

Legal Framework and Operationalization

Financial Autonomy not Operational

The Rivers State Audit Law 2020 and the Rivers State Audit (Amendment) Law 2021⁶⁵ signed by Governor Nyesom Wike in December 2020 and December 2021 respectively provides for financial autonomy for the Office of the Auditor-General. S.25(1)(a) of the principal law indicates that “the Office of the Auditor-General shall prepare and submit to the House of Assembly not later than 90days before the beginning of each year its estimates of revenue and expenditure for the next financial year”.

Furthermore, S.25(3) provided for in the amendment indicates that “the sum appropriated for the Office of the Auditor-General by the House of Assembly of the State in each financial year shall be charged on the Consolidated Revenue Fund of the State and paid as a first line charge in twelve equal installments for each month of that financial year”.

No evidence was provided to prove the legal provisions stated above are being implemented in Rivers State. Also, none of the officials from the Office of the Accountant-General, Office of the Auditor-General and House of Assembly responded to the SAE index questionnaire despite repeated engagements. Effectively implementing the audit law to allow for fiscal independence as provided for in the legal framework is necessary to enhance the optimal performance of the foremost accountability institution in Rivers State and enable it to implement freely and without interference its audit plans and programs.

Administrative Autonomy not Activated

There is no indication the Audit Service Board in Rivers State has been inaugurated since assenting to the amended audit law in 2021. However,

S.29A(1) of the State Audit Law established the State Audit Service Board with functions to include promotion of staff as recommended by the Auditor-General and commence disciplinary processes against any staff as requested by the Auditor-General among others.

A fully functional State Audit Service Board would guarantee administrative independence for the Office of the Auditor-General of Rivers State and limit reliance on the Civil Service Commission of the State for all human resource matters relating to recruitment, discipline, promotion, and remuneration for staff of the Office of the Auditor-General.

Appointment Procedure for the State Auditor-General is Transparent

The process for appointing the Auditor-General in Rivers State as provided for in the legal framework is transparent and competitive. S.2(2) of the State Audit Law provides that “the Civil Service Commission shall 6 months prior to the expiration of the term of a substantive Auditor-General: (a) advertise the vacancy for interested and qualified persons to apply and (b) schedule examination and interviews for the applicants and recommend the 3 best qualified candidates to the Governor”.

Tenure of Office for the Auditor-General is Secured

The Rivers State Audit (Amendment) Law 2021 provides for a secured tenure for the Auditor-General. S.3 of the Law amended S.3(1) of the principal law by providing for a new paragraph (f) which states that “a candidate applying for the position of Auditor-General shall not be more than 56 years of age on the date of appointment”.

65-https://plsinitiative.org/audit_laws/rivers-state/

Also, S.4 of the principal audit law indicates that "subject to section 127(2) of the Constitution, the Auditor-General and Auditor-General for Local Government shall remain in office until he has attained the retirement age of 60 years".

The legal provisions stated above clarifies the maximum number of years an Auditor-General can spend in office. Term of office for an Auditor-General 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.

Legal Mandate to Publish Audit Reports Online not Available

Neither the Rivers State Audit Law 2020 nor the Rivers State Audit (Amendment) Law 2021 provides the legal mandate for reports of the Auditor-General to be published on an electronic portal to enable citizens access freely.

While S.11(1) of the Audit (Amendment) Law provides that "subject to the Constitution and in the exercise of his function under this Law, the Auditor-General shall be independent and shall not be subject to the direction or control of any other authority or person including but not limited to the following areas: (h) publishing and disseminating audit reports, once they have been formally submitted to the House of Assembly", the section did not provide for audit reports to be published online.

Annual Activity Report for 2021 not Submitted to HoA

There is no evidence the Office of the Auditor-General for Rivers State submitted an annual activity report for 2021 financial year to the State House of Assembly. However, S.11(6) of the Audit (Amendment) Law indicates that "the Auditor-General shall submit Annual Activity Reports to the House of Assembly setting out: (a) the

financial and non-financial impact achieved by the Office; (b) progress made with improving its human capital; (c) challenges and mitigations in course of fulfilling its mandates; (d) support received from various sources and (e) any other relevant information on the activities of the Audit Office in the year".

Audited Financial Statement for 2021 Published Online

There is no evidence the Office of the Auditor-General for Rivers State published the full audit report for 2021 financial year online. What is available to citizens is the audited financial statement for the year ended 31st December

2021⁶⁶. Making the full audit report freely available to citizens enhances civic advocacy and investigative journalism on public finance management practices using audit information.

Implementation Status of Audit Recommendations for 2020 not Available

The status of implementation of audit recommendations and House resolutions for 2020 financial year was not provided as state officials did not respond to the SAE Index questionnaire. Also, it is not evident if the Office of the Auditor-

General and House of Assembly in Rivers State has effective mechanisms for monitoring implementations of audit recommendations and resolutions.

No Evidence of Performance Audit for 2021

The Office of the Auditor-General for Rivers State did not produce a performance audit report on any government project, program or policy in 2021 that is separate from the annual audit report. Best practice requires that a performance audit be conducted on projects, programs or policies implemented by the Executive and a report produced, submitted to Parliament and published online for members of the public.

Performance audit refers to an independent examination of a program, function, operation or the management systems and procedures of a governmental entity to assess whether the entity is achieving economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in the employment of available resources.

Citizens' Accountability Report for 2021 not Published Online

The Rivers State Government did not publish online the Citizens' Accountability Report for the 2021 financial year.

A Citizens' Accountability Report (CAR) is a series of graphic and tabular illustrations of the contents of the Audited Financial Statements prepared by a

government agency on behalf of the government to the citizens to ensure accountability of public funds. This report details the government's performance in carrying out the duties assigned to it and the utilization of funds in the coffers of the government.

CS/Media Actors not Involved in the Audit Process

There is no indication that civil society and media actors are involved in the audit process of Rivers State, especially because civic actors do not have access to the full report of the Auditor-General on the account of the Rivers State Government.

It is important that civic groups who are mostly affected by audit issues and public finance

management gaps can use audit information to 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.

PAC Review of 2021 Audit Report not Started

There is no proof the Public Accounts Committee of Rivers State House of Assembly has reviewed the 2021 report of the Auditor-General on the account of Rivers State Government. The PAC did not respond to the SAE Index questionnaire despite repeated engagements. There's also no indication the PAC has any mechanism for monitoring implementation of its recommendations.

The PAC is encouraged to improve its effectiveness and ensure reports of the Auditor-

General for 2021 and other pending audit reports are given expeditious consideration. The PAC should also involve civil society and media actors when reviewing audit reports and ensure its resolutions reflect the experiences and feedback from citizen groups particularly those who are victims of audit findings and other public accountability gaps.