

THE NATIONAL SCHOLAR

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OUR MISSION

The National Scholar is the official news magazine of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), published with the goal of setting agenda for public discourse on contemporary issues of general interest. Our mission is multifaceted, yet unified by an unwavering commitment to upholding the principles of humanism, academic freedom, promoting intellectual discourse, and advancing the cause of higher education in Nigeria.

At the core of our endeavors lies a steadfast dedication to fostering an environment conducive to rigorous intellectual inquiry and critical analysis. We believe that universities play a pivotal role in shaping the future of our nation, and it is our solemn duty to safeguard the integrity and autonomy of these institutions. Through our pages, we strive to ignite thought-provoking discussions on contemporary issues that impact the academic realm, seeking to influence policy decisions and raise awareness among stakeholders and the general public.

Recognising the power of creative expression in shaping narratives and fostering cultural understanding, our pages are adorned with thought-provoking poems and captivating cartoons that not only entertain but also provoke introspection and critical thinking. We believe that art and literature offer unique perspectives on the human condition, complementing our academic pursuits and enriching our collective intellectual journey.

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Please note that some views expressed in this publication are those of the individual author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official stance of ASUU.

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THE STATE OF THE UNION:

Navigating through the Current Challenges

In its nearly five decades of existence, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has stood as a formidable bulwark against the erosion of academic values in Nigeria's public universities. Emerging from the ashes of the Nigerian Association of University Teachers (NAUT) in 1978, ASUU has long championed the cause of academic freedom, staff welfare, and resistance to state-induced decay. Today, ASUU is still very committed to its principles, discipline and dedication to the welfare of her members as was envisioned by the founding fathers.

Under the current leadership of Comrade Emmanuel Osodeke, the Union has reaffirmed its commitment to its core values by eschewing 'economism'. But there are some challenges arising from members who are largely unaware of the principles of the Union, and who have not taken time to



study and integrate the Union's constitution. Nonetheless, the demonstrated concerns of ASUU to emancipate and empower the Nigerian University System against the imperialist powers bent on stifling academics have over the years endeared many Nigerians to its course. Regrettably however, these activities of the Union to liberate the system have at the same time been marked as object of criticisms and venomous attacks by some unenviable characters, especially within the government circles and some university administrators. Unfortunately, these anti-ASUU elements are now desperately recruiting collaborators among members

of the Union. Consequently, these vulnerable academics who are prone to opportunism and self-aggrandisement with a high sense of desperation for power have elected to work against ASUU members' unity, strength and solidarity towards their collective struggles.

As the Union navigates this complex terrain, a number of deep-rooted structural and ideological challenges have risen to the surface. First, a major source of crises in the branches today is the dearth of academics of the ideological left. This is the product of the collapse of political education through the regular holding of ideological classes in Nigerian universities. It has become difficult to identify academics with sufficient ideological clarity, social commitment and leftist radical to lead the Union in many branches. In some branches, while the veterans believe that some Chairpersons selflessly

promoted the welfare and defended the rights of ASUU members, some hold the view that many Chairpersons because of their inept leadership precipitate crises. Consequently, alliances are formed to the extent that some sister unions in branches get involved in the struggle for leadership position in ASUU, either to support their kinsmen or friends. Thus, the emergence within the ranks of ASUU membership of two groups that seemed on the surface like anti-establishment and pro-establishment. The polarization in some branches usually encourage the university administration to stop the collection of check-off dues to the local branch while remitting same to ASUU at the National level or in some cases, the remittances are completely stopped against the extant laws.

Second, the appointment of Vice-Chancellors has become another flashpoint. Where once it was a strictly academic contest, it has now become deeply politicised. Some ASUU executives have sought to influence outcomes, dragging the Union into factional fights. When their preferred candidates lose, accusations of bias and procedural flaws follow. ASUU must return to a

position of principled neutrality. Let the process be transparent and merit-driven - but let the Union remain above the fray.



A member of ASUU at the NLC solidarity protest in Jos amid the prolonged strike by university workers in 2022.

