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COMMUNICATIONS FEEDBACK MECHANISM: A PUBLIC SPHERE PERSPECTIVE OF A STATE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

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ABSTRACT:*Given its attendant implication to democracy, governments and their agencies are coming to terms with the need for increased citizen's participation in governance. Yet this quest is impaired because government institutions and their publics under-utilize feedback mechanism. It is in the light of this notion that this study examined communications feedback mechanism and how its publics leverage on this feedback mechanism to foster public sphere discourse in a single state's House of Assembly in Southern Nigeria. The study adopted the survey research method and its sample size was 400. Data were gathered using a questionnaire and analyzed with percentages and frequency distribution tables. Findings are among others revealed that respondents are not aware of any feedback mechanism and that constituents' level of participation in public sphere discourses remains low. Against this backdrop, this study recommends that the House enact a legislation that will make it mandatory for the public to participate in all phases of law making, while submitting that public hearing be democratized to accommodate more constituents. Also recommended is that the House should synergize with Non-Governmental Organizations cultural/traditional and religious organizations to engage constituents in regular town hall meetings on issues that concern them. Conclusion and recommendations are reached.*

KEYWORDS:Communication Feedback Mechanism, Public Sphere Discourse, Legislative Public Relations, Marketing Political Services, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

At the root of democracy is popular participation. Little wonder Lincoln (1863), defined democracy as the government of the people, by the people and for the people. Moreso, the US Department of State's Bureau of International Information Programs (1998, para.2) would define it as a government by the people in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system. Suffice to say that the people remain the life wire of democracy. It is for this reason the system is structured to maximize popular participation.Consequently, modern society and its dynamics and complexities do not give the opportunity for direct democracy. To this end, the representative democratic system provides citizens the opportunity to elect representatives who aggregate their views, sentiments and bias on the floors of the parliaments. The legislature does not stop at making laws but epitomizes a melting pot for divergent shades of views, ideological leanings among others, of their constituents. These views, ideological leanings, idiosyncrasies, world views and aspiration as would be presented on the floor of the parliament must truly be the positions of the constituents only conveyed through their representatives. So that, anything

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short of this takes the sheen off the democratic system of government. It therefore follows that the business of legislation cannot be done in obvious isolation of the people.

In view of the fact that democracy is all about the people, every stage of legislative business must be people centered, initiated and driven by the people. It therefore becomes imperative that appropriate channels that foster effective communication between the legislature in this instance and their constituents must be encouraged. Arguably, the legislative arm of a democratic government is the bastion of the system. Beside the judiciary which is often touted as the last hope of the common man, effective legislature could just be the only voice of the common man. Among the benefits of having a robust communication channel between the legislature and the people is that it provides citizens the opportunity to directly participate in policy making and as such position them to facilitate policy implementation. This is also not to mention the fact that this could encourage a high sense of belonging, patriotism and participation.Interestingly, feedback, which is a bridge between the people and the legislature ensures for citizens' participation in policy making (Nyalunga, 2006). Suffice to say that the quality of feedback is mainly a function of the various feedback mechanisms at the disposal of citizens.

As the outcome or effect of a message, feedback reverses the communication process (Nwabueze, 2009). By this, the receiver turns the sender and the message from the former becomes the feedback. Again, Nwabueze (2009) explains that feedback helps the sender of a message to evaluate their message with a view to finding out whether they achieved the aim of initiating the communication process, yet feedback could either be positive or negative. Due to its instrumental value, different studies have been carried out to understand the feedback as a concept, (Ilgen, Fisher and Taylor, 1979; Larson, 1984, cited in Taylor, 2012). The studies show that cognitive and affective processes related to feedback were investigated. Ashford and Cummings (1983) cited in Tayfur (2012) see feedback as a pointer to the active posture of individuals who are not seen as "passive recipients of information" (p.92). Their argument maintained that feedback seeks to reduce ambiguity about appropriate behaviours.

Consequently, feedback traditionally enhances performance improvement (Casas-Arce, et al. 2015). Feedback helps in the performance measurement and evaluation literature, because it improves learning and motivation. (Ammons, 1956; Ilgen*et al.* 1979; Kopelman, 1986; Casas-Arce, *et al*. 2015).

Ilgen*et al*. (1979)explains that researchers have observed some specific feedback characteristics that show the credibility and power of the source, as it relates to individual performance. (Hanna, *et al.* 2005 in Casas-Arce, 2015, whether it is communicated privately to the recipient or made public and whether it conveys a positive or negative message. (Illies and Judge, 2005, cited in Casas-Arce, 2015). They maintained that governments across board must begin to address information asymmetry to make a self-reinforcing feedback loop possible, a first step would be to make information accessible to all at the same level. Information asymmetry occurs in transaction once a party has more information than the others thereby creating an imbalance of power in communication transaction, (UNDP, Albanis 2010).

Imperatively, citizens' right to know cannot be overemphasized. Accordingly, the principle of maximum disclosure states thatany information held by public bodies should be subject to disclosure, (Global Campaign for Free Expression, Article 19). To this end, these principles encapsulate thatthe basic rationale underlying the very concept of freedom of information and access to official information should be a basic right for all and it should be constitutionalized.

