

LEAD DEBATE ON A BILL FOR AN ACT TO ESTABLISH THE SOUTHWEST DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION 2019 AND FOR OTHER RELATED MATTERS

Sponsor: Senator Ibikunle Amosun, CON, FCA

Mr. President, Distinguished colleagues, it is a great honour and privilege to, on behalf of all the 17 other Senators from the South West geopolitical zone of the country, lead the debate for an Act to establish the South West Development Commission.

Mr President, Distinguished colleagues, this Bill was first read on the floor of the Senate on 14th November, 2019.

In leading this debate, I would like to crave your indulgence to stress that the issues that necessitated the enactment of this Bill are prevalent in all the other geopolitical zones in the country. What this literally means is that all the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria have more or less similar issues.

Mr President, Distinguished colleagues, in the pre-independence period up into the early post-independence era, Nigeria was made up of three regions – Northern, Eastern and Western Regions. Midwestern Region was later carved out of the Western Region. In the Western Region, the founding fathers, had a development ideology, which focused on the empowerment of the people. A policy mix in such core areas as health, education, agriculture, employment, infrastructural development and a functional and efficient public service defined their agenda for the region. The free primary education scheme and the universal health programme were two elements of their governance agenda, which were meant to produce a vibrant human capital as a basis for sustainable growth of the region.

The result of that policy mix was the transformation of the Southwest into an infrastructural paradise as experienced up to the most remote of locations across the region. Years after, especially since the return of Nigeria to democracy, which has now gone unbroken for 20 years plus, nothing bears similitude in virtually all the six states of the Southwest to the progressive development and assured march to self-sufficiency of the old Western Region. There is a gloomy picture of a region that is alarmingly in dire lack on almost all fronts; a region that once provided leadership for other regions and indeed the entire country.

Today, with an ever-increasing population due to rural-urban migration, facilities in the Southwest region, especially social amenities, are increasingly stretched, just as living standards continue to plummet. Majority of roads are calling for urgent attention. Many state-owned hospitals have inadequate medical personnel and equipment that can properly manage the health needs of patients. Educational institutions

are not what they used to be. Industrial estates have become desolate, while a few which are still functional are struggling to remain in business.

The massive growth and activity of the agricultural sector evidenced with endless rubber and cocoa plantations have since given way while growth of local industries has been stalled. Also, no effective bureaucracy exists, and with the least premium placed on capacity development, human resources development has ceased being a culture. Added to these, are policy inconsistencies and profligacy in governance and leadership styles. Everything seems at the lowest ebb.

Mr President, Distinguished colleagues, the Southwest region has immense prospects and potentials, which are capable of making it rival any of the flourishing Arabian enclaves making waves globally today. Aside hosting Nigeria's busiest airport, the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Lagos, and the busiest highway, the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, 60 per cent of Nigeria's industrial capacity, banking assets and even insurance assets are situated in the region. These are in addition to holding two of Nigeria's most important deep seaports – the Apapa Port Complex and Tin Can Island, thus having access to both land and sea borders.

Consequently, Mr President, Distinguished colleagues, the push for the establishment of the South West Development Commission is an attempt to address the dwindling fortunes of the South West region by implementing a regional development plan, taking into consideration the region's unique endowments, natural advantages and capabilities. This is one of the major reasons we are proposing the establishment of this commission. This Commission if passed into law will enhance regional integration which is capable of delivering the benefits of large economies of scale. It is my firm belief that this Bill will act as a catalyst to develop the geo political zone by providing legislative backing to address some of these challenges in the South West, just as it has been done for other geo political zones in this hallowed chambers.

The Bill seeks to resolve issues of under development by redirecting Federal attention to the development challenges of the South West region which comprises Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo States. Issues which include, but are not limited to, Agriculture, transportation, health, infrastructural decay, education, environment, housing, industrialization, water supply, electricity, commerce etc, which when addressed will have a multiplier effect of great proportions not only for the South West region but Nigeria as a whole.