Third, some ASUU members are of the opinion that the Union can be used to determine whether the University will have a good Vice-Chancellor or a bad Vice-Chancellor. However, there are no “good” and “bad” Vice-Chancellors. There are only strong Senates and weak Senates that can either checkmate a dictatorial Vice-Chancellor or allow him to destroy the system. The problem in the Nigerian university system today is, therefore, that the Vice-Chancellors have become overtly powerful and dictatorial. The duty of the Union to keep the Vice-Chancellors in check has been abandoned. ASUU must

ensure that activist academics are strategically placed in governing bodies to restore internal checks and balances. The Union's watchdog role must not be abandoned.

Fourth, ASUU's success in pushing for university councils to take charge of VC appointments is commendable. However, this victory has been marred by internal conflicts. The moment vacancy for the post of Vice-Chancellor is advertised, tensions begin to mount and in some cases the Union is dragged into it. Even the leadership of ASUU as EXCO would experience a division based on different preferences occasioned sometimes by clannish sentiments. Some of the candidates would woo ASUU leadership to recognize them as candidates to be supported by the Union. When some dissenting voices insist that all the candidates, whether from the University or outside are members of the Union and the contest should be placed on level ground, strong antagonism sets in. Consequently, after the appointment, and where the supposed candidate of the Union does not get appointed, the leadership begins to cast doubt on the process accusing the Council of not following the procedure in short-listing of candidates.

One wonders why the process was flawed when members of the Union are on Council and would have advised on the right procedure. This is one issue affecting our branches and therefore, ASUU leadership must avoid being seen - or used - as kingmakers. Its role is to uphold due process, not to manipulate it.

Fifth, the compromised recruitment process in universities is perhaps the most insidious threat to the Union. Under the guise of political patronage, individuals with little regard for academic culture are being smuggled into the system. As ASUU President Emmanuel Osodeke categorizes, people in academics today include: (i) those who genuinely have love for scholarship and are willing to be lecturers, (ii) those who went into other sectors of the economy but did not find any satisfaction and had always wanted to lecture and are back in the system, (iii) those who were brought in by the politicians for their involvement in election and having delivered their polling units, were offered employment through their politically appointed Vice Chancellors without due process, (iv) those who come in to the system with the sole aim of making money without

regards or concerns about the university culture. The implications are dire. When recruitment becomes a matter of political calculation, the soul of the university is sold to the highest bidder.

Sixth, congress meetings, once vibrant arenas for ideological exchange, now suffer from poor attendance. Most members only show up when discussions on welfare and money are involved. This "bread-and-butter" mentality runs counter to ASUU's founding principles. The Union must rekindle a culture of intellectual activism and collective responsibility.

The blueprint for navigating through the current challenges would include the revival of ideological training, ensuring leadership neutrality, strengthening internal governance, and upholding merit-based recruitment. Also, ASUU congresses must be reinvigorated, and the union's leadership must be strengthened.

To revive ideological training, regular political education and mentorship for younger academics is required. This can be achieved through constant ideological discussions to groom young academics in leftist radicalism and social commitment. To ensure leadership neutrality, branch executives must resist co-optation during VC selection processes. They must officially

declare and maintain a neutral stance in the Vice Chancellor selection processes but at the same time support a transparent and merit-based system that prioritizes competence over political affiliations.

Furthermore, internal governance can be strengthened through promotion of internal checks and balances within the Senate, Council, and Congregation to prevent excessive centralization of power. The union should ensure active ASUU members participation in Senate and Council meetings to safeguard academic freedom and institutional integrity. Moreover, the union at both National and branch levels should continue to push for public advertisement of academic vacancies and standardized selection criteria and vehemently oppose politicized appointments in order to uphold merit-based recruitment. The union should publicly condemn and legally challenge recruitment practices influenced by political affiliations. It should also encourage universities to enforce rigorous recruitment standards to ensure only qualified and committed individuals join the academic system.

To enhance members'

engagement and participation, branches should regularly organize thematic congresses to address contemporary issues beyond just salary-related matters. The union should develop incentive participation by introducing academic or professional development opportunities for active congress members. It may be necessary to improve communication with members through the use of digital platforms to keep members informed and involved.