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Among other legislation on the principles on freedom of information are (1) obligation to publish mandates public bodies to publish key information. The legislation should cover areas that concerns society and as it affects citizens in operational information that will open up the arena for discourse. Especially, if the body provides direct services to the public, information should be made accessible to public. Price et al., (2010) citing Sadler (1989) acknowledge that "feedback include identification of errors or misunderstanding, but highlights the forensic role of feedback diagnosing problems with the work" (p.278). This simply means feedback can help fill the gap of misunderstanding in performance, (Price, *et al.* 2010).Situating this to our discourse, it is debatable to the extent in which communication process in the legislature has fostered, first, effective communication and then, a robust feedback channel. Instead it appears that the communication process is linear in this case House of Assemblyand does not give room for quality citizen participation. While this is not to preempt the study, the seeming indifference and apparent loss of interest in the activities of the legislature by the citizen is a reflection of negative feedback.Any democratic government should help citizens to participate or engage in policy making as a right to shape society, (Holmes, 2011). Democracy thrives on pluralistic, participatory society and of course maintains a vigorous group life (Maddox, 2005). It therefore follows that citizens must be given every enabling platform to participate in policy making. An effective feedback structure could just be a means to achieving this. The House of Assembly as presently constituted comprises 24 members representing 24 constituencies of the State.Among the function of the House of Assembly are as follows: Law-making for the good governance of the state; Passing of resolutions on matters of public concern; Exercise of oversight function for the ministries and departments of government to ensure strict adherence and compliance to the laws, policies and directives of government; Confirmation of appointments into executive and judicial positions. Constitutionally, a State House of Assemblycomprises of representatives of constituencies with key responsibility of making laws, the assembly represents the aggregate views, positions, coloration, ideological makeup and aspirations of the people. Yet, there are concerns on the widening gap and obvious communication breakdown between the legislature and their constituents (Gaventa, 2002) and this follows Nyalunga (2006) and Baba (2014) who opine that in developing countries perspectives citizens are best used as tools to attain political heights and rather than as tools for generating communications feedback for informed law making.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public opinion/Spiral of silence theory

In its common understanding and as studied by Elizabeth Nuelle-Neuman, public opinion is that attitude one can express publicly, or should express publicly, if one is to avoid the risk of isolating oneself (Amadi, 2003, citing Little John, 1996). Amadi (2003) explains that the obviousness of the danger of public opinion in our modern times is quite real and intimidating. He explains that it is a hidden persuasion that forces us to behave, act and believe in what others have believed in without question. The fear of not wanting to be adjudged as running against the tide of public opinion, Amadi, explains gives rise to the concept of spiral of silence. The spiral is in the sense that when one person keeps silent because of fear, others like them will also decide to keep silent also (Amadi, 2003). He argued that since the silent ones are often in minority, it makes the spiral of their silence easy to complete. He maintained that this 'public' opinion induced silence happens and is ongoing (never dies) in every society whether rich or poor. What this implies, he continues, is that all popular opinion anywhere any time is

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'public'opinion. And being that, it is clear that such opinions are irrational. Amadi, (2003), therefore, argues that "this implies that the opinion that prevails at any time in every society is often the irrational vulgar one" (p.155).

Relating this to the subject matter, it is disturbing when representatives attempt to stifle feedback from their constituents, especially when they fear that such feedback is 'not in line' with the general views of the public, even when such opinion or feedback would be 'better, informed, accurate, truthful, rational, verifiable and objective'. Yet, the fact that constituent members fear that their opinions or feedback might be rejected could make them resign to the realm of the spiral of silence which is not good to our development as a people.Furthermore, the public sphere theory which is associated with Jurgen Harbermas, a German Sociologist whose classic work, the structural transformation of the public sphere, dwelt extensively on the importance of a vibrant public sphere in democratic societies (Okoro, 2008, cited in Nwofe, 2009). Imperatively there is the scholarly submission that the principal way the mass media contribute to the growth and sustenance of democracy is by helping to create and promote social spaces for public dialogue and interaction (agenda setting) (Kellner, 1990 Dahlgren and Spark, 1991; Calhoun, 1992; Helin, 1994 and Dahlgren 1995 cited in Nwofe, 2009). Moreso, the public sphere theory craves for an open mass media system that is widely accessible and advocates free circulation of information without government intervention to restrict the flow of ideas (Croteau & Hoynes, 2001; Okoro, 2008). The theory sees people as citizens rather than consumers. It further contends that 'the media of mass communication should serve these citizens instead of targeting them as consumers. Yet Harbermas (1989) argues that in the 18th century England the public organized itself as the bearer of the public opinion following the emergence of a public sphere which mediated between society and state'. In the public sphere, communication systems occupy a central position in the constitution of citizenship. The perspective of public sphere rests in the fact that the contribution of the mass media to the democratic processes has in creating and sustaining a citizenry that is prepared for participation in public life (Okoro, 2008; Nwofe, 2009).The autonomy cue upgrades the primacy of rational communication and downgrades the notion of instrumental rationality which seeks to promote the privatization and commercialization of the public sphere space, (Okoro, 2008). The exchange and critique cuebuttresses a democratic system anchored on interactive, rational, critical form of conversation as well as the 'reciprocal structure of critique' which characterized the public sphere concept. Reflexivity is interpreted to mean the process of standing back from critically reflective –upon, and changing one's position when faced by the better argument. The ideal Role-taking cue stresses a public-oriented exchange whereby participants endeavor to put themselves in the position of the other's perspective (Dahlberg, 2001; Nwofe, 2009). Dahlberg (2000) argues that the *sincerity cue* of the public sphere theory harp on the need for discursive participants to make a sincere effort to promote the deliberative process by making known 'all relevant information and their true intentions, interests, needs and desires'. Similarly, as the domain of common concern, Baoill (2000) and Nwofe (2009) says the public sphere is characterized by three factors: Universal access- whereby anyone can have access to the space; rational debate- whereby any topic can be raised by any participant, and such topic will be rationally and critically discussed until consensus is reached and disregard of rank- whereby the status of participants is ignored.

