



Special Interest

Report of E-Conference Proceedings

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Highlights

Over 3500 members of S4C forum, comprising mainly of young Nigerians converged online to engage the ASUU representative, with the objective of understanding the demands of striking lecturers, ascertain the status of FG-ASUU negotiations and proffer recommendations on the way forward.

FG-ASUU FACEOFF: The Issues Within

On Saturday, October 5, 2013, Spaces for Change (S4C) convened an e conference, "FG-ASUU Face off: The Issues within" featuring Dr. James Okpiliya, the Chairman of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), University of Calabar chapter.

Over 3500 members of S4C forum, comprising mainly of young Nigerians converged online to engage the ASUU representative, with the objective of understanding the demands of striking Nigerian university lecturers; ascertain the status of negotiations between it and the Nigerian Government; and proffer recommendations on the way forward.

The ASUU strike action

grounded academic activities in Nigerian universities across the country forcing students to remain at home throughout the period. The union has made it clear that it has no plans to call off the ASUU strike until their demands, as captured in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by Government on the 24th January 2012 and recommendations in the report of Government's Committee on Needs Assessment, are met by the Federal Government (FG). By that agreement, the federal government agreed it would inject N100 billion as funding into the universities in the first month; and that before the end of 2012, they would inject another N300 billion.

Prior to the commencement of the strike action, FG had

also reneged on another 2009 agreement with representatives of ASUU. The agreement was due for a review on the, June 20, 2012 but the agreement has not been substantially implemented. Due in large part of to the regularity of reneged agreements, ASUU is accusing the Federal Government of willful refusal to honour an agreement into which it (government) voluntarily entered.

On the other hand, the Supervising Minister of Education, Chief Nyesom Wike, has also disclosed that the Federal Government has met 80 per cent of ASUU's demands, except those of earned allowances and the N400 billion annual capital expenditure to universities.

Contextual background



Dr. Otuburu James Okpiliya is a senior lecturer in the department of English and Literary studies in University of Calabar (UNICAL), Cross Rivers State. He is the current Chairman of ASUU in UNICAL since 2010. He has been teaching in the university since 1998.”

Prior to the conference, hundreds of online users responded to Spaces for Change's call for submission of questions. A total of 122 questions centered on the ASUU strike and Nigeria's education sector were received, synchronized and presented to the guest speaker to rejoin and elucidate on. Elnathan John, a young popular writer and lawyer moderated the e-conference.

Beyond the group discussions on the Facebook social networking site, the E-conference proceedings were robustly live-streamed on Twitter, another social networking platform. The discussions attracted scores of retweets and followers to the **@spaces4change** handle on Twitter, while a great number of Twitter audiences used the hashtag **#FGASUUFaceoff** to follow the discussions.

While some vehemently condemned the FG for renegeing on their promise, forcing the lecturers to go on the strike, others blamed ASUU for being insensitive to the plight of the students they had been trained to teach. Other range of issues raised include the inability of the Nigerian government to for the revitalization of public

universities in Nigeria which coincidentally had been confirmed by the Federal government through the Needs Assessment Report on the state of public universities in Nigeria and the Federal Government Technical Committee recommendations to both the Federal Executive Council and the National Economic Council.

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EXCERPTS FROM THE CONFERENCE

Spaces for Change: Now we will go straight to the first set of questions by Tony O. Adams: Why can't ASUU take the Federal government to court for not honoring their agreement instead of punishing the students with strike? Must ASUU go on strike to bring FG to honor their agreement? And why did state universities join the strike?

Otoburu Okpiliya Our government is deaf and the only thing that will nudge it into consciousness is strike. The union has explored all avenues including dialogue, lobbying, name them to avert the strike but all failed. The Nigerian Constitution provides for Federal government assistance to states (section 164 sub-section 1 of the Nigerian Constitution). So during the negotiation, both teams found it pertinent that the agreement (2009) makes provision for

Federal government assistance to state universities.

Spaces for Change: Next question sir, from Obi Trice Emeka: What do state universities stand to gain from joining the strike?

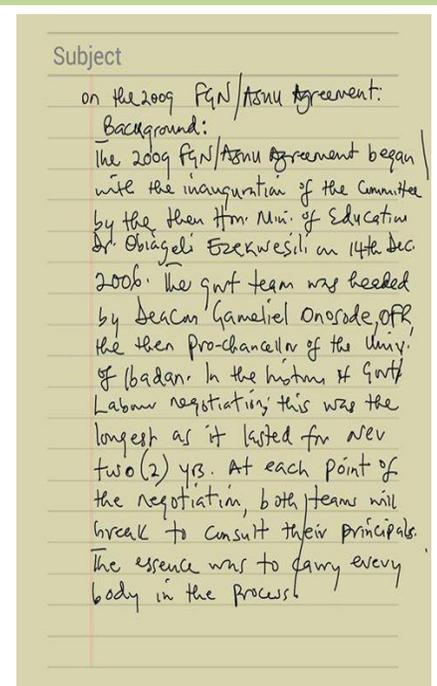
Otoburu Okpiliya The 2009 agreement, the implementation of which is the locus of the on-going industrial action, has the following key provisions borne in the context of the necessity of stemming the rot in the system and arresting and possibly reversing the problem of brain drain. Education is on the concurrent list and once the Federal government intervenes either by policy directives or legislation that will affect the activities of the states. Education is a social good and a critical area for sustainable development. That is why it is desirable that the federal

government should assist the states in proper funding of education to achieve this goal. For instance, the 3 Billion naira given to Ebonyi State University recently was not for salaries of lecturers, but assistance to that university for infrastructural development.

