

*Full Length Research Paper*

# The Impacts of ASUU Strike Actions on Host Communities

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**Strike action is a demonstration of demand by a group of people at a given period of time. This study is taken cognizance of the academic staff union of universities (ASUU) which is frequent in Nigeria from time immemorial. The paper argues that the problem of Nigeria today is the nonchalant of political leaders. It obviously dealt with the concept of strike, the causes, the effect and consequences, the theories, the strike prevention measures (Government/Trade Unions), University Management System, and that of the benefits of ASUU Strikes and challenges. The paper concludes that ASUU strike action in Nigeria have consequences on the social, economic, political, educational and cultural aspects of the host communities.**

**Key words:** Strike Action, Consequences, Host Communities.

## INTRODUCTION

Strike actions by the teaching staff in Nigerian universities aimed at restoring and maintaining favorable industrial relations in workplaces, for our purpose. The University system without which governments and management as employees of labour would have no inducement to negotiate. This was demonstrated in 1980, when the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) embarked on only a 2-day nationwide strike action because a demand for a National Minimum Wage was ignored by the Federal Government. Management was immediately induced to negotiate which led to the ultimate enactment of the minimum wage Act of 1981. Onah (2003) argues that, "industrial sociologists have clearly established that conflict in form of strike actions is not only avoidable but, in fact, not bad in itself except when destructive". The argument for the prohibition or avoidance of strike actions is that it will adversely affect the fortunes of the economy, threaten public health, safety or security (of lives and property) and welfare of communities.

That ASUU strike actions however, are necessitated by its unending struggles to redress certain matters of serious interest to the university system such as brain drain, poor funding, non-provision of infrastructural needs, how to train and retain academics and non-teaching staff for more experience so as to re-introduce and inculcate in staff the norms and values of the teaching profession, it also includes how to internally generate and prudently manage resource within the

universities for the growth of the system. ASUU strike action therefore, is mainly a struggle to combat the phenomenon of brain drain and university system (Yakub, 2007:2). It would be recalled that the formation of trade unionism started as a group of employees realized after the advent of the factory system, that their strength lies on the workers grouping together to discuss their common problems and finding solutions on how to improve their lot. It was a better approach to tackle problems of common interest.

Initially, the problem arose out of child labour, long hours of work and poor work and poor working conditions and later, economic problems including the question of employee benefits and services which became a major concern. Here again, strike action was the weapon used. Trade unionism believes that through collective support of employee members, management and employees can always be influenced positively on conditions of employment, service and union demands. Mamoria and Ganker, (2011: 72) observes, "strike have always induced sectional managements and public leadership including governments to negotiate employment conditions and unions demands".

## Statement of the Problem

ASUU strike action affects socio-economic, political,

religious and cultural aspects of universities' host communities because during the period, those who depended on the University for Survival are affected by the strike action as business crumble in university campuses. Activities are usually crippled, inactive and business crumble in university campuses. In the word of Dotem in Memoria et al (2006), strikes are merely symptoms of more fundamental maladjustments, injustice and economic disturbances. The persistent strike actions of University Teaching Staff adversely affect the development of Nigeria Universities. Many scholars and members of society perceive strike action as the bane of quality education and academic standards. It is generally seemingly perceived that ASUU incessant strike actions has resulted to disruption of academic calendar and apparently the ultimately low standards and quality of education in Nigerian Universities. This is worrisome to the society, stakeholders in universities and the government.

The spates of strike action by ASUU however, are critical in reactions to Government insensitivity and nonchalant to the infrastructural and funding needs of Nigerian universities system at both federal and state levels. Pertinent to the problems is non-implementation of agreement with ASUU. The consequences of the ASUU strike action however are also clearly evident among universities host communities which include students and workers within the university environments. Jega (1998) cited in (Yakub, 2007) has alluded the problems of the ASUU strike thus: the struggles of the academics focused on saving the university system from collapse gained public sympathy and support. Unfortunately, the often resulted in prolonged closures of the universities, disrupt teaching and research, and the graduating students' career plans. They have tended to generate animosity within the system between the academic and non-teaching staff. These contradictions have exacted their own price on the system. Mamoria (2009) posits, "a strike is unjust in that it is an appeal to force in a matter of disrupted right. It is inhuman because of the misery it causes to the worker. It is wasteful of resource of capital and labour. It is wicked because it stirs up hate, it is anti-social in that it denies and disrupts the solidarity of the community". Thus, Wesilli (2006) lamented "protracted strikes have forced the most gifted and talented teachers to flee our universities; Buttressing the problem of brain-drain, from Nigerian universities, Kazeem (2009) regretted notably, "A militant strike has begun in ASUU in Nigeria significantly. This time, they have linked up with non-teaching staff. The system of education in the country appears to be in dismal state causing brain drain Fashoyin (2011) contends that in any event, whether or not a strike imposes economic costs on parties and society, there are social costs which make the strike distasteful and unacceptable. Such costs include deprivation of service, risks and threats to security, lives and property. In other words, all strikes have their

economic and social costs to society and in this sense no strike is good. The problem therefore, is that ASUU strike actions is perceived by society and stakeholders in the university system in Nigeria to have social, economic, political, educational and cultural consequences on their host communities.