The suitability of this theory is based on the fact that opportunity is provided for the public to rationally engage and participate in the decision-making process that impact on their future. Second this theory also encourages the reproduction of informed, rationale, accurate, truthful, verifiable, better and objective feedback in the democratic process. Relatively, studies spanning

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over 3decades on how and why individuals use the mass media have attracted scholarly interests and several contributions have been made to shape this theory (Orlu-Orlu, 2014, McQuail2005; Vivian, 2007). In contextualizing this theory it is imperative to note that constituents are not just those whose rights are restricted to voting, but are active participants in the decision making and policies that affect their wellbeing so that if given the opportunity they would contribute to issues that interest them.Consequently, the Stakeholders Theory developed by Mitchell,*et al.* (1997), posits that government officials face competing demands from stakeholders and they respond to those demands with different priorities. Yang & Callahan (2007) and Nguyen,*et al.* (2015) maintained that involvement decisions are based upon government officials' response to salient stakeholders who push for participation. In this vein, citizens have to compete with other stakeholders, such as businesses and NGOs, to have their voices heard. Even among citizens, different groups of people may need to compete with each other should there be conflicting interests among them. In the end, the most salient stakeholders have the best chance to participate and influence the decision-making process (Mitchell,*et al.* 1997). Stakeholder theory sheds light into who has the opportunity to participate in government decision making processes. Stakeholders who have more attributes (i.e. power, legitimacy and urgency) and higher levels of the attributes would be more salient than those with fewer and lower levels of these attributes (Mitchell, *et al.* 1997; Nguyen, *et al.* 2015). Because individuals have limited cognitive resources, it would be too costly to process all available information; instead, they tend to overweight the data that is most salient (Taylor & Thompson, 1982 cited in Casas-Arce, *et al.* 2015). Recent studies have attributed the different biases in decision making on stakeholder salience (Gennaioli & Shleifer, 2010; Bordalo, Gennaioli & Shleifer, 2012, 2013; Casas-Arce, *et al.*, 2015). These studies reveal that salience can account for a number of behavioral anomalies and explain such behavior in a wide range of setting (Casas-Arce, *et al.* 2015).

Relating this to the study, it is expected that relevant stakeholders participate in decision making process. These could include businesses, NGOs and interest groups who will both power, legitimacy and urgency attribute. Law-making should not be the exclusive reserve of the legislators even when critical stakeholders have very meaningful submissions to make in the decision-making process. However, it is the lack of these attributes that make constituents rather passive in decision making process, even when the necessary feedback channels are at their disposal. People prefer to interact with others who are like them because they share interest and are socialized with the same cultural norms (Costa & Kahn, 2013; Nguyen,*et al.* (2015). Citizens face greater challenges in large cities for building such networks and have less strong social attachments, further hindering their power, relative to other stakeholders. Yet there is also the tendency that opinions of stakeholders who do not have the attributes listed above could be jettisoned. Expectedly, the voices and opinions of every stakeholder in the decision-making process should be considered.

Understanding feedback

At the root of an effective communication process is feedback. That is, communication cannot be said to be completed without a successful interplay between components or elements of the process. A number of definitions have been given on feedback. Yet the component of the communication process, though fundamental, has not received sufficient attention. Feedback therefore, is the response to a message. Feedback indicates to the person sending a message whether and how that message was heard, seen and understood (Verderber, 1999). Feedback reverses the communication process (Nwabueze, 2004). This means that the receiver now

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becomes the source or sender while the sender becomes the receiver waiting for the message which is the feedback. Verderber, (1999) explains that, if the verbal or nonverbal response indicates to the sender that the intended meaning was not heard the originator may try to find a different way of encoding the message in order to align the meaning that was understood with the initiator's original meaning.Similarly, feedback could either be positive or negative (Nwabueze, 2004, Trenholm, Jensen, 1996). Nwabueze maintains that feedback is positive where the receiver shows understanding of the message and gives a meaningful response to the sender, while it is negative where the receivers' expression or response shows the message was not understood requiring send the process afresh. Trenholm and Jensen (1996) used the household thermostat to graphically explain how feedback works. They explain that a thermostat regulates with the room temperature such that it goes off when the temperature rises above the setting – the furnace is turned off and heat is reduced. It is again fixed back on when temperature falls. This kind of feedback is designed to discourage system deviation, that is, to keep the system from changing. Feedback that encourages deviation is called positive feedback, they maintained. Feedback could be immediate or delayed.Since it is difficult to ascertain, the success or otherwise of a message, feedback helps the sender of a message to evaluate his message with a view to finding out whether he achieved the aim of initiating the communication process (Nwabueze, 2004). Accordingly, the ability of humans to successfully interact with physical reality through sense experience is one example of feedback from environment agency (Martin, 2010). He classifies feedback into tight and loose. A tight feedback is occasioned by avoiding a contact with hot stoves, having been burnt previously. However, loose feedback is seen in disease environment. In this environment one might not know when one had contracted a disease no matter how hard one tried.

Consequently, upward feedback emerged with Generation x in the 1980s, which allowed the subordinate to provide feedback to his supervisor (Lepsinger & Lucie 1997). Moreso, Coffin,*et al.*(2011) explain that in the early 1990s, a strong focus on performance emerged due to downsizing and outsourcing, which led to the implementation of a more holistic 360-degree feedback method in the workplace. Citing Anderson (2006), they noted that the 360-degree feedback incorporates input from supervisors, colleagues and customers, as well as a self-appraisal component. Interestingly, from the history of feedback, we can infer that a feedback that only flows from top to bottom cannot be tenable in the 21st century society or organization. Yet the efficiency of feedback in a system is predicated on the incorporation of all relevant stakeholders, having ample opportunity to directly or otherwise contribute to issues of collective concern.It is arguable whether feedback leads to performance improvement. Others argue that in the performance measurement and evaluation literature, feedback has a positive impact on performance because it improves learning and motivation (Ammons, 1956; Ilgen, *et al.*, 1979; Keperean, 1986). Whilst other researches have shown that feedback does not normally improve performance, but a function on organizational structure (Balcazer, *et al.* 1985; Wuger & DeNisi 1996; Alvero *et al.* 2001; Casas-Arce and Lourenco, 2015). They maintained that the effect of feedback is contingent on the organizational setting in which it is provided and on the characteristics of the feedback itself. So, beyond feedback is its effect. Effect here is predicated by the organization; the extent it has created convenient and accessible channels for feedback as well as the quality of feedback. However, Casas-Arce& Lourenco (2015) in their study argued that more feedback by directing attention to the most recent events, leads to worse decisions.