Spaces for Change: Could you briefly mention the key elements of the 2009 agreement?

Otoburu Okpiliya 1. Conditions of service. 2. Funding. 3. University autonomy and academic freedom. 4. Other matters.

Spaces for Change: Thank you sir. Some commentators have asserted that ASUU's demands revolve around their pockets and that if their outstanding allowances are paid, they will crumble and go back to work,



"The above is the guest speaker's notes detailing the processes and actors involved in the 2009 agreement reached between ASUU and the federal government."

Excerpts from the Conference Continued ...

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back to the same rotten infrastructure they now claim to be fighting to fix. How would you respond to this?

Otoburu Okpiliya: ASUU is not fighting for its pocket in as much as this struggle is concerned. The focus for this strike is on funding requirements for revitalization of public universities in Nigeria. This also the Federal government has confirmed through the Needs Assessment Report on the state of public universities in Nigeria and the Federal Government Technical Committee recommendations to both the Federal Executive Council and the National Economic Council.

These recommendations were unanimously accepted by both bodies. The strike has nothing to do with increase in personal emolument of lecturers. That is why the struggle is patriotic which governments themselves have acknowledged.

On the issue of allowances 98% of academic staff are not benefiting from the earned allowances. Rather it is for members of the university community (academic and non-academic) engaged in other responsibilities outside their primary assignment.

Spaces for

Change: Thank you for your response. Kelechi Chinonso and Ejikeme Azukaeme have both wondered about what the impact of this strike is on students. Has ASUU thought about students in this matter? Do you agree that in this faceoff, it is the students that suffer most directly from this imbroglio? What compromises if any is ASUU willing to make?

Otoburu Okpiliya It is true that the strike has impact for not just students, but also lecturers. After all, there are lecturers

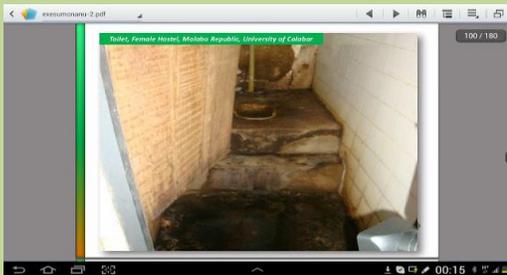
whose children and wards are in the universities. We are teaching them and we know where it pinches. If students themselves are sincere, they will understand what ASUU is saying. For compromises, the agreement and MoU reached with the government is staring us at the face. Let the Federal government come out openly and tell the world what it intends to do with it. For ASUU, we are tired of promises from government and that is why we have been having series of strikes.

Note that it was the failure of government to implement the 2009 agreement that gave rise to the MoU, the content which were virtually dictated by the secretary to the government of the federation after making the union to believe that it was sacrosanct. This document which was signed on the 24th of January 2012 for

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which implementation was to commence immediately did not see the light of day until the strike began on July 1,2013.



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ASUU says its fighting for funding of infrastructure to improve learning outcomes.



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ASUU says challenges inundating Nigerian universities include the following:

1. Less than 10% of the universities have video Conferencing facility.
2. Less than 20% of the universities use interactive boards
3. More than 50% don't use public address system in their lecture **OVERCROWDED** rooms/theatres.
4. Internet services are non-existent, epileptic and slow in 99% of Nigerian universities
5. Nigerian universities' library resources are outdated and manually operated. Book shelves are homes to rats/cockroaches.
5. No university library in Nigeria is fully automated. Less than 35% are partially automated.
6. There are currently 701 development projects in Nigerian universities. 163 (23.3%) are abandoned and 538 (76.7%) are **PERPETUALLY** on-going projects.
7. Some of the abandoned projects in Nigerian universities are over 15 years old, some are over 40 years old.

FG-ASUU FACEOFF: The Issues Within

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About our Organization...

Spaces for Change (S4C) is a non-profit organization working to infuse human rights into social and economic governance processes in Nigeria. Through research, policy analysis, advocacy, youth engagement, public interest litigation and community action, the organization aims to increase the participation of Nigerian youth, women and marginalized constituencies in social and economic development, and also help public authorities and corporate entities to put a human rights approach at the heart of their decision-making.

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