Importantly, the leadership of the union can be strengthened through capacity building in the form of leadership training for executive members at both national and branch levels and regularly educating members on ASUU's principles, constitution, and ethical guidelines. ASUU executives should uphold transparency in decision-making to maintain members' trust.

As Comrade Biodun Ogunyemi once noted, just as there is no power of darkness, but the absence of light, the collective resolve, determination and commitment of our principled members are all we need to checkmate the discordant elements among our ranks. Therefore, it has

become imperative that we all rise to defend and strengthen our Union against crass opportunism and forces of reaction. In this regard, the ageless Principles of our Union's document becomes an indispensable compass. With it, we can circumnavigate and overcome emergent organisational challenges that may threaten the growth and stability of our Great Union. Quoting the union hymn we conclude that, we can bring to birth a new world from the ashes of the old if we realise that our Union makes us strong.

*Aluta Continua. Victoria
Acerta
Long Live ASUU.*

*Victor Terna Igbum
Convener, NEC Secretariat*

We are blessed to have resolute leaders across all strata of our union - Emmanuel Osodeke

For decades, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has remained at the forefront of the struggle to safeguard Nigeria's public university system. From university autonomy and infrastructure to issues of lecturers' welfare, the union has consistently raised its voice against policies it perceives as detrimental to the academic sector. At the heart of this enduring struggle are individuals who have quietly but resolutely dedicated themselves to preserving the integrity and future of Nigeria's higher education.

In this exclusive interview with The National Scholar, ASUU President, Professor Emmanuel Osodeke, speaks with candour about his journey through the union's ranks, the sacrifices involved, the gains recorded under his leadership, and the ongoing challenges confronting the union and the Nigerian university system at large. From navigating government negotiations to tackling funding models such as NELFUND, Professor Osodeke lays bare the realities of leading one of Nigeria's most resolute and misunderstood unions.

Excerpts...

TNS: *Could you recount the events that led to your emergence as ASUU President?*

EO: You know, in ASUU, you do not determine what you will be. You do not pick a form to apply for any position. When you indicate interest, you are disqualified. So, all the positions I held in the union came from members. I started as the secretary of my branch. Even

though I was not interested, I got nominated. Afterwards, I was elected to the position of chairman of my branch. Then, one year after becoming chairman, I got a letter from Dipo Fashino stating that I was now the Zonal coordinator of Nsukka Zone, and I held that position for nine years. After serving as zonal coordinator (without indicating interest), I was elected the union's financial secretary. From there, I became the Vice President and served for



Emmanuel Osodeke

two years before becoming president. In ASUU, you do not indicate interest. Truly, for me, if I was told to indicate interest, I would not have contested because I know the stress associated with the union's work. This goes to say that in ASUU, you will be called upon to take more responsibilities when you are doing well.

TNS: *From what you have said, serving the union involves a significant amount of sacrifice. How have you managed to cope with the pressures and demands of the union?*

EO: I have been so lucky with

my team. None of them has betrayed me. Each one is very willing to work for the system. Likewise, my family has been very supportive. My wife, particularly, encourages me a lot. So yes, the work is stressful, but you are rewarded for it. Although you are not rewarded in monetary terms, you are recognised for what you have done and will be respected. That is the most important thing for me.

Over time, ASUU has contributed much to the educational system and the country. This would not have been possible without the sacrifice of members. If not for our union, the Nigerian university system would have been like the secondary/primary schools in the country that the private sector has taken over. What people do not realise about what has happened to our educational system is that we have replaced excellence (quality) with quantity. For example, if you consider the cut-off mark for the JAMB examination, it has been reduced over the years. Previously, you needed to score at least 200 to be admitted, then it was reduced to 180, which is just a little over 40%. Today, we have gone even below the 180 score. The quality of people coming from our secondary schools has declined, which is why the failure rate of the JAMB (Joint Admission and Matriculation Board) examination has become very high. Sometimes, the admission cut-off mark is

reduced to as low as 30%.

People recognize all of us in ASUU for what we have done to maintain the standard of our universities. As we speak, over 90% of Nigerian students prefer public universities. There are many private universities now in the country but, they do not admit more than 6% of the students. That speaks volumes about our struggle as a union to sustain public universities.