Among the effective communication strategies as encapsulated by Wayne & Dauwalder (1994) and Wilson (2005), is the use of appropriate feedback. The sources lends credence to the earlier

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positions on feedback when he submitted that 'for the strategies to succeed, (including feedback) there are behavioral preconditions such as the attitude of the communicator and communicate, as well as timing'. In essence, all of these characteristics and conditionality make for an effective feedback in all our communication, (Verderber, 1999). This is why the ability to give and receive feedback is such an essential part of communicative competence (Trenholm & Jensen, 1996). Essentially, feedback is critical to development. Domatob (1989); Nsereka & Anele (2014) observes that feedback is a basic communication strategy for rural development. It follows that if democracy anchors on popular participation, then feedback is imperative. Little wonder Domatob, advocates that feedback should be built into the national communication policy as one of the keys to the transition from a one-way to a two-way communication of information.

The concept of feedback is borne out of the fact that humans are not passive recipients of information. They actively seek feedback to reduce ambiguity about appropriate behaviours and to self-assess their progress (Tayfur, 2012). Also, Ashford (1986) posit that people live in an environment which is characterized by ambiguity, change and uncertainty, noting that, to reduce tension created by ambiguity and uncertainty, people try to gather information either by asking questions to other people or monitoring the environment. Sadler(1989) and Price, Handley, Millar and O'Donovan(2010) acknowledges that feedback must include identification of errors or misunderstanding but highlights the forensic role of feedback diagnosing problem with the work. Accordingly, different motives instigate certain feedback seeking behavior. Morrison & Bies (1991) and later Ashford and Cummings (1983) maintained that three different motives may instigate certain feedback seeking behaviors: Desire for useful information which is related to instrumental value of information; desire to protect ego and self-esteem from the threat of negative feedback, which is more related to the self-protection motives of people and desire to control the impressions of others, which involves both defensive and assertive impression management desire. Similarly, Anseel, Lieveens & Levy (2007) opined that self-assessment and self-improvements motives in addition to self-verification and self-enhancement are motives for seeking feedback. That is, whatever the motive may be feedback is expected to facilitate an effective communication- one devoid of uncertainties and ambiguities. This, expectedly, should be the prevailing model of communication between the legislature and their constituents. Although the feedback model of Anseel, Lieveens & Levy (2007) has been criticized by Coffin, *et al.* (2011) as one which primarily contain negative motive and content.

Feedback mechanism in legislature business

In democratic societies, legislation has the power to effect great transformation if it is responsive to the needs of its poorest and most vulnerable sections. (Aparajita, et al., 2011) are of the opinion that transparent, fair, accountable and participatory legislative process is needed to enact laws that would bring about realistic transformational change. Interestingly, public involvement in the constitution making is increasingly considered to be essential for the legitimacy and effectiveness of the process (Elkins, Ginsburg and Blount, 2008). Scholars have recognized the important role of citizens' participation in the decision-making process of government (Nguyen et al., 2015). More so, contemporary discourses on democracy and human rights acknowledge that explicit or tacit involvement of the people in the management of the political institutions (including the legislature) of the country is an integral element of good governance (Mukuna & Mbao, 2014). Without doubt, legislatures are increasingly coming to terms with the need to democratize the business of law making. Nabatchi& Farrar

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(2011) in their study on bridging the gap between public officials and the public, noted that 'all the legislators studied, recognized that constituent engagement is a job requirement 'a necessary part of the game' and essential for political survival. They reported that most of the legislators observed among others that the benefits of engagements include productive two-way communication, leads to the exchange of substantive information, helps legislators identify concerns that apply to others.The effect of democratizing the legislature on the citizens is far reaching. Elkins, *et al*. (2008) argued that participation conceivably inculcates democratic skills, habits and values such as trust, tolerance and efficacy-attributes that may be good in themselves but that may also trickle up to provide system-level benefits. In the same vein, Mukana & Mbao (2014) maintained that further involvement of the people in public affairs may enhance the people's propensity for them to willingly support the state.

Consequent upon these, a number of nations are opening up the legislature space so as to foster citizen participation. Aparajita*et al.* (2011) reported that India took the lead in this direction by enacting the robust Right to Information Act in 2005. In the UK and EU, for instance, they reported that public participation is encouraged at all stages of the legislative process, from policy papers to draft bills. Also, Canada, USA, Switzerland, South Africa and Kenya have existing procedures to facilitate public participation. Mukuna & Mbao (2014) observed that the Kenyan National Assembly did adopt its standing orders that provide that "the Departmental Committee to which a Bill is committed shall facilitate public participation and shall take into account the views and recommendations of the public when the committee makes its report to the House" (p.443). In South Africa, Aparajita*et al.* (2011) reported that at the national and provincial levels, sections 59(1)(a), 72(1)(a) and 118(1)(a) of the constitution impose an identical obligation on the National Assembly (NA), the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) and the provincial legislatures to: (a) Facilitate public involvement in the legislature and other processes of the (Assembly/Council/Legislature) and its committees.They noted that at the local government levels, municipalities are enjoined to "encourage the involvement of communities and community organizations in the matters of local government. Section 160(4)(b) of the constitution provides: (4) No by-law may be passed by a municipal council unless- the proposed by-law has been published for public comment. The effort to increase public participation in law making and of course the enactment of laws to strengthen it has been necessitated by the UN Human Rights Committees' General Comments. The comments provide states with interpretative guidance to the rights contained in the ICCPR. For example, general comment on Article 25- right to public participation outlines the following key features: (a)The right to take part in public affairs extends to all exercises of political power, including the exercise of legislative powers. (b) This participation can take two possible forms: direct participation or indirect participation through representatives. However, the General Comment does not clarify whether both forms of representation must be present in a political system or whether the presence of representative governance obviates the need for direct participation. (c) Furthermore, citizens exercise their rights to participate 'through public debate and dialogue with their representative. (d) States must take such legislative and other measures as may be necessary to ensure that citizens have an effective opportunity to enjoy the right to take part in political process.

