



## Operationalization of Financial Autonomy for the Office of the Auditor-General

The Nasarawa State Public Audit Law 2021<sup>127</sup> signed by Governor Abdullahi Sule on 28th June 2021 is the statutory legal framework for public audit function in Nasarawa State.

S.13(1)(b) & (c) of the law states that “the Auditor General shall prepare and submit to the House of Assembly at least 120 days before the beginning of each year the estimate of revenues and expenditure for inclusion in the State budget; and the operational, administrative and capital expenses of the State Audit Office including salaries, allowances, gratuities and pensions payable to staff”.

S.13(4) indicates further that “Any sum appropriated to the Audit Office by the State House of Assembly in each financial year shall be charged upon the Consolidated Revenue Fund of the State and paid as a first line charge in equal installments every month of the year”.

There is no evidence that this provision to ensure financial autonomy for Nasarawa State Auditor-General has been operational since June 2021 when the law was signed by Governor Abdullahi Sule. This is despite the issuance of letter of instructions<sup>128</sup> by the Secretary to the Government of Nasarawa State - Barr. Muhammad Aliyu directing relevant agencies of government to commence implementation of the law. Financial autonomy and operational independence for Supreme Audit Institutions especially at subnational level are foundational pillars of achieving public accountability. It is imperative that the Executive arm in Nasarawa State fully comply with the provisions of the law to ensure that the Auditor-General remains independent, able to perform his/her statutory functions and not subjected to the direction or control of any individual or authority due to financial constraints.

## Exemplary Tenure for the State Auditor-General

S.10(b) of the Nasarawa State Public Audit Law 2021 indicates that “The Auditor General shall serve for a four (4) year tenure, which will be deemed renewed, until he/she attains the retirement age of sixty (60) years”.

The legal provisions above governing the tenure of the Auditor-General in Nasarawa State clarifies the

maximum term and number of years an Auditor-General in Nasarawa State can spend with an age limit of sixty (60) years set. Term of office for AuGs must be well defined, consistent and predictable to guarantee their independence. This will further ensure that an Auditor-General is not subjected to the direction or control of any person on the account of tenure instability.

## Audit Mandate Execution

Beyond the annual financial audit, the Auditor-General for Nasarawa State should conduct other types of audits including compliance audit and performance audit. This would ensure adherence to fiscal and procurement regulations by government agencies and guarantee value for money on programs and projects implemented by the government of Nasarawa State.

<sup>127</sup> <https://nasarawastate.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Nasarawa-State-Public-Audit-Law-2021.pdf>

<sup>128</sup> <https://nasarawastate.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ssg.pdf>



## Effectiveness of Public Accounts Committee

There are no indications the Public Accounts Committee of the House of Assembly in Nasarawa State has reviewed the State Auditor-General's report for 2020. It is equally not clear how much backlog of reports the Committee is yet to review. The effectiveness of the Public Accounts Committee in reviewing audit reports on the accounts of Nasarawa State and making recommendations to correct public finance management gaps could not be ascertained during this research

exercise as relevant officials did not provide required information despite repeated engagements. The role of the Public Accounts Committee in ensuring timely review of annual audit reports cannot be overemphasized and very crucial to concluding the audit action cycle for proper accountability. Recommendations of Public Accounts Committee to improve accountability in the utilization of public funds must also be taken seriously and implemented as quickly as possible.

## Citizens' Participation in the Audit Process

The 2020 report of the Auditor-General for Nasarawa State is not accessible to the public, only the 2020 Financial Statement<sup>129</sup> is available however, without an audit certificate. There is no evidence citizens or Civil Society Organizations are actively involved in the Nasarawa State audit process. Lack of access to the complete report of the Auditor-General is responsible for low participation of citizens in the audit process of Nasarawa State especially in using audit information to demand accountability or engagement with the Office of the Auditor-General and Public Accounts Committee.

Citizens should be involved in audit planning and execution by the Auditor-General and the review exercise carried out by the Public Accounts Committee. It is important that citizens who are mostly affected by audit issues and public finance management gaps can engage with the Office of the Auditor-General and Public Accounts Committee to ensure their opinions and experiences reflect in planning and executing audit functions as well as the oversight role of the state's Parliament.

<sup>129</sup> [https://openstates.ng/nasarawa/dataset/738/nasarawa-state%20state%20audited%20statement%20report%20\(financial%20statement\)%20document%20for%20the%20year%202020](https://openstates.ng/nasarawa/dataset/738/nasarawa-state%20state%20audited%20statement%20report%20(financial%20statement)%20document%20for%20the%20year%202020)