TNS: You have been at the helm of ASUU for about four years now. What do you consider to be your most significant achievements?

EO: Ordinarily, as a leader, you do not assess yourself but allow others to do that. Nonetheless, let me mention a few of our achievements. First, our struggle has removed us from IPPIS, which is key for me. When we were in IPPIS, we were unsure who our colleagues were and who were not. Also, we were not sure of our actual pay because of the disparity from one month to another, and the promotion arrears of some of our members were not paid. Remember that they are still holding on to check-offs of four months. Second, our pension scheme. Our struggle to have professors retire with their salaries is now a reality. We have been assured that professors retiring this year will do so with their full pay. NUPEMCO (Nigeria Universities Pension Company) has organised seminars in this regard. Third, we have gotten a little increase in our pay (the wage award of 35%/25%). Our struggle made it

possible. Fourth, we have completed negotiations with the Yayale Ahmed-led government team; we hope they will sign it.

Fifth, we successfully recapitalised NUPEMCO. When we came in, the capital requirement for a Pension Fund Administrator (PFA) was N1 billion, but the government increased it to N5 billion midway. Under our leadership, we were able to achieve this. Sixth, we increased the Ph.D. grant for our colleagues from N300,000 to N500,000. We also raised the scholarship amount given to indigent students from N100,000 to N200,000 (branches have also joined in doing this).

Under my leadership, we have also helped the vulnerable in society. We have supported IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) in the country's South-south, North West, and North Central regions. Similarly, we have increased our assistance to members who are ill from a maximum of N4 million to a maximum of N6 million. In addition, we have raised what we give families of our bereaved members from N200,000 to N500,000.

Regarding infrastructure development, we have added 42-room chalets to the ASUU Researchers Chalets (ARC) without charging members any levy. We bought a building in town (Abuja) for CEPED (Centre for Popular Education) to house their

operations. Also, the National Secretariat was renovated. These are some of the things we have achieved during my leadership, amongst others.

TNS: *During the finance officers' meeting, a model for a proposed conference centre was displayed. What informed this?*

EO: It was conceived around 2012 when we started the National Secretariat, but we have not been able to get the VCs to provide us with the land. We believe that as a union of academics, we should be able to provide a good conference centre to host large union meetings and other conferences that our members may participate in. We have been able to get land for it (this was made possible by the immediate past VC of the University of Abuja, Aisha Maikudi).

TNS: *ASUU has been able to engage in several ventures without charging members a levy. How have you done this?*

EO: The secret is the prudent management of our resources.

TNS: *Since taking over the leadership of ASUU, what reforms have you initiated to improve the efficiency of operations in the union?*

EO: We have introduced several initiatives. We have created a digital accounting system, which has eased the

running of the union. It has reduced the cost and the number of times officials travel. We have also reduced the long hours we used to spend on our meetings. In the past, we could have meetings that would last from 8am to 2am the following day.

We have also introduced exercise during our meetings to avoid sitting down for long hours. We also have a health committee that develops programmes/events for the well-being of members. Another area where we have ensured efficiency in our operations is the streamlining of our committees, which has improved their performance. Furthermore, we have reduced the number of meetings of the principal officers so they can concentrate on their university duties.

TNS: *Has the union embraced technological options in its operations, particularly for meetings?*

EO: Yes, we have held virtual meetings, but we do so only when strategy is not going to be part of the discussions. This is because virtual mediums are public channels. We hope we will someday have a programme that cannot be hacked into.

TNS: *We know it has not been 'beds of roses'. ASUU faced unprecedented challenges during your leadership, including legal actions and the government's registration of parallel unions. How have you managed to remain resolute?*

EO: As long as you are doing the right thing (and not soiling your

hands), people will not succeed in trying to scuttle you. That is what we are doing in ASUU. The Minister of Labour, Ngege, did several things to scuttle us, including registering other unions and taking us to court. Where is he now? Where are those so-called registered unions? One day, they will beg us to come back to ASUU. I advise those who will come after us to stick to the union. We are blessed to have resolute leaders across all strata of our union. This has kept us going. Very importantly, I believe that God will protect me once I am doing what is right. I received numerous threats to my life during the last strike action we embarked on, but I am here, nothing has happened to me, and I am not scared.