The AU, through the AUCA states one of the objectives of the AU as to promote democratic principles and institutions, popularparticipation and good governance. One of the foremost instruments in Africa which embraces popular participation from a broader governance perspective is the ACHPR. Articles 13 states that: (1) Every citizen has the right to participate freely in the government of his country either directly or through freely chosen representatives

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in accordance with the provision of the law; (2) Every citizen shall have the right of equal access to the public service of his country; (3) Every individual shall have the right to access to public property and services in strict equality of all persons before the law.In Nigeria, like most emerging democracies sovereignty lies with the people-as section 14 of the Nigeria 1999 constitution states that, the sovereign powers of the Federal Republic of Nigeria originate from the people. This follows that beyond the duty to participate in putting people in place to make policies, institutions must give them ample opportunity to participate. Achara (2008) pointed out that in dealing with this aspect of public participation, five provisions of the 1999 constitution come handy. These are sections 39 (freedom of expression and of the press); 40 (right to peaceful assembly and association); 38 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion) and section 24 (duties of the citizen. He argued that the most important of the five is section 14, subsection (2) thereof. Paragraph (c) of that subsection that reads thus: the participation by the people in their government shall be in accordance with the provision of this constitution. However, a caveat to this is that this participation is only within the restricted space stipulated by the 1999 constitution. In essence, the Nigerian constitution does not allow an express participation in government business and legislation except that which the institutions allow.

The National Assembly has a standing order that ensures public participation in their deliberations both at plenary and committee levels (Onogu, 2016). Conversely Nabatchi & Farrar (2011) identified the following as engagement mechanisms used by state legislators and they are: email, newsletters, town hall meetings, phone calls, social media (Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, etc), TV or radio show. Others are: public meetings, focus groups, committees and survey methods to encourage participation (Berner, 2003; Nguyen,*et al.* 2015). Evidently, Nigerian legislatures mainly use public hearing forum as a feedback platform which enables them feel the impulse and contribution of their constituents on a bill. However, whether the platforms have created the needed quality contribution from the public on legislature remains debatable. It is debatable when one attempts to critically assess the composition of the public in these public hearings *vis-a-viz* the quality of contribution and knowledge on the subject matters. The underlining factor is that there are benefits inherent in opening the space for public participation in legislation. Nabatchi & Farrar (2011) identified in their report on bridging the gap between public officials and the public some benefits of these feedback mechanisms in the legislature are limitless. For example, it encourages two-way communication at a minimum reaching out to constituents; inform people about the things that they are doing which would affect constituents positively; gives legislators a chance to provide and talk with 'real people' about their concerns with a view to providing assistance.

Consensus conference and E-deliberative democracy

Kimeli, *et al.* (2014) submitted that this model was developed by Danish Board of Technology, it works through the bringing together of an inclusive and representative sample of 14 who meet over a time to explore complex technical issues, they engage each other through various methods and eventually weigh policy options and present their agreed recommendations to principal decision makers in a final report. They maintained that 'consensus conferences have been used to engage the public around telecommunications policy, bioengineering and most recently, nanotechnology'. Again, Kimeli, *et al.* (2014) citing the World Bank describes E-government as the use of information technologies to 'transform relationships with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government'. This includes improved service delivery, citizen empowerment, and more efficient management. Citing IBM centre of business of government, they noted that a spectacular array of tools are emerging that give ordinary citizens a greater

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'voice' in nearly every aspect of society today. Called by some extreme democracy, by others 'personal democracy' and still others 'me media', these tools enable individuals with like interests to find one another; build and manage constituencies, spark meaningful conversation among diverse groups; publish text, audio and video to the web to growing audiences; and collaboratively manage content using blogs, wikis, and other tools of the networked environment (Kimeli, *et al.* 2014).

Challenges of citizens' participation in legislative feedback spectrum

Encouraging substantive citizen participation is not an easy task (Baiocchi, 2003, cited in Nguyen, *et al.* 2015). Aparajita*et al.* (2011) identified factors like the lack of education, inadequate access to information and the cost and infrastructure constraints of public bodies can impede the effective participation of the public in the legislative process. They argued that excessively rigorous participatory requirements can cause extensive delays and sometimes paralyse the legislature process altogether. In fact officials may fear that citizen involvement could increase conflict in the political system, increase problems with government policymaking (Yang, 2005) and decrease government agency effectiveness (Nguyen, *et al.* 2015). They further argued that citizen themselves have been criticized for lacking competence, expertise skills and a commitment to participation, tending their voices.Similarly, there is also the challenge of citizens who participate in lawmaking doing so personal aggrandizement (Nabatchi & O'Leary 2005, Yang 2005, cited in Nguyen, Mahjabeen *et al.* 2009, Elkins, *et al.* 2008).The threat of instability and disorder is deemed too high risk in widespread popular participation -"Introducing highly participatory processes in pre-modern societies may exacerbate conflicts among citizens over resources, identity, or other societal cleavages. This could ultimately prevent a constitution from emerging, or hinder its operation once adopted, through the intermediate effect on citizens" (Elkins, *et al.* 2008. Pp.370).

