

Industrial Conflict and National Development: An Assessment of ASUU Struggles at Recent Times

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This paper focuses on discussions on the issues of conflict *vis-à-vis* industrial conflicts as it relates the activities of ASUU. The issue bothering conflict is diversified, endemic and mostly unavoidable in our day to day existence in all societies. The paper stresses the presence of conflicting circumstances among individuals and groups, not only in Nigeria, but also in even the more advanced, more civilised and more developed communities in developed nations like in Europe and in America. While most communities see conflict as a taboo, some other instead sees it as a way to apply it to transforming conflict to the positive gains when results of conflict situations are reviewed. The researcher employed strictly the use of data generated from secondary sources as a means of driving home his point of argument, conceiving the issue of conflict as seen to be either a sine qua non to development or a non essential ingredient for any appreciable level of an overall development to take place in the education industry as it relates to ASUU and in societies like Nigeria. The paper highlights some achievements gained from ASUU strike actions for the onward transformation of the Nigerian universities. The paper is of the opinion among others that, for development to be actualised, there is the likelihood of turmoil, disturbances, and hence conflict among parties concerned and that ASUU should see strike action as the last resort in driving home their point. Hence should be done with caution.

Keywords:

Asuu, Benefits,
Conflict,
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Background to the Study

Conflict has been in existence right from the cradle of man existence. In other words it is as old as mankind, hence inarguably a salient feature of the human society. Conflict most times represents the one of the two natures of man which is evil (St. Augustine, 1950). Consequently, conflict may manifest in disagreement, anger, quarrel hatred, destruction, killing or war. Any untoward attitudes capable of charging up the political or social environment can likely generate conflict (Sheriff, n.d). Attributes akin to indiscipline such as greed, covetousness, self centeredness, discontent, envy, arrogance, rudeness, impunity and much more are capable of jeopardising the existing robust relationship among individuals.

The foregoing does not however mean that most conflict situations arose as a result of the motive of causing disaffection, or troubling the existing peaceful atmosphere, but it can be arising to liberate and redress and better organise the system for higher level of efficiency and productivity. An individual, group, or a section of a group, which may be seen as minority may be treated with disdain and suffer perpetually if that one refuse to react and raise his voice beyond the normally acceptable to warrant attention and sympathy – thus the reason for conflict at that instance is worthwhile, reasonable and commendable. The result of this, when eventually actualised would lead to a more suitable, egalitarian, encompassing, responsible, and inclusive governance and hence stability in governmental developmental processes.

In a properly analysed conflict situation, especially those that involve organised groups of people, there usually abound the type of conflict, reasons for the conflict, reasons for the justification for the conflict and so on, hence the foregoing will dictate the extent of the benefit that will be derived if things normalise in favour of the latter. All of them engineered towards the actualisation of a better and enviable society.

It is worthy of note the fact that nations most especially developing ones and Nigeria to be specific have experience several instances of industrial disputes right from the pre colonial era to this present era of democracy, the academic associations of tertiary institutions such as the academic staff union of universities (ASSU), Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP) and others are not at all left behind in this conflict.

The academic staff union of universities have demonstrated its anger towards the unacceptable ways by which the nations universities is being run and among others, the dilapidation and deplorable state of infrastructural deficits in the nations universities which is the highest institution of learning.

Reactions towards the aforementioned had come in the form of absenteeism, strike, sabotage, and others; the result which has brought a untold hardship to the economy, and the production of low quality university graduates into the system as most students now study to pass when they should study for knowledge acquisition.

It is based on this backdrop of general conflict situations that this paper seeks a probe into the following pertinent issues:

1. What is the brief history of ASSU;
2. What are the nature of ASUU struggles and;
3. What are the results of ASUU struggles?

Objectives of the study

The study will be guided by the following objectives:

1. To recall the history of ASUU in order to show if it was meant for conflict.
2. To find out the nature of ASUU struggles and if justified.
3. To identify if the results are pleasant to national building.

In an attempt to embark on the presentation of this paper, attempt will be made on the definition of some relevant concepts, theoretical framework, types of conflict, forms of conflict the nature of conflict in Nigeria conclusion and recommendations.

Definition of Concepts

In order for us to properly understand the intricacies of conflict as it relates to the development of our dear country Nigeria, then the need to make a clarification of some terms like conflict and development.