Of importance is also the fact that we keep our history. You see Assisi Aseobi, who was president in the 1990s, with us. Likewise, we always have Dipo Fashino, Hassan Shumonu (who was an NLC leader), and Sule-Kano, who are still with us. They consistently remind us of our history during our meetings. This has kept us going.

TNS: *You mentioned that those who worked against the union are likely to return and ask to be taken back. If that happens, will ASUU be willing to accept them?*

EO: When we get there, the union will consider whether they are coming back with good intentions. This has happened in the past.

TNS: *What is your experience negotiating with government?*

EO: We have negotiated with four different government teams. Apart from the first one, which was coming to talk about school fees and student loans. We have had an agreement with the last three. Usually, when they are finished, they go back to their principal to report what they have negotiated. Often, that is where we have a problem. They do not come back to us with any areas of disagreement (if there is). We have been following the rule of negotiation. It is the government side that has been reneging. When we agree with them and they have gone back to their principal, they do not return to us. Instead, they forget about us. That is our problem with them.

We have been following the rule with this government. This time around, the chairman of government team (Alh. Yayale Ahmed) is determined to change the tide. We hope to get it better than our previous engagements with the other people we have negotiated with.

TNS: *You talked about NElfund. Despite ASUU's opposition, the government has insisted on having it. How does NElfund affect the union's call for increased government funding for Nigerian universities?*

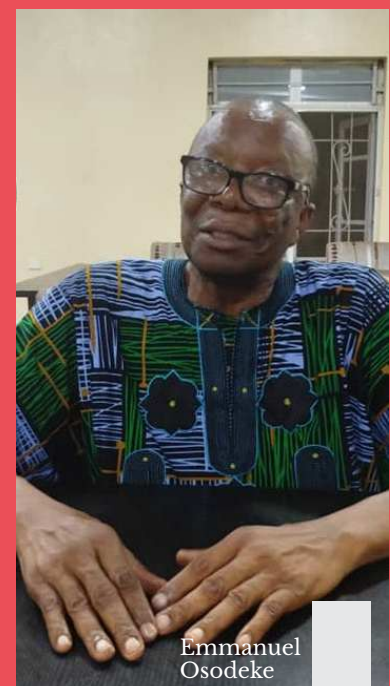
EO: NElfund is not adding a kobo to the university.

What NElfund is doing is removing the responsibility from parents and placing it on the students. Instead of parents paying their children's school fees, NElfund provides the funds to the children, who will repay them in the future. The government has merely shifted the financial obligation. That is essentially what they have done, which we have been discussing. If you want to assist the children of the very poor, provide them with grants, as was done in the days when we had bursaries. Let me give you an example of what NElfund is doing. The total amount that they have disbursed to students in their two years of operation is N42 billion. However, what they have allocated to run NElfund this year is N120 billion. Compare the N120 billion budgeted for bureaucracy and system operation with the N42 billion that has been given to students over the last two years. By implication, this year's spending will be almost three times what has been disbursed to students in 2 years. The country is losing. If they decided to provide grants to the children of the very poor, they would save money.

We have conducted our investigation. In the U.S. (United States), where the unemployment rate is less than 7%, people who took this type of loan still struggle to repay it. I read about one case of a person who will soon retire but is still repaying the loan. Due to the burden of the loan on people (some have committed suicide), the President of the U.S. then (Joe Biden) decided to pay off the loans of the very poor. In Nigeria,

less than 50% of graduates secure employment within the first three years after graduating hence, it will be difficult for them to repay the loan. Our idea is that if you love this country, do it as it was done in the past, as a grant.

The students are not even interested in loans. They are being forced to take them. If they were interested, many more students would have applied. This has caused universities to hike their fees. Day by day, more students are unable to afford it. That is where we currently find ourselves. They wanted to transfer Tetfund money to NElfund. If not for the advocacy efforts of the union, the National Assembly would have passed the bill abrogating TETFund.