During strike action, some female students indulge in promiscuous living which tends to increase moral decadence. There are also usually unnecessary and uncontrollable journeys or movements by students which are aimless and meaningless. Some of these journeys end up in fatal accidents that claim lives of our students and staff untimely. The strike periods result in cases of deviant behavior and criminality which include theft, burglary and kidnap, as most students find themselves idle and as the adage goes that "an idle heart is the devil's workshop".

Also, the strike action sometimes leads to disruption of students' academic programs and disrupt the academic calendar were student are made to spend long time or extend semester than usual. In this way, parents are affected in that they spend more money than they should have done because of unplanned expenses by students and in terms of payment of sectional school fees. In course of the strike actions, some students are lured into cultism and some other nefarious acts that jeopardize their career as the occult practices lead some of the victims to issues of rustication or suspension from the universities. From the foregoing, strike actions bring uncertainty, hopelessness and heartbreak in host communities. There is also the problem of postponement of graduants mobilization for National Youth Service which delay and hinder graduates in the labour market to secure employment.

### Theoretical Framework

The Functional View of Talcott Parsons, American Sociologist's point of departure is concern with how social order can be achieved in society. He posits that, social life consists of "mutual advantage and peaceful cooperation rather than mutual hostility and destruction".

Social solidarity of the universities and their host communities can be guaranteed and society can survive only if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity; education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the child from the beginning the essential similarities; co-operation, social solidarity and therefore social life would be impossible. A vital task for all societies is the welding of a mass of individuals into a united whole, in other words the creation of social solidarity. Durkheim argues that in industrial social solidarity is based largely on the interdependence of specialized skills for example the manufacturer of a single product requires the combination of a variety specialist. This necessity for combination produces co-

operation and social solidarity.

Thus, schools transmit both general values which provide the “necessary homogeneity for social survival” and specific skills which provide the “necessity for social co-operation”. Industrial society is thus united by value consensus and a specialized and a specialized division of labour whereby specialists combine to produce goods and services. The system theory sees organizations as natural systems composed of interrelated and interdependent series of processes. Organizations as open systems are usually ideally established with well-defined structures, goals and stated means of achieving the goals, thus, it is a combination of the interrelationship and process rather than only one of them that matter.

## METHODOLOGY

In the course of the study, secondary data and direct observation were adopted to analyze the content of the topic under study. The survey was derived from content analysis approach thereby obtaining relevant data from textbooks, journals, monographs etc.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Consequences of ASUU Strike Actions in Perception

It takes perception to determine how people react to and see situations, such as the case of study “ascertaining the sociological consequences of ASUU strike actions on universities host communities in Nigeria”. According to (Shaw, 2003 and Silverman, 2001), sociologists know that an individual acquires and makes sense out of information from the environment. Perception is also the process by which individuals select, organize, and interpret sensory inputs. The things people contribute to make sense to others come from their brains and the world benefits one from another in their environments. Through the senses, all environments stimuli are interpreted through the perception process. Based on the above definition, in human relation perception is just as important as reality. People often encounter the same things and perceive differently (Lussier, 2010: 54). A number of perceptions therefore, have been stated below to present the view of different opinions of people about the sociological consequences of ASUU strike actions on universities host communities or campus towns.

During ASUU strike actions in the past and in recent ones, it generates social and economic problems, which affect business activities in universities campuses and its environs. Grasses over grow with weeds which breed reptiles. It affects also lecture halls and the entire campuses by reason of non-activities (Hamza, 2012). From personal interviews with some accessible host community dwellers of the Niger Delta University (NDU)

host community, Amassoma, a community member said, “With the establishment of Niger Delta University in Amassoma, the first University in Bayelsa State began a boom in property business within and around Amassoma as a lot of the University’s students prefer to stay in rented apartments off campus. This brought about increased number of buildings informs of students’ hostels and self-contained apartment built by the indigenes of Amassoma and employees of the university who could buy land around the community. Another respondent, owner of a 20-flat of one bed room apartments occupied by students, said an apartment in his property goes for ₦120,000 - ₦150,000. He said, business is usually at its peak when students return for new sessions, adding that, with the recent strike actions by ASUU, life has not been easy as about thirteen(13) of his tenants rent has expired in October and he could not rent the apartments out because the tenants property were still locked up in the rooms. Some of our children who come from poor homes but however want to be educated are often engaged by the University students to render them services ranging from car wash, laundry, house-keeping to hair dressing, etc. it is from these menial jobs they do, that some students sponsor their education. If the strike action continues, it can affect the future of our children who now sit at home or gather at joints aimlessly to discuss issues that may not add value to their lives because they are idle. The worst hits were food vendors whose customers were mostly students.

A young caterer called madam Calabar who sells a restaurant at the new site of glory-land campus of NDU said, she used to sell about ₦17,000 - ₦20,000 in one day before the strike action, but now that sales have drastically dropped. She could now hardly sell ₦7,000 in a day and wondered if she could pay her shop rent which would expire by the coming month. She is considering reduction of the numbers of her workers which she pays ₦5,000 per day. She further lamented that before the strike action, she used to cook two bags and sometimes three bags of semolina and 15 tubers of yam but during strike action she would hardly finish a bag of semolina and 5 tubers of yam. According to her, when the University was in session, business was usually 24 hours 6 days a week but that during the strike, the campus is all quiet everywhere as early as 9:00pm.

Another respondent said business which provided services to the College of Health Sciences (CHS) in NDU now operate skeletonally because of lack of patronage that became the fate of those businesses from the beginning when the industrial action started over the four months ago. Although the strike action has impacted the economy of the University and its neighboring suburb popularly called Wilberforce Island negatively, the sector worst hit by the strike is the transportation sector as various transporters interviewed by the researchers said that they only operating skeletal services. A school teacher who has three children in the University believes

that the lecturers should take the amount government was offering now and resume academic activities in the Universities. "If after an agreed period of time, the Federal Government refuses to pay up the remaining part then, they can resume the strike again". Youth being left unnecessarily idle over such a time period would suffer a negative effects on them, the society and the nation in the long run, she opined.

Honestly, the strike action is having its toll on our petty business. David Agbala, a local laundry man popularly known as "Washing Machine" also expressed worry over the over the low patronage his business had recorded in the last four months. Agbala said, his laundry business which used to be the envy of many colleagues is going down since the industrial action commenced, leaving him with no option but to start sachet water business.

Hairdressers also complained that business was now poor. It used to boom because of the influx of female students who have travelled due to the strike action. They were no longer being patronized regularly as before, especially on weekends. "You can see that in the whole of the stalls that accommodate the eight of us, there are only three customers who some of our members fought over." Avoidable death that some families experiences following the unstable academic calendars that forced students to be on the road all the time, instead of being in the classroom and there is hardly even any evidence of the reversal of the phenomenon of brain-drain because ASSU went on strikes and secured fat packets. When and if rigorously computed and compared, it is likely to be the case that net losses are higher than get gains from these strikes. This point of view informs our stance that strike action is not the effective option (Yaqub, 2007:13).

The university is perceived as an organization for; it has characteristics that are common to other forms of organization as open system existing in the context of a given social and physical environment and involved in some form of interchange and exchange processes with the environment. There are benefits which host communities derive from universities that can be temporary suspended in the event of ASUU Strike actions, thus affecting the symbiotic social life interactions and exchange ok communication which forms the social solidarity of universities and their host communities some of such benefits are:

### **Landlords and House Rent Patronage**

Landlords of university communities have the privilege of higher patronage from student who could not secure university hostel accommodation and have to rent and live off-campus. In recent times, especially from the era of government monetization policy, most universities no longer make provisions for hostel accommodation. A good and typical example is the Imo State University, Owerri which operates only private hostel accommodation around its environment. Students in most

universities therefore live off-campus, even at the post-graduate level, example with such university without hostel not until lately is the Delta State University, Abraka. Host communities members who are landlords take advantage of the circumstance and hike rents. This had contributed to the socio-economic development of privileged communities. In the event of ASUU Strike action, such private hostels, private rented buildings or apartments and private hostels used as students accommodation will not be possible as students would vacate the premises and for as long as the strike continues, business will be affected.

### **Community Business Ventures: Economic**

University environments are often littered with business ventures of different and various sorts; including restaurants, computer centres, photocopying outfits, book stores/stands, electronic gadgets store and so on. These businesses boost the economy of the host communities as it provides self-help employment to community members, students and others, thereby providing food, shelter, ultimate improvement in the general economy. ASUU Strike would mean a temporary shut-down or permanent shut-down of these businesses depending on the nature, timing and seriousness of the strike action and the response of the state or federal government as the case may be.

### **Religious Benefit**

Scott and Marshall (2005) defined religion as a set of beliefs, symbols and practices concerned with the sacred and activated by moral community. Religion itself is a product of its time and no matter how conservative and unchanging it present itself; religion is being constantly influenced by the circumstances of the period and society in which it exists. At whatever stage of the prevalence of religion, the social-economic, political and cultural conditions are always at work modifying the major and providing points of emphases. Religion interest the social scientists, sociologist and social anthropologists inclusive, as a significant social universities with pervasive and enduring hold on mind and consequently on the behavior of man in society. It is seen as a social phenomenon to which the rules of the sociological method are applied in order to ascertain the functions it performs, attitude it stimulates, the demands and obligations it makes on and expect of its adherents. ASUU Strike affects religion in many ways.

The major ways of sponsorship and daily running of the church is basically the payments and church free-will offerings. The numerical strength of a church determines the volume of money or funds provided for the church. If students vacate the university because of ASUU Strike, church attendants both within the university campus and the church within the host community will be drastically

affected. This will reflect automatically in the drop of payment of offerings, tithes and other church contributions. Social and economic life of the church pastor or leader and family will be affected adversely for the period. Souls will be hardly be won for fewness of membership and church aid programmes to some student members will revoked or withdrawn. The emotional feelings of love for fellow religious church members may also be denied as the affection may be strong while they miss each other during long ASUU Strikes.

### **University Admissions in the Strike Year**

In case of a close down of a university resulting from ASUU Strike, where student admission is denied that particular striking university for the given year, it means candidates from that university post communities may have to seek admission elsewhere outside the state and/or its immediate environment. This will certainly affect the number of candidate who will secure admission to the university for that year of the strike, from that host community. These and lots more are some consequences of ASUU Strike action in Nigerian universities and their hos communities.

At the most simplistic level, one can assert that politics govern human conduct. Yes, the general understanding of politics is that it concerns power but the exercise of power becomes meaningless, except in a social context; a sociologist thus becomes interested with political power vis-à-vis the organization of society who wield political power and for what purpose? For whose benefit? What forms of social control can the other members of society exercise on the power holders? (Olurode 2013:1) on political implications of strikes on host communities, in some universities appointments of some key positions including principal officers of a university reflects the host communities input and representation. For example, the Vice-chancellors and registrars of many universities emerge as host community representatives or from state indigenes through the recommendation of university host communities' elites. This also reflects in the appointments, recruitments and promotion of employees in the universities. University political participation is predominantly by the host community members within the universities who politicize every facet of the university operations, including the awards of contract through the University Tenders Boards.

The geo-politics is often more than the politics outside the university arena. In the event of ASUU Strike, some representatives of host communities in strategic positions such as the university governing council, senate, the Registry and other principal officers might lose their positions or appointments dissolving the governing council by the visitor or in the case of protest and/or petition seriously considered by university constituted authorities.

Harambos & Heald (2008:28) posit, "it should be noted however, that studies have shown that, political participation is directly proportional to income level, occupational status, educational qualification and long-time residence in the community than short-time residence. Levels of political participation of community members in the university systems appears also to related to the degree of involvement and integration of the individual in society or university community. Some university host communities are sometimes presented with the opportunity of providing legal services to the university. For example a law firm located proxy to the university campus may be consulted to offer accounting and other such special legal services to the university. A strike action by ASUU could affect the legal services rendered by the host community lawyer who consult for and benefit from the university. The university staff or employees are in many ways badly affected. They loss the wages/salaries for the strike period and to meet the day to day expenses, they incur debts. Sometimes, employment is lost and future prospect become dim. The disruption in the family live, personal hardship, mental agonies and tensions develop and persists.

The employees are prosecuted, often intimidated, even victimized or kidnapped and given severe beating and repressed by police arrests and loss of morality results. In case of unsuccessful strikes, besides inflicting financial loss on workers, demoralized them, make them solemn and disappointed or shake the confidence in trade unions. Frequently, the weak trade union itself is helped for sometimes or permanently. The employers suffer heavy loses, not only academic outputs, but in form of huge expenditure incurred on crushing strikes, engaging strike-breakers and black legs maintaining a police and guards; organizing counter-demonstrations, processions and undertaken publicity. Apart from these losses, the loss of mental peace, respect and status in the society cannot be computed in terms of money. Memoria et al (2009). The public/ society too is not spared. Catlin (2009:419) posits, "the strikes and lock-out are a day menace to public safety. They infringe upon property right and become malicious in their effect, if not in their purpose, and they are regarded as a war or at any rate a blockade. Communities can be guaranteed and if there is oneness among members of that society can well survive. It takes education to bring about that oneness and unity through children in the school in their attributes that demonstrate co-operation and through solidarity and collective lives are able to make social life possible. This is done as the child mixes up while gaining education from the beginning of early life. Communities can be wielded into one whole.

This is known as social solidarity. According to Durkheim cited in (Alumode, 2002:29), in societies of industrialists, oneness which bring about social solidarity, depends on interdependence in terms of skills that are specialized. For example, for a product to be

manufactured it requires different individual skills to be combined from a variety of specialist this necessity for combination produces co-operation and social solidarity.

Anugwom (2010:61). The University is perceived as an organization for; it has characteristics that are common to other forms of organization as open system existing based on given social and physical environment and involved in some of interchange and exchange processes with the environment. There are benefits which host communities derive from universities that can temporarily be suspended in the event of ASSU Strike actions, thus affecting the symbolic social life of interactions and exchange of communication which forms the social solidarity of universities and their host communities some of such are:

Landlords of university communities have the privilege of higher patronage from students who could not secure university hostel accommodation and to rent and have to rent and live off-campus. In recent times, especially from the era of government monetization policy, most universities no longer make provisions for hostel accommodation. A good and typical example is the Imo State University, Owerri which operates only private hostel accommodation around its environment. Students in most universities therefore live off-campus, even at the post graduate level, example of such a university without hostels not until lately is the Delta State University, Abraka. Host communities members who are landlords take advantage of the circumstance and hike rents.

This had contributed highly to the development of socio-economic and social life of privileged communities. In the event of ASSU strike action, such private hostels, private rented buildings or apartments and private hotels used as students accommodation will not be possible as students would vacate premises and for as long as the strike continues, business will be affected. "The unending problem of the government and ASSU members did not only threaten breaking down every sector like some unions were threatening to join the action, but already had its toll on the Nigerian Students, communities and almost collapsed the educational sector. The strike already paralyzed or greatly affected the economy of the communities around the Universities as a great number of the members of such communities engage in small businesses inside the universities campuses to sustain their families". University environment are often littered with business ventures of different and various sorts; including restaurants, computer centers, photocopying outfits, book stores/stands, electronic gadgets stores and so on. The businesses boost the economy of the host communities as it provides self-help employment to community members, students and others thereby providing food, shelter ultimate improvement in the general economy. ASSU strike action would mean a temporary shutdown or permanent shutdown of these businesses depending on the nature, timing and

seriousness of the strike action and the response of the state or federal government as the case may be.

### Summary and Conclusion

In recent times, especially from the era of government monetization policy, most Universities no longer make provision for hostel accommodation. A good and typical example is the Imo State, University, Owerri which operates only private hostel accommodation around its environment. Students in most universities therefore live off-campus, even at the post graduate level, example of such a university without hostels not until lately is the Delta State University, Abraka. Host communities members who are landlords take advantage of the circumstance and hike rents. This had contributed highly to the socio-economic development of privileged communities. In the event of ASSU strike action, such private hostels, private rented buildings or apartments and private hotels used as students accommodation will not be possible as students would vacate premises and for as long as the strike continues business will be affected.

From the fore-going, the university system in Nigeria impacts on host communities, families, states and national universally, thus according to UNN post graduate studies Prospectus (2006-2010):

It shapes the destinies of individuals, races and nations.

- It reflects the particular and societal idiosyncrasies.
- It is committed to academic excellence, distinguished scholarship and the enlightenment of mankind in all communities.
- Its orientation is academic, cultural and vocational.
- The university system generally calls for a realistic approach to the problem of education.
- The academic, cultural and vocational pursuits, which boost the Social status of individuals, also elevate the host community as a whole.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

University in Nigeria should be non-discriminatory without prejudice in terms of sex, race, and national origin or religious creed, rather, it should act on the faith of diversity in education as opposed to one pattern as this would show strength rather than weakness in communities wherever Universities are domiciled.

Universities should be able to create wealth and present sustainable development and serve as a beacon of hope to those who seek knowledge for service to humanity in communities and societies in general.

Universities should ensure that they impact host communities socially, economically, culturally,

educationally and morally through a philosophy geared towards nation-building through capacity development.

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