

LEGAL FRAMEWORK & OPERATIONALIZATION

FINANCIAL AUTONOMY NOT OPERATIONAL

The Katsina State Audit (amendment) Law enacted in November 2021 provides for financial autonomy of the Office of the Auditor-General. S.29(1) and (2) of the Katsina State Audit Law 2020 indicates that “funding of the salaries and overheads of the State Auditor-General shall be in accordance with the appropriation act of the State House of Assembly. Any amount standing to the credit of the State Auditor General in the annual appropriation Bill shall be paid on a first line charge to the State Auditor-General and disbursed as approved by the State House of Assembly”.

Also, S.14(d) of the Katsina State Audit (Amendment) Law 2021 states that “the Auditor Generals are to submit draft annual estimates directly to the State House of Assembly, make any necessary amendments after receiving comments from the State House of Assembly and then submits the amended estimates to the Ministry of Budget for inclusion in the appropriation bill, no changes shall be made to the estimates submitted by the Auditor Generals to the Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning without the prior agreement of the State House of Assembly, and; the Executive must not control or direct access to the resources of the Auditor Generals/Offices.”

Feedback received showed that the financial autonomy clause is not operational and the Office of the Auditor-General for Katsina State is dependent on its auditee (the Executive arm) for its finances. The inability of the Executive to ensure effective implementation of the audit law to allow for fiscal independence for the Audit Office continues to hinder the optimal performance of the foremost accountability institution in Katsina State as it is unable to implement its audit plans and programs freely and without interference.

ADMINISTRATIVE INDEPENDENCE ACTIVATED

Response collected revealed that the Katsina State Audit Service Commission was inaugurated in December 2020. The Commission has executed activities relating to

employment and promotion of staff at the Office of the Auditor-General for the State and Local Governments. This is in compliance with S.4(1) and (2) of the Katsina State Audit Law 2020 which established the Commission and S.12(2) which provided for its powers and functions to include the power to promote and confirm appointments of persons employed by the Commission and dismiss and exercise disciplinary control over such persons holding or acting in such offices among others.

The inauguration of the State Audit Service Commission is one of the positive impacts of the enacted Audit Law of Katsina State which is contributing to strengthening the Office of the Auditor-General administratively especially by ensuring that human resource issues are addressed through the State Audit Service Commission rather than through the Civil Service Commission.

APPOINTMENT PROCEDURE FOR THE STATE AUDITOR-GENERAL IS TRANSPARENT

The process for appointing the Auditor-General in Katsina State as provided for in the Audit Law is transparent and competitive. Although S.23(1) of the principal law states that “the Auditor-General shall be appointed by the Governor on the recommendation of the State Civil Service Commission, subject to the confirmation by the House of Assembly”, S.10 of the Katsina State Audit (Amendment) Law provides that “in recommending person(s) for appointment as Auditors-General, the State Civil Service Commission shall advertise the vacancy on the State's website, in two (2) national newspapers, the official gazette, and procurement journal for a minimum period of six weeks before the date set for interview. The State Civil Service Commission shall interview the applicants and recommend the top three candidates to the Governor”.

TENURE OF OFFICE FOR THE AUDITOR-GENERAL IS SECURED BUT LACKS CONSISTENCY

The Katsina State Audit Law provides for a secured tenure for the Auditor-General. S. 25 of the principal law which has been amended states that “the Auditor-General shall remain in office until he has attained the age of sixty (60) years and shall not be more than fifty-six (56)

62. SAE Index 2024 Research Survey
63. SAE Index 2024 Research Survey

years at the time of first appointment”.

The law provided for a maximum term of four years for any Auditor-General appointed for the State. 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 IS AVAILABLE

The Katsina State Audit Law provides the legal basis for reports of the Auditor-General to be published and made available to citizens. S.42(2) indicates that “the Auditor-General’s Report shall be published and made available to the public after its submission to the House of Assembly; this shall be on demand and non-payment of a minimal fee.

ANNUAL ACTIVITY REPORT FOR 2023 NOT PUBLISHED

The Office of the Auditor-General for Katsina State did not publish for public access its annual activity report for the 2023 fiscal year. It is not evident if the report was submitted to the Hous of Assembly. However, S.43(1) of the Katsina State Audit Law provides that “the Auditor-General shall prepare and submit to the Public Accounts Committee, on a quarterly basis, a report on the performance and operation of the Office of the Auditor-General”.

Also, S.43(2) indicates that “the Auditor-General shall submit annually to the Public Accounts Committee a copy of annual performance and financial audit report with respect to the Office of the Auditor-General. The report shall include a report on the extent to which the Auditor-General achieved his/her annual plan and audited financial statements of the Office of the Auditor-General.

Nonetheless, an annual activity report for the Audit Office should include the specific initiatives and activities undertaken during the previous/outgoing calendar year to strengthen the office and improve its performance as well as any impacts (financial and non-financial) that were achieved through audit.

AUDIT REPORT FOR 2023 PUBLISHED ONLINE

The Office of the Auditor-General for Katsina State published the audit report for 2023¹⁰⁰ financial year on a dedicated website. The report contains audit issues, observations and recommendations. Making the audit report freely available to citizens enhances civic advocacy and investigative journalism using audit information.

IMPLEMENTATION REPORT OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2022 ONGOING

Response received showed that implementation of audit recommendations and resolutions of the House of Assembly for the 2022 financial year are ongoing. However, it is not evident if the Office of the Auditor-General and House of Assembly in Katsina State has effective mechanisms for monitoring implementation of audit recommendations and resolutions.

PERFORMANCE AUDIT REPORT FOR 2022 AVAILABLE BUT NOT STANDARDIZED

The Office of the Auditor-General for Katsina State conducted performance audit on the Katsina State Ranch Programme implemented through the Department of Livestock and Grazing Reserves.. However, the performance audit report should have been more comprehensive, conformed with international standards and published as a separate document from the annual statutory audit report. The Audit Office included findings on performance audit conducted into the annual report of the Auditor-General (pages 190 - 197). Notwithstanding, best practice requires that a separate report on performance audit conducted be produced, submitted to Parliament and made available to 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 2023 NOT AVAILABLE

The Katsina State Government did not publish the Citizens' Accountability Report for 2023.

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.

PAC REVIEW OF 2023 AUDIT REPORT STARTED

The claim that the Public Accounts Committee has started the review of the 2023 report of the Auditor-General on the accounts of Katsina State Government could not be verified as relevant officials did not respond to the SAE Index research questionnaire despite repeated engagements. Also, it is not evident if the PAC has completed review of pending audit reports.

The role of the Public Accounts Committee in ensuring timeous review of annual audit reports cannot be over-emphasized and very crucial to concluding the audit action cycle for proper accountability. Recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee to improve accountability in the utilization of public funds must also be taken seriously and implemented as quickly as possible by Executive agencies.

The PAC is encouraged to improve its effectiveness and ensure reports of the State Auditor-General for 2023 and other pending audit reports are given expeditious consideration. The PAC should also continue to involve civic 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.

CS/MEDIA ACTORS LESS INVOLVED IN THE AUDIT PROCESS

Participation of Civil Society and media actors in the audit process of Katsina State is low and it is crucial for state actors especially the Public Accounts Committee to intentionally create more opportunities for engaging civil society and media actors. Although the report of the Auditor-General for 2023 was published on a dedicated website for public access, civic actors in Katsina State reported limited opportunities for either engaging directly with the Public Accounts Committee.

A representative of a civil society organization working in Katsina State confirmed that the Public Accounts Committee is yet to invite civic actors for engagement around review of audit reports. "The Public Accounts Committee is yet to organise any activity, the Auditor General has invited us and discussed the audit report and also showed his willingness to support us in developing the Citizens' Accountability Report".

It is important that citizens, civic groups and journalists 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 legislature.