TNS: *Sir, it is common knowledge that TETFund is a creation of ASUU. Are you satisfied with the control ASUU has over TETFund?*

EO: When TETFund was created, it was agreed that ASUU would be a board member. ASUU was represented on the board for the first 10 years or so of TETFund's existence until the time of Mahmoud Yakubu (the current chairman of INEC) as Executive Secretary. They changed the law to provide for a university representative on the board (which is now someone from the National Universities Commission) in place of the union's representative. That was how ASUU was removed from the board of TETFund.

As it is, TETFund is not doing what we expect it to. There is too much bureaucracy and political interest. Our idea of TETFund is that there will be no bureaucrats there. Instead, there will be a meeting every year to allocate the money to the universities, and the following year, they will return to defend it, just as we are doing with the Needs Assessment Fund.

This is where we are today. We are working on that to see how we can return to the TETFund board to serve as a check. We give some credit to the present Executive Secretary. From time to time, they use us to monitor their programmes and the completion of projects. This is the first time they are doing

this. But we need to go beyond that. Just like we do for Needs Assessment, let the universities come to defend their projects and get approval before accessing the funds.

TNS: *ASUU has had reason to embark on industrial actions (as a last resort). How do you respond to criticisms that the union should consider alternatives to strike action instead?*

EO: The question we ask those who criticise us for going on strike is, what other alternative do we have? Let me give you an example. Before ASUU goes on strike, all the issues will be raised and sent to the government for resolution. Most of the time, the issues are things the union and the government have agreed on, yet the government will not implement them. When they do not attend to the issues raised satisfactorily, we write to them again (sometimes up to 5 times). If, in the end, the government fails to act as they should, and when we have exhausted all available options, including negotiations and letters to them, what other options do you have? Do we give up? We have asked the public to tell us what other option remains. Nobody has come up with any other solution.

We had to strike to get the TETFund (Tertiary Education Trust Fund) and the Needs Assessment Fund. We had to go on strike for the government to send visitation teams to the universities, and you say we should not go on strike. Let anyone opposed to us going on

strike tell us what the union should do. The situation is worse now, and I keep on saying it. In the 70s, 80s, and early 90s, the government intervened quickly whenever a strike action was declared. Why? Then, the children of big men were still attending our public universities. They are no longer there, so even if you go on strike for several months, they act unconcerned.

There is no part of the world where lecturers or workers do not go on strike. The difference is that elsewhere, when workers go on strike, the issues are resolved immediately. In Nigeria, it is allowed to continue for long periods of time. That is our problem. Currently, it seems like the state governments handle the strike actions of lecturers better than the Federal government. Probably, because the government officials are closer to the people at the state level. So you find industrial disputes with state universities resolved quickly.

TNS: *There is always disharmony between ASUU on one side and parents/students on the other, particularly when the union is on strike. How can the union gain their support?*

EO: The difference is that what we see as academics, they do not see. Because we lose some months when we go on strike, they become agitated. We have not gone on strike in a while, and they are

beginning to realise what we have done for them. Not too long ago, the students called me, saying that we should go on strike again because of the fee hike. We warned them against this, but they didn't see it. Now the reality is before them. Many students are dropping out of school due to the exorbitant fees. They would have joined us if they had known that it would be like this. In the past, the student leadership understood this.

Another issue is that student leaders are copying the lifestyle of politicians. I was told that in a particular university, I think in one of the universities in the South-South, the student union leader has up to 100 special assistants. They now drive Prado SUVs with plate numbers marked SUG 01, SUG 02 ... What is that?

For the parents and the public, we told them that the day they take the initiative to urge the government to address our concerns, we will not go on strike again. Unfortunately, they believe that when ASUU is on strike, their children do not go to school. However, when the government begins implementing the policies that the union opposes, they realise and regret not supporting us. We should consider society's interests rather than just individual interests. That is what we have been saying.