One of the strongest theoretical claims about popular participation concerns a constitution's ability to constrain government if citizens are to effectively policy the action of government, it must be sufficiently clear what constitutes a violation of the limits of government power so that citizens can mobilize to prevent it (Elkins,*et al.* 2008). They noted that, a more open process can also make bargaining and the granting of concessions more difficult. The USAID listed these challenges to include:corruption, a sense of entitlement, mutual distrust, slow bureaucratic reform, failure to implement laws and regulation, varying capacity among local CSOs Reliance on leadership and changing national regulations among others.Still in line with Elkins,*et al.* (2008) line of argument, NCPRI (2011) argued that "as the US experience demonstrates, an obligation to respond to the numerous views expressed is in danger of paralyzing the legislative or administrative process" (p.69).

Casas-Arce, Lourenco & Martinez-Jerez (2015) examine the effects of non-financial performance feedback or the behavior of professionals working for an insurance repair company and foundthat frequent feedback should lead to better performance. The study, therefore, contributes to the feedback literature by looking at the performance effects of the interaction of feedback frequency and feedback detail, unlike previous studies that tended to examine these characteristics independently with inconsistent results (e.g. Goodman *et al.* 2004; Chhokar&Wallin, 1984).Tayfur (2012) found that receiving feedback once or twice a year was not enough for employees studied. They argued that employees do not wait for annual performance – reviews as supposed in many years; they actively search for information to decide what goal to pursue, learn what to do for goal attainment, and determine whether goals are achieved. With focus on feedback seeking, they used the behaviour theory and self theoryto

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determine employees desire for useful information, desire to protect egoand desire to control image, and self-verification, enhancement, improvement assessment respectively. Nyalunga (2006) found that the need to legally streamline public participation by providing for the right to:contribute to the decision-making process of the municipality;be informed of decision of the municipal council and disclosure of the state of affairs of the municipality.However, those legislative guidelines which sought to ensure transparency and accountability in the management of local government affairs have been proven inadequate in practice due to: Party politicization of development and participatory structures;lack of commitment by municipalities to prioritize public consultation; the slow pace of basic service delivery. The lack of access to basic social services does not only hamper participation but also defers ordinary South Africans from enjoying a decent standard of living; General lack of capacity amongst stakeholders; Access to information. Flear&Vakulenko (2010) noted that there is a dearth of insight on the interplay between citizen participation and human rights. The article sketches the essence of its own human rights perspective as being about empowerment. This perspective, it maintains, is brought to bear on EU discourse on citizen participation in the governance of new technologies.It reveals a dispowering 'deficit model' of citizens in need of education through their participation in EU governance. Also, Okoro&Nwafor (2013) reported that the use of social media in politics has continued to grow in recent times since it was first used for political purpose during the 2008 US presidential election by Barack Obama. They observed that many nations and politicians across the globe have continued to embrace the platform to mobilize their citizens towards active participation in the political process. Coffin,*et al.* (2011) revealed that there is in fact a disconnect between Millennial reactions to and preferences for feedback in the workplace and the older generations' perceptions of these experiences and desires. The study however recommends that organizations strive to offer a diverse array of feedback types to cater to the many types of feedback that best motivates Millennial.

Price,*et al.* (2010) in their study reveals that difficulties relating to multiple purposes of feedback, its temporal nature and the capabilities of evaluators reveal that measuring effectiveness is fraught with difficulty. Yet the paper argues that the learner is in the best position to judge the effectiveness of feedback, but may not always recognize the benefits it provides. The study therefore recommends that the pedagogic literacy of students is key to evaluation of feedback and feedback processes.Nabatchi& Farrar (2011) revealed that only four respondents had familiarity and/or experience with deliberation. It revealed that the majority of those interviewed for this study did not know what public deliberation was, and even after explanation, had trouble understanding how this approach differs from what they already do to engage their constituents. It submits that with a few exceptions, the respondents conflated it with their present engagement practices such as polling, public hearings, town halls, tele-town halls, and opportunities to hear individual stories. It notes that lawmakers expressed skepticism about the feasibility of deliberation. Given that lawmakers generally did not believe public deliberation is possible, they were hampered in assessing its utility, the study reveals. But, that while lawmakers could generally see the intellectual, ethical, and philosophical reasons for using public deliberation, they had trouble imagining how it could be employed in the 'real word'. Similar study demonstrates that negative teacher feedback and effort feedback were related to their relationship with the teacher and that students who reported a positive relationship with their teacher perceived that their teacher gave them extensive effort feedback and little negative feedback (Burnett, 2002; Burnett &Mandler, 2010). A comparative study of selected developed countries procedures for public participation in the lawmaking process reveals that all of these countries have made provisions for public

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participation in lawmaking processes, but with relative levels of implementation (Aparajita*et al.*, 2011). In other words that public participation is encouraged at all stages of the legislative process,

Noah (2008) reveals that respondents in the two studied organizations demonstrated general low measure in decision making and that due to higher educational status of respondents in one of the establishment, their frequency of involvement is relatively higher. This implies that respondents' measures of involvement are related to their educational qualification in Flour Mills of Nigeria Plc, while those who possess low educational qualification exercise low measure of involvement and those with higher education demonstrated equivalent level of involvement in management decision-making. However, other studies submits that while the workers demonstrated positive attitude towards involvement in decision making, the actual level of involvements they exercise is negative (Fashoyin, 1992;Adewumi, 1993; Imaga, 1994; Noah, 2008).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a survey approach and the population of this study comprised all residents of 24 constituencies that make up the Stateunder investigation. Simple random and proportionate sampling methods were used for this study was used to select 400 samples from the entire population.Apeh (2016) used the proportionate sampling to administer questionnaire among residents in Southern Nigeria. Same was adopted by Okechukwu (2012) in his study on Audience Assessment of AIT and NTA's Reportage of the Boko Haram crisis. On this strength, the sampling technique was deemed appropriate in the administration of the questionnaire. The data analysis techniques used are simple percentages and descriptive statistics.

Table 1.1: Proportionate distribution of questionnaire among respondents across the LGAs inBayelsa State

S/No	Local governments	No. of questionnaire
1	Brass	43
2	Ekeremor	46
3	Kolokoma/Opokuma	52
4	Nembe	45
5	Ogbia	41
6	Sagbama	45
7.	Southern Ijaw	60
8	Yenagoa	68
	Total	**400**

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DATA PRESENTATION AND FINDINGS

Table 1.2:Distribution and retrieval rate of questionnaire

S/NO.	LGAs	NO OF QUESTIONNAIRE	RETRIEVAL	%
1.	Brass	43	41	95.35%
2.	Ekeremor	46	43	93.49%
3.	Kolokuma/Opokuma	52	50	96.15%
4.	Nembe	45	41	91.11%
5.	Ogbia	41	40	97.56%
6.	Sagbama	45	43	95.56%
7.	Southern Ijaw	60	57	95.00%
8.	Yenagoa	68	65	95.59%
	Total	400	380	95%

Research question 1: Through what channels does the Bayelsa State House of Assembly maintain its feedback with the public sphere? This item sought to identify the feedback channels through which members of the Bayelsa State House of Assembly interact with their constituents. It was addressed by questionnaire items 13.

Table 1.3:Mean Responses onChannels of Feedback Maintenance by Bayelsa State House of Assembly

S/No		Responses in Mean Scores					WMS	Decision
		SA	A	U	D	SD		
a	Public hearing	189	156	25	7	3	4.37	Agree
b	One on one meeting	184	161	18	11	6	4.33	Agree
c	Weekly meetings	46	34	76	97	127	2.40	Disagree
d	Social Media Platform	38	32	54	124	132	2.26	Disagree
e	Email/Newsletters	7	5	112	126	130	2.03	Disagree

Source: Researchers' data analysis, 2017

As indicated in table 1.3, the respondents agreed that the channels of feedback maintained by the Bayelsa State House of Assembly were mainly public hearing but also one-on-one meeting while they disagreed with the views that items (c) (d) and (e) were also channels of maintaining feedback. The implication is that they maintained feedback mostly through public hearing and one-on-one meeting.

Researcher question 2: What is the level of participation of the constituents of the Bayelsa State House of Assembly in public sphere discourses?This research question was answered with item 14 on the instrument which sought to determine the level of participation in public sphere discourse. The result is as presented in table 1.4 below:

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Table 1.4: Mean responses on level of participation in public sphere discourses

	Level of Participation	Responses in Mean Scores					WMS	Decision
		SA	A	U	D	SD		
a	Very high	130	160	108	346	105	2.23	Disagree
b	High	110	180	123	354	95	2.26	Disagree
c	Undecided	120	172	96	344	109	2.21	Disagree
d	Low	980	344	66	72	40	3.95	Agree
e	Very low	905	332	78	86	47	3.81	Agree

Source: Researchers' data analysis, 2017

As shown in Table 1.4. above, respondents said that the level of participation in public sphere discourse by constituents was low or very low with the option of 'low' having a higher endorsement by the respondents as indicated by the WMS of 3.95. This means that the constituents' participation in public sphere discourses was low.

Research question 3: To what extent is the feedback between Bayelsa State House of Assembly and its constituents?

Table 1.5: Respondents' perceptions of what constituents adjudge adequate in feedback mechanism

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Regular interaction	73	19.21%
Town hall meeting	64	16.84%
Public participation in lawmaking	153	40.26%
Public hearing	50	13.16%
Submission of memoranda	35	9.21%
Social media updates	5	1.32%
Total	380	100%

Source: Researchers' data analysis, 2017

Table 1.5 above shows that majority of the respondents (153 or 40.26%) believe that public participation in lawmaking constitutes adequate feedback mechanism. While 73(19.21%) respondents suggested regular interaction, town hall meetings were seen by 64 respondents representing 16.84% as adequate feedback mechanism. However, public hearing and submission of memoranda were the submissions of 50(13.16%) and 35(9.21%) respondents respectively. Moreso, 5(1.32%) respondents went for social media updates. The implication of this result is that there are increasing demands by constituents for public participation in lawmaking.

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Table 1.6: Respondents position onhow laws by Bayelsa State House of Assembly reflects their views and opinions

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	102	26.84%
No	198	52.11%
Not sure	80	21.05%
Total	**380**	**100%**

, Source: Researchers' data analysis, 2017

Majority of the respondents 198 (52.11%) as could be seen in table 4.12 above, do not believe that issues raised on the floor of the Bayelsa State House of Assembly are a reflection of their views and aspirations. Yet 102(26.84%) agree that these views reflect their opinions. Meanwhile, 80 were not sure. The implication of this result is that positions and activities of the BYSHA are not always a reflection of the views and aspirations of constituents and this is disturbing.

Research question 4: To what extent has feedback foster citizen participation in governance in Bayelsa State?This research question was answered with questionnaire item 23. Results are presented on table 1.7.

Table 1.7: Mean Responses on the extent of feedback fostering of citizen participation in governance

S/NO	Variables	Responses in Mean Scores					WMS	Decision
		SA	A	U	D	SD		
a	To a very large extent	690	516	108	80	37	3.76	Agree
b	To a large extent	740	544	60	98	27	3.84	Agree
c	Undecided	150	112	168	268	132	2.18	Disagree
d	A low extent	185	164	132	272	122	2.30	Disagree
e	To a very extent	170	128	141	262	136	2.20	Disagree

Source: Researchers' data analysis, 2017

Result on table 1.7 shows that respondents agreed with the views expressed in items (a) and (b) which state that feedback fosters citizen participation in governance in Bayelsa State and disagreed with items (c), (d) and (e).

Research question 5: What challenges are inherent in the use of feedback mechanism in the Bayelsa State House of Assembly?This research question sought to identify the challenges inherent in the use of feedback mechanisms in the Bayelsa State House of Assembly. Item 20 in the questionnaire captured it. The result is as presented in table 1.8 below.

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Table 1.8: Mean responses on challenges on the use of feedback mechanism in the Bayelsa State House of Assembly

	Variables	Responses in Mean Scores					WMS	Decision
		SA	A	U	D	SD		
a	Lack of Awareness	255	172	315	184	89	2.67	Disagree
b	High Delay in response from constituents	210	176	336	148	108	2.57	Disagree
c	Concern of being challenged by constituents	775	608	108	54	10	4.09	Agree
d	Funding	190	184	348	178	91	2.60	Disagree
e	Quality of feedback from constituents	160	148	210	228	127	2.29	Disagree

Source: Researchers' data analysis, 2017

Respondents agreed that the main challenge in the use of feedback mechanism in the Bayelsa State House of Assembly was the concern of being challenged by constituents. They discountenanced other views expressed as shown in table 1.8.

DISCUSSION

As seen in the finding, majority of the respondents had affirmed that they do not have access to their representatives as majority of respondents representing 52.11% had averred to this position and this finding supports Edward (2005) who contends that the shift from government to governance involves the provision of means to engage individuals and organizations outside government through structures and arrangements which support effective relationships across the public, private and community sectors as they collaborate in decision making. The point to be noted here is that relationship is critical for citizen participation to thrive and this has been described by Putman (2000) and Cuthill and Fien (2008) as social connectivity and is a critical element in the formation of social capital orientation see also (Aulich, 2009). It is also revealed that constituents' level of participation in public sphere discourses remains low and this result contradicts that of research question one which implies that the scope of participation in public hearing were usually small, Mba-Nwigoh (2012), Samuels (2006), Elkins, et al. (2008), Flear&Vakulenko (2010), Edwards (2013).These authors opined that these programs implemented during the Great Society reforms included requirements for public contact and feedback and the opportunities were typically treated more administratively. The falling confidence in the State political system is symptomatic of a people who are vexed because the system has not provided them the needed platform to participate in public sphere discourses (Bingham, et al. 2005; Hartz-karp& Carson, 2009). However, increasing public participation in public spheres discourses and provides opportunities for citizens to exercise that knowledge in service of policy and programs development on a regular and on-going basis (Kimeli'set al. 2014).

We found that technology is increasing public sphere discourse, but the study did not ascertain if this can be said about rural dwellers. However, drawing from our respondents opinion that the level of participation in public sphere discourse is high, it also follows that social media is helping to increase public sphere discourses at individual and group levels and supports (Leadbeater& Milles 2004; Brun, 2005; 2008; Bruns& Schmidt, 2011; Joe 2015). They

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maintained that in the sphere aided by social media platforms, users can create content; disseminate information extensively and distribute and redistribute information. Interestingly, the social media has increased the frontiers of public sphere discourse, providing citizens the opportunity to express their views on issues of concern, an opportunity that is not common place with the conventional media. In sum, this has resulted in enriched media content; enhanced audience participation, and engendered cost savings in the long run. Aparajita,*et al.* (2011) confirm this finding to the extent that the legislative authorities often lack the resources and human capacity to initiate effective public participation information distribution and education campaigns. More so, those who frequently participate in public sphere discussion tend to promote their own agenda and thus are not necessarily representative of the entire community (Nabatchi, 2011; Nguyen,*et al.* 2015; Hartz-Karp & Carson, 2009).More pertinently is that finding leverages on Article 10(3) of the TEU States which provides that every citizen shall have right to participate in the State's democratic process. Additionally, finding show that there is a seeming disconnect between representatives and their constituents (Edwards (2013; Nyalunga, 2006; Mukuna&Mbao, 2014; Nguyen,et al., 2015).Also, the study revealed that feedback in itself fosters citizens' participation in governance (Burnett, 2002; Burnett & Mandel, 2010; Casas-Arce,*et al*. 2015; Salmoni, *et al.* 1984; Schmidt &Dolis 2009; Tayfur, 2012; Radin&Couper 1989, Ventriss, 2002; Bingham *et al.*, 2005; Baiocchi, 2003).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the studyfindings, we conclude as follows that: lack of commitment to government program and policies by constituents is borne out of a seeming sense of isolation and distrust Bingham,*et al.*, (2005) that public administration practitioners and scholars must reengage the public in governance, recognize the special duty they have to citizens and move their research and teaching agenda in a direction that supports these new governance processes to address the fundamental imperatives of democracy.Recommendations follow that:(1) the State House of Assembly should enact legislations that would make it mandatory for the public to participate in law making. The provisions should ensure that the process is all inclusive with mechanisms to monitor the level of citizen participation. (2) Public hearing be democratized to accommodate more constituents. This will require the House to synergize with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and cultural/traditional/religious organizations to engage constituents in town hall meetings on issues that concern them. (3) Bayelsa State House of Assembly should extend its feedback mechanisms to accommodate new technologies like the social media which will foster public sphere discourse and greater participation. Social media platforms can be used to aggregate feedback from constituents who might not be opportune to meet their representatives one-on-one. This expectedly will increase youths' participation in governance. (4) The House grants the constituents unfettered access to information at its disposal, especially when it is in tandem with public interest. The House can begin to ensure that its settings are aired live and an FOIA office is created to address consultations and submissions from constituents. Also, a dedicated website should be created to regularly furnish the public on the programs of the House.

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