The Bill seeks to establish a commission that will mobilise the collective strengths, assets and capabilities within the States of South-West Nigeria, towards achieving sustainable socio-economic growth and development that would result in high standard of living and improved

well-being for the people of the region to make it the preferred place of choice for people to live, to work, to visit, and to invest in. The main thrust being the attainment of an egalitarian, democratic and economically self-sustaining region that unlocks the energies and resourcefulness of her people for greater good and prosperity, while assuring their liberty and freedom.

The functions of the South West Development Commission include:

1. Conception, planning and implementation, in accordance with set rules and regulations, of projects and programs for sustainable development of the South West Region in the areas of transportation, roads, waterways, health, employment, industrialization, agriculture, housing and urban renewal as well as in education to mention a few.
2. To facilitate the rapid and sustainable development of the South West into a region that is economically prosperous, socially stable, ecologically regenerative and politically peaceful region.
3. Provide a master plan for reduction of unemployment while also providing schemes to promote physical development of the South West.
4. Implement all the measures approved for the development of the South West by the Federal Government and member States of the commission.
5. Identify factors inhibiting the development of the South West and assist the member States in the formulation and implementation of policies to ensure sound and efficient management of resources of the South West.
6. Cause the South West area to be surveyed in order to ascertain measures which are necessary to promote its physical and socio-economic development.
7. Assess and report any project being funded or carried out in South West area for the purpose of development.
8. Tackle ecological and environmental problems that arise from soil erosion problems and related environmental challenges in the South West, and advise the Federal Government and the member States on the prevention and control of erosion and environmental challenges.
9. Carry out such functions as the President may from time to time direct.

Mr President, Distinguished colleagues, it is the collective agreement and aspiration of all the Distinguished Senators from the South West geo political zone and other distinguished senators from other zones to support the passage of this historic and all important Bill. By passing this Bill, Mr President, Distinguished colleagues, this Senate would have demonstrated rare courage and audacity when it was most needed to turn around the dwindling fortunes of the South West zone and

consequently etched their names in the annals of history as standing up to save the South West and indeed Nigeria from economic oblivion.

Finally, Mr President, Distinguished colleagues, let me thank you most sincerely for supporting this Bill. I urge you, for the good of the people of the South West and our country, to lend your voices in support of this Bill. May history be kind to us all for the actions we take today for the present generation and those yet to come.

Mr. President, my highly respected and distinguished colleagues, in line with order 77(3) of our standing rules, the financial compendium is hereby attached.

Thank you for your kind attention and support for the passage of this Bill.

COMPENDIUM DISPLAYING A SYNOPSIS OF BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF A PROPOSED BILL FOR AN ACT TO ESTABLISH THE SOUTH WEST DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION.

In compliance with Order 77(3) of the Standing Order of the Senate 2007 (as amended) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria with respect to the procedure on Bills, Compendium and Consolidation.

It is worthy of note that the compilation shown below is a summary of the contemplated Overhead Costs, Recurrent and Capital Expenditure of the Commission.

Capital Estimate:

1.	Office Space and Setting	—	N14,000,000.00
2.	Office Furniture	—	N22,850,000.00
3.	Office Equipment	—	N10,437,000.00
4.	Communication Facilities	—	N3,338,000.00
5.	Operation Vehicles	—	N23,250,016.00
	Sub-Total	—	N73,875,016.00

Recurrent Estimate:

6.	Training	—	N10,000,000.00
7.	Emolument and Allowances	—	N74,167,034.32
	Sub-Total	—	N84,167,034.32
	GRAND Total	—	N158,042,050.32

SURMISES

The forgoing compilation proffers a fair approximation of the financial implications for the establishment of the Commission.

To all intents and purposes, the financial outlay estimated and projected is a modest one appropriate for the effective discharge and performance of the duties contemplated in the Act.