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Transparency in the Legislature: A German example

August 3rd, 2011 · by Nicholas Ibekwe · [No Comments](#)

Would it not be fantastic if the Nigerian voter could ask legislators in the state and national assemblies questions directly on issues that affects his or her constituency as well as topical national issues – for example what they think of the controversial Tenure Elongation Bill – and get responses from them in a few days?

Imagine a change from the culture of “ayes and nays” that has characterised the voting system of assemblies across the country. Nigerians would certainly be eager to know, without going through the unending labyrinth of bureaucracy, their representative’s attendance ratio, voting records and earnings.

Until 2005, German voters also had to go through a lot of trouble in order to find out such information about their MPs.

In that year Gregor Hackman and his partner Boris Hekele came up with Abgeordnetenwatch or Parliament Watch, an “innovative solution” that was designed to enhance transparency and accountability in German federal and state parliaments. This online platform is run by a small Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) made up of two webdesigners, one online editor and three interns. It also employs about 20 freelancing moderators.

“Abgeordnetenwatch.de enables citizens to ask the right questions and helps you to test how responsive your Members of Parliament are”, Mr. Hackmack told the participants of this year’s IJ Summer Academy in Hamburg.

In the last six years, the project has grown from being a Hamburg-only platform to covering seven of the 16 German state parliaments, the Bundestag (federal parliament) and German representation in the EU Parliament.

How it works

On the website, citizens can type in their post code and are automatically taken to the profile of their representatives and can post questions to them.

After the question has been checked by one of the moderators to make sure that it is not racist, sexist or inflammatory, Abgeordnetenwatch will forward it to the MP. As soon as he or she replies, the user will be notified via email. Questions and replies are displayed online.

If there was a similar platform in Nigeria, I could, for example, draw the attention of my representative in the state assembly to the neglect of the road I use to travel to work daily. All I would need do is ask the politician online if there are any plans to do something about the state of disrepair of the road. If he or she decides to reply, I will be notified via email. The question and

email would be displayed for all to read.

A political bridge

This kind of service would be particularly helpful in Nigeria where legislators have the habit of moving out of their constituencies as soon as they are elected into office. From then on they are completely disconnected from their voters.

Abgeordnetenwatch can also be a useful tool for politicians as they can connect with their constituents.

The website also shows MP's rate of response as well as monitoring their voting pattern on core policy issues.

The opportunity to broaden transparency and accountability is perhaps the most attractive advantage of such a monitoring project.

The phenomenal growth and popularity of this German organisation in just six years (over 100,000 questions asked so far with an 80% response rate) and its success in countries like Luxemburg and Ireland is a pointer that it stands a good chance of working in Nigeria.

However, one challenge immediately comes to mind. Nigeria does not have the same level of internet saturation as Germany, and this would in no small way limit the impact and reach the platform would have.

Tags: · [Abgeordnetenwatch](#), [Parliament Watch](#), [SA11](#), [transparency](#)

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