TNS: *How is the relationship between ASUU and other university-based unions?*

EO: It has been extremely challenging. ASUU would like all the unions to work together; however, if past experiences are any indication, achieving this will be difficult. In the past, when we reached an agreement on a particular issue, they later



Emmanuel
Osodeke

withdrew. For instance, in the early 1990s, all the university unions went on strike together, and while the government offered a 12% pay rise, the other unions called off the strike. Only ASUU continued the fight, which led to a significant pay rise. This became the foundation for parity in the university system. The most recent case is that of IPPIS. We all agreed not to join and we made our position clear to

government. However, when we met with the government the following day, they stated that IPPIS was the best solution. This is our history. We have attempted to mend our differences, but it remains a challenging task.

TNS: *Looking ahead, what will be the most critical challenge to ASUU in the near future, and how should the union prepare to address it?*

EO: Our members contend with the hardships in society and poor salaries. There is need to increase what lecturers earn to stop them from leaving the country to render their services elsewhere. This is the greatest challenge for the union. It is a critical aspect that our union should advocate for, and the government should listen because universities are universal. Nigeria pays millions of dollars every year to Ghana in tuition fees. When our universities operate effectively, foreign nationals will come here to study, and such funds will flow into Nigeria.

There is need for the unity in the union to be sustained. It should not just be about welfare. When you focus solely on welfare, you risk losing the system. If you are paid good salaries but lack laboratories, students will transfer to private universities where they can access such facilities.

TNS: *What advice do you have for ASUU members who*

believe the union should focus solely on their welfare?

EO: Once in a while, we go around to educate our members. The teachers fought for their welfare, and today, the NUT (Nigeria Union of Teachers) cannot go on strike. Nigeria Railways and NEPA did the same. When the government destroys the system, you cannot fight again. Welfare is not just about salaries. The office or classroom where you work, being sponsored for studies, or attending conferences is also part of welfare. Some years ago, I met a Nigerian in Ghana who was working there as a lecturer, even though our salary then was better than theirs. I asked him why he was working there and not at home. His response was that he lived in the staff quarters within the university and did not need to drive his car to work. Whenever he fell sick, he could go to the university clinic and receive treatment at a subsidized rate. That was the catch for him. So do not just think that your welfare is only about salaries.

TNS: *What advice would you give to your successor?*

EO: My advice is that they should hold on to our tradition of honouring our past leaders. Additionally, they should adhere to our principles. By doing so, we will succeed regardless of who opposes us.

TNS: *President, not everyone*

may be familiar with your educational background. Could you provide us with a brief overview?

EO: I come from a very humble background. I lived in a mud house in a village. My father died the day I finished primary school. My mother was involved in grinding gari, so even after passing the exams to two of the best secondary schools in Bendel State, we could not afford them. After staying home for 2 years, I told my mother I wanted to train to become a carpenter. She disagreed and insisted that I was very brilliant and should continue my education. She said I would blame her if I failed in the future.

I ended up attending a village secondary school. There, I later became the senior prefect. After graduation, I proceeded to Ambrose Ali University (we were the first set of students there). By the end of my third year there with a CGPA of over 4.5, my programme was closed by Gen. J. T. Useni. I had to secure admission elsewhere. I got admission to ABU and Rivers State University of Science and Technology. I went to the latter because of its proximity to my hometown. Moreover, it was the last school serving a 5 kobo meal. I graduated in soil science as the university's best graduating student in 1987.

I did my NYSC in Danbatta, Kano. The experience there changed my life. The school principal where I did my primary assignment gave me a piece of land where I farmed wheat. That year, my harvest was worth

N2,400. At that time, our NYSC allowance was N250. The next time, I planted beans and earned N2,100. By the time I was leaving, I had about N5,000 in my account. I used that money to finance my master's programme. I could not pursue a Ph.D. because the university had a rule that supervisors could not have more than five students, and those in my area already had that number. I had to look for a job. I was employed at the Rubber Research Institute of Nigeria, but I soon realised I did not belong there, so I left for Delta State University. However, when I understood that I was not going to be sponsored for my PhD, I transferred to Michael Opara University, where I completed my PhD.

TNS: *Comrade President, one would wonder what you do in your spare time. How do you relax?*

EO: I love playing draft and I am a Rotarian. I also say jokes and watch football.

TNS: *It is always a delight having to chat with you.*

EO: Thank you.

“SHