offshore oil dichotomy saga between the oil producing states of the Niger Delta and the Federal Government of Nigeria). These collaborative efforts have facilitated the sharing of best practices and the formulation of unified strategies to tackle issues such as revenue allocation, environmental protection, sea piracy, cultism, and kidnapping, which are prevalent in the Niger Delta region. Such inter-state legislative cooperation enhances the effectiveness of laws and policies, leading to improved security and economic outcomes for Bayelsa State.

The impact of these intergovernmental relations on Bayelsa State's development is significant. Through its engagement with the National Assembly, the BSHA has influenced federal budget allocations and development programs, ensuring that Bayelsa State receives its fair share of national resources. This has resulted in increased federal investments in infrastructure, healthcare, and education within the state, thereby accelerating socio-economic development. Moreover, the harmonization of policies with other state legislatures has led to a more stable and secure environment, fostering economic activities and attracting investments to the state. By effectively collaborating with the National Assembly and other state legislatures, the BSHA has ensured that the state's unique challenges are addressed within the broader national framework. These efforts have culminated in enhanced security, improved infrastructure, and overall socio-economic growth, underscoring the importance of intergovernmental collaboration in a federal system.

Economic contributions

The BSHA has played a very critical role in the state's economic development through its legislative functions, particularly in budgeting and appropriation. By scrutinizing and approving the state's annual budget, the BSHA ensures that financial resources are allocated effectively to sectors critical for economic growth, such as infrastructure, education, and healthcare. For example, in October 2024, Governor Douye Diri presented a budget proposal of ₦689.4 billion, titled the "Budget of ASSURED Prosperity," to the BSHA for consideration. The Assembly's thorough review and subsequent approval of such budgets facilitate the implementation of development projects that stimulate economic activities and improve the standard of living for Bayelsans.

Beyond fiscal oversight, the BSHA has enacted laws that create an enabling environment for business and investment. Legislation aimed at improving the ease of doing business, protecting property rights, and ensuring contract enforcement has attracted both local and foreign investors to Bayelsa State. This legislative framework has led to job creation, increased revenue generation, and overall economic diversification, reducing the state's dependence on oil revenues and fostering sustainable economic development. The BSHA has also been instrumental in human capacity building, serving as a training ground for political leaders who have ascended to higher positions of authority. Notable examples include:

Table 1: Notable Career Advancements from the BSHA to the National Level

Name	Position(s) Held
Rt Hon Senator Lokpobiri Heineken	Former Member and Speaker, later served as Senator and Minister
Rt Hon Peremobowei Ebebi	Former Member and Speaker, subsequently Deputy Governor
Late Hon Foingha Jephtha	Former Member, later served in the House of Representatives
Rt Hon Werinipre Davidson Seibarugu	Former Speaker, later Deputy Governor and Acting Governor
Late Rt Hon Nestor Binabor	Former Acting Governor
Rt Hon Boyelayefa Debekeme	Former Board Chairman of FRCN and National Neuropsychiatric Hospital, Uselu, Edo State
Rt Hon Tonye Isenah	Presently Chairman, Bayelsa State Housing Authority
Hon Dr Akpe	Chief of Staff to the Governor
Hon Chief Dr Johnson Alalibo Sinikiem	Resident Electoral Commissioner, INEC
Hon Dr Gentle Emelah Epelifa	Commissioner of Education
Hon Belief Nelson	Former Member, House of Representatives
Hon Dr Obuebite Robinson	Former Commissioner of Education
Hon Dr O.O.O. Osusu	Former Commissioner of Education, now Associate Professor at Niger Delta University
Hon Kurokegha Dorgu	Former Chairman, Bayelsa Housing Authority
Hon Nadu Karibo	Former Member, House of Representatives
Hon Dein Benadoumene	Chairman, House of Assembly Service Commission
Hon Adolphus Ofongo	Former Chairman, Bayelsa State Local Government Service Commission
Rt Hon Senator Benson Konbowei	Now Senator
Hon Barr Dein Benadoumene	Now Chairman, Bayelsa State House of Assembly Service Commission
Hon Dr Parkinson Macmanuel	Now a PhD holder and for Commissioner and SA to the Governor
Hon Amalayon Yousou	Now a PhD holder.
Hon Target Segibo	Now Executive Chairman Southern Ijaw LGA
Hon Nein Oniye	Now Executive Chairman, Ekeremor LGA
Hon Chief Sunny Goli	Former House of Reps Now a Traditional Ruler
HON David Obuma	Now A Traditional Ruler
Hon Ayiba Duba	For Commissioner...Former
BEN Ololo	Now Commissioner,
Alaboh Hon Bright Erewara	Held several positions out the Assembly
Hon Angus Dide	Still serving the State and Country in diverse capabilities
Hon Vivien Ere	Still serving the State and Country in diverse capabilities
Hon Dr Komonibo Ebiondu	Still serving the State and Country in diverse capabilities
Hon Charles Emmanuel	Still serving the State and Country in diverse capabilities
Hon Chief Augustus Osomu	Still serving the State and Country in diverse areas

Source: Compiled by Author, 2024

These transitions underscore the BSHA's function as a crucible for leadership development, equipping individuals with legislative and governance experience that benefits both the state and the nation. In summary, the Bayelsa State House of Assembly has significantly contributed to the state's economic development through prudent budgetary oversight, the enactment of business-friendly legislation, and the cultivation of leaders who have progressed to influential roles. These efforts have collectively enhanced governance, promoted economic growth, and improved the quality of life for the people of Bayelsa State.

Challenges and Constraints

Internal Challenges

The BSHA faces several internal challenges that significantly impact its ability to contribute effectively to the state's development. A primary challenge is the inadequate financial resources allocated to the Assembly, which limits its operational capacity. Insufficient funding affects the Assembly's ability to conduct oversight functions, organize public hearings, and engage in legislative research critical for informed decision-making. Without adequate financial autonomy, the Assembly becomes dependent on the executive branch for resources, undermining its independence and ability to act as an effective check on executive power (Oladele et al., 2021). Additionally, the BSHA grapples with insufficient technical expertise and professional development among its members and staff. Many legislators lack the specialized knowledge and skills required to draft complex legislation, analyze policy proposals, or scrutinize budgetary allocations effectively. This skill gap reduces the quality of legislative outputs and hinders the Assembly's capacity to address the state's multifaceted developmental challenges.

The internal organizational structure of the BSHA also poses challenges to its functionality. Weak institutional frameworks and inadequate administrative processes often lead to inefficiencies in legislative operations. One key example here is that delays in legislative proceedings and committee meetings can result in missed opportunities to address pressing issues. In the same vein, the lack of robust mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of laws and policies further diminishes the Assembly's developmental impact. This internal inefficiency is exacerbated by limited engagement with stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector, which restricts the flow of diverse perspectives into the legislative process. Without active stakeholder engagement, the Assembly risks enacting laws and policies that fail to align with the actual needs and aspirations of Bayelsa's citizens.

These internal challenges have a cascading impact on the Assembly's contributions to development. The lack of financial and technical capacity undermines the BSHA's ability to oversee executive actions effectively, leading to governance inefficiencies and suboptimal resource allocation. The limited institutional efficiency also affects the Assembly's ability to respond promptly to emerging socio-economic issues, weakening its relevance in addressing the state's developmental priorities. To overcome these

constraints, there is a need for targeted reforms, including increased funding, capacity-building programs for legislators and staff, and the establishment of efficient administrative structures. Addressing these internal challenges is crucial for enhancing the BSHA's effectiveness and ensuring its role as a driver of sustainable development in Bayelsa State.

External Challenges

The BSHA operates within a broader political and institutional framework that presents several external challenges, significantly impacting its effectiveness in driving the state's development. A critical external challenge is the dominance of the executive branch, which often undermines the Assembly's independence. In many cases, the executive wields substantial influence over the legislature, particularly through control of financial resources and political pressure. This dominance can limit the Assembly's ability to perform its oversight functions effectively or to challenge executive decisions that may not align with the state's developmental needs (Oladele et al., 2021). Such an imbalance in the legislative-executive relationship creates a governance dynamic where the BSHA may prioritize the executive's agenda over its constitutional mandate to represent the interests of the people.

Another significant external challenge is political interference and partisan pressures, which often disrupt the Assembly's legislative processes. Political parties and influential stakeholders frequently exert pressure on legislators to prioritize partisan interests over developmental goals. This interference can result in legislative gridlock, delays in passing critical bills, or the enactment of laws that lack broad-based support. Furthermore, the external political climate, particularly during election cycles, often shifts legislators' focus from governance to political survival. This tendency not only distracts from developmental priorities but also exacerbates the public's perception of the legislature as a politically motivated institution rather than a developmental partner (Odalonu, 2020).

The broader socio-economic and security challenges in Bayelsa State also present external constraints on the BSHA's effectiveness. Issues such as poverty, youth unemployment, and security threats, including militancy and piracy in the Niger Delta region, create a complex environment for legislative governance. These challenges often require urgent legislative responses, but external pressures can limit the Assembly's capacity to address them adequately. Additionally, the federal government's management of the state's oil revenues, which often bypasses the legislature, further constrains the BSHA's ability to influence resource allocation effectively (Odalonu, 2020).

The impact of these external challenges on Bayelsa State's development is profound. Executive dominance and political interference weaken the legislature's ability to hold the executive accountable, resulting in governance inefficiencies and suboptimal use of resources. Furthermore, the lack of legislative autonomy hampers the Assembly's ability to enact transformative policies that address pressing socio-economic and security

issues. Overcoming these external challenges will require strengthening institutional safeguards to protect legislative independence, fostering collaborative governance frameworks that prioritize development over politics, and addressing systemic issues such as equitable resource allocation. These measures are essential for empowering the BSHA to fulfill its developmental mandate effectively.

Recommendations

1. The independence of the Legislature should be encouraged greatly. This will give the law makers the opportunity to engage issues without sentiments.
2. The issue of financial autonomy is highly recommended if we must abide by the tenets of democracy.
3. Incessant suspension of members should be the last resort for erring members as harmonious relationship remains an important virtue a State House of Assembly should imbibe. Alternative means of dispute settlement should be encouraged.
4. Since leadership is service and development is people centered, private sponsored member bills should be encouraged as they are more in the interest of the people.

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