Conflict

The term conflict refers to an existing state of disagreement or hostility between two or more people (Nicholson, 1992). In politics, conflict is more explicitly defined. Conflict is said to exist when two or more groups engage in a struggle over values and claims to status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate the rivals (Jeong, 2000). Conflict is a demonstration of cross-purposes of distinct or similar political groups which often ends in political violence, and political violence, when contextualized in the Weberian sense, according to Anifowose, in his *Violence and Politics in Nigeria* (1982), is an acceptable weapon to ventilate anger.

From the definition as posed by Anifowose above, which described conflict as an acceptable way to ventilate one's anger, demonstrated reason for which conflict can be approached for the betterment of the society. There is no gainsay the fact that, more responsible ways such as mediation, notices, petitioning, even peaceful protests and so much more ways may be approached without much attention, but when people luck up and take to violence, then they get the attention that is mostly deserved and desirable. Hence violence is a worthy tool for correction, and emancipation for the redemption of one's lost glory and existential deprivations.

Development

Development as a concept is captured as a multidimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitude and national institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth. It involves reduction of inequality or eradication of

absolute poverty among the citizenry. It represents a continuous change involving reorganization, re-orientation of the social, economy and the entire system (Dominic, Matthew, and Akunna, 2014). Development at present can also mean to represent a whole lot of changes that occur which brings changes to the social system by ensuring that the various need and desires of the individuals and groups are lifted away from the one that was formally unsatisfactory.

Theoretical Framework

In view of the pivotal importance for the embrace of conflict in some situations, to enhance development and ease of life, the adoption of the social conflict theory. This perspective is relevant as a result of its adherence to the fact that every society has its own portion of conflict. It laid emphasis on the fact that, the survival of any society chiefly depends on the level with which individuals are ready to face up to it. It registered its displeasure for the relative failure of the early sociologists in the words of Don Martindale, (1960) that conflict and its resolution are a central fact of society and to search traditions for relevant materials. The theory however laid emphasis on the need for a conspicuous social order at every point where necessary for the sake of resolution and suppression of social conflicts, but not to do out rightly away with conflict situations through elimination or absence.

In the light of this, conflict is projected as a necessary ingredient for a successful running of the social system. Similarly, as a way to buttress, Adam Ferguson (1723 – 1816), a member of Scottish Enlightenment, thought that while man is born in society, some of his important institutions originate in force and conflict is necessary concomitant to progress. Out of the efforts of man to secure values arises the order and authority of society. The forms and powers of government are established by the incidents of struggle.

Types of Conflict

Intra personal conflict: This can be referred to a type of conflict exhibited by an individual against himself as a result of what comes from the mind of that person as it is dictated by the circumstances surrounding such person. Unpleasant situations such as anger, depression, confusion, frustration and others often lead to aggression, erratic behaviour and in extreme cases, suicide (Ross, 1993).

Inter Personal Conflict

This is the fight that involves man and another man. This may take the form of a direct opposition, it may be in the form of exchange of blow, a gun fire at someone, or as in a case of robbery, or it may be a more subtle conflict between the desires of two or more persons (Nikolajeva, 2005). Keeping malice or a cold attitude towards someone is a testimony to conflict. This type can come in the form of an implicit hostility, that may not be obvious to a third party, but the unfriendly parties already know that all is not entirely well between them.

Man against Society and Nature

This is a state of contention between man and its environment. It describes a situation whereby man stands against some manmade institutions and practices (Morell, 2009), such as prostitution, slavery, corruption, bad governance and so on. Nature can also be seen to be contending with man in an area of global warming, resistant malaria, desertification, and other natural disasters. Man is seen to be left with no option than to look for ways to acclimatise to its condition and make the situation to be less severe.

Family Conflict

As it is well known by anthropologists that family is the smallest unit of the kinship structure, conflicts also emanate despite its smallness and close affinity of members. Conflicts do arise from roles played by members, expectations from family members and so on. Conflicts may have characteristics that are similar to rudeness, claim to seniority, truancy at school, disputes from properties and inheritance.

Inter Group Conflict

Groups such as interest groups, religious groups, ethnic groups and religious group are usually in a state of disagreement. For instance, the crises emanating from the Christians and Muslims in Nigeria is a good example of inter- faith conflict and there has been clashes between their members early 1980. The Maitatsine riots in Kano, Bulumkutu crisis in Maiduguri, Sokoto university campus riots over use of Othman dan Fodio's daughter's name in a pageant, Cross vs. Crescent crisis at the Ibadan university, among others, are worse scenarios of this (Folarin, 1997). The Boko Haram Islamist terrorist onslaught against Christians and the Nigerian State since 2009 has however, become the worst in the annals of Nigeria's religious conflict. In terms of ethnic conflict, there have been: Igbo-Hausa feud that began after the military coup and counter-coup of 1966, culminating in the Civil War in 1967, Efik-Ibibio conflict, Tiv-Jukun debacle, Fulani-Birom clashes, and Itsekiri-Urhobo-Ijaw conflict in the Niger Delta. Intra-ethnic or inter-community conflicts include Ife-Modakeke, Umuleri Aguleri, Andoni-Ogoni, and Egba-Awori (Ota) clashes.

Intra-State Conflict

This is the type of conflict that is confined within the boundaries of an independent state, usually triggered by factors of economy such as land, uneven development, the need to control ones resources and a unacceptable formula for the sharing of common revenue. Other factors such as socially induces related ones like the case in old Sudan. Social ethnic factors such as the ethnic cleansing like the case of Biafra in Nigeria and the genocide in Ruwanda, is a good example. Other politically induces ones are cases of lopsidedness in appointments, quota systems and so on.

Inter-State Conflict

This refers to conflicts that arose between states with clear cut boundaries. They are otherwise known as international conflicts and it can degenerate to a state of war. Actions related to territorial encroachment by neighbour states, dumping of hazardous wastes by other country, importation of toxic materials to other countries, and so on.

Global Conflict

This is synonymous to interstate conflict as it is international, but its scope and dimension is far more grater. Example is the Serbia- Australia conflict of 1914. The German- British conflict of 1939 and the rise in terror activities have led to global conflict involving global attention to tackle.

Forms of Conflict

Effort will be made in this paper to briefly identify some forms of conflict that are common in the sub Saharan Africa and Nigeria.

1. Revolt - this simply refers to a general rejection in a established order and this may encourage revolution which can be described as a general sweeping off of a existing order. Protest refers to a mass demonstration of citizens against a particular action or decision of the government. Protest can be brief, peaceful, or violent.
2. Mutiny - this is a kind of resistance to obedience among the security forces. It is aimed at resisting the command of the Commander-in-Chief to topple the government.
3. Insurgency - this is an organised rebellion against the operations of a state. It is usually led by ethnic, religious or sectional group. It is aimed at destabilising the existing state structures by use of force so as to produce another. Examples are the emergence of Eritrea from old Ethiopia, the emergence of South Sudan from Sudan and others.

The Nature of Conflict in Nigeria

For the purpose of this paper, effort will be geared towards discussing the positive roles that conflict have placed towards the betterment of the majority. The ways in which crises emanate in Nigeria generally are in divers in ways and it originated from the multi ethnic, and multi tribal nature of the Nigerian state, which attracts disintegration, civil war, civil strife - all culminating into agitations and violent conflicts. Conflicts are pronounces on issues of ethnicity, religion, industrial unrest, civil unrest just to mention but a few.

The benefits that conflict can have especially in the challenging some outdated and harmful practices are enormous. It sharpens the society to adhere the modern norms and practices that will in the end lead to higher productivity and outcome at the least effort. The need for absolute ingenuity is required for success, and this may be difficult to achieve without exerting a reasonable force. Conflict raises the awareness and sensitivity of individuals to what is important at a moment in time.

Conflict situations for instance in the Niger Delta area by the (MEND) Movement for the emancipation of the Niger Delta People has opened the eyes of the public to the intensive degradation and environmental pollution in such areas and the need to grant amnesty to the militants. The violence situation involving the Fulani herdsmen and the farmers amidst claims of trespassing and sabotage is a wakeup call for all stake holders to find a lasting solution to the impending calamity, and this is making for a proposal for cattle

ranches and / colony. The conflict triggered by the Boko Haram insurgency has reinvigorated the Nigerian Armed forces to get more modern equipment and engage the insurgents in a more tactical way of approach to tackling the menace.

A Brief History of ASUU

The academic staff union of universities (ASUU) is a union of academic staff of Nigerian university teachers formed in the year 1965 to cover academic and association of university staff of all state and federal universities in Nigeria and it was founded and established in 1978 with its affiliations in the Nigerian labour congress.

Highlights of Some ASUU Struggles and Results

It should be noted here that, the conflict situation generated by ASUU at most instances is as a result of the unions unending desire for a positive change for a reformation of the tertiary education sector the education sector, and the country at large. In the view of a fundamental importance and the need for a robust institution for learning, and for the negotiations for fair wages, which the government of Nigeria are reluctant to do, ASUU have had no option than to at many instances reluctantly engage in conflicts with the government for the singular reason of ensuring that their laudable demands are met for the overall interest of the masses who are the major patronage of Nigerian public institutions.

For instance during the military regime in 1988, ASUU went into activities to pressed for the need to obtain fair wages and salaries and also to seek for autonomy of the university system. After series of negotiations, which later resulted into a industrial strike actions that lasted for long leading to the seizure of the unions properties and the outright proscription of the union in August 7 1988 (www.asuunigeria.org). The government realised that there are lots of substances in the position of the university academic members, hence, an arrangement was reached that led to the eventual meeting of many of the union's demands.

Similar conflicting situations were recorded in 1994, 1996, even at the return of democracy in 1990 during which the union was aggrieved about the level of opposition it was facing in the hand of the government of the day. In the second half of 2002, the then national president of the union petitioned the leadership of the independent corrupt practices commission headed by Hon. Justice Mustapha Akanbi, to investigate the authorities of the university of Ilorin for financial mismanagement and corruption.

It should be noted as a fact that there was no response in 1992 until strike action was taken, then the federal government insisted that they cannot revitalise the university after ASUU gave the Educational Trust Fund proposal (ETF) which is now TETFund. Similarly, in 2008, ASUU provided pictorial documentations of the state of decay of the universities that led to the federal government to embark on the NEEDS assessment programme, the result of which was not approved until strike actions were taken.

It is most disheartening that most of the major developments in the higher institution of learning today were achieved but with a pill of strike action. Some other notable activities of responsibility such as the allowances for supervision of a Ph.D. student and Masters students which stood at two thousand and five thousand naira respectively were never reviewed upward till now (probably because no strike was embarked).

The present industrial unrest in the education sector, especially among the (ASUU) Academic Staff Union of Universities has paved way for the release of a part of the funding requested for the smooth running of the Universities, the approval of the Nigerian University Pension Fund Custodian and so on.

These aforementioned gains of the proceed of strike have in no small measure added some feather to nation building and development. And this is ain line with the ideology and aspirations of past nationalists and heroes of ages past. Moreover, most claims made by ASUU were largely centred on, but not limited to funding, weak institutional autonomy, the revitalisation of the public universities in the country and so on hence should not be sen as selfish egoistic and self-aggrandisement Ogbette, Eke and Ori, (2017).

Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, the issue of conflict is two sided and the application of its meaning is a function of the purpose for which conflict is employed for and so should not be seen as a taboo in its entirety. In cases where there is the need to go beyond dialogue in the resolution of some crises situations emanating from cheats from the other party and or from the insensitive nature of some other party involved to the plight of the other, then, the need for the display of minimal aggression which could take the form of peaceful protest, strike actions and boycott of some nationally organised programmes and activities may be necessary to serve as a wakeup call for a government to sit up and jettison its ineptitude and insensitivity to the plight of the common man.

The researcher is of the recommendation that, in as much as it is expected for individuals and groups to respect and appreciate the feelings of others so that there will be a harmony in the dispensation of justice, conflict should not be seen as neither totally bad nor good. Citizens should be ready to be submissive and tolerant in their quest for a better approach for governance. There should be the exercise of restraint and caution should never be thrown into the wind.

There is the need for parties to express their feelings through the manifestation of some tender aspect of conflict so that their grievances and aspirations can gain attention by the concerned authorities. Hence, there is the need for controlled behaviours and actions that might generate disturbances and turbulent situations in order for a focussed attention to verbalise our problems for solution to be achieved and for development to be achieved. ASUU should explore all other avenues – formal or informal, in their struggle for justice, hence see strike actions as the last resort at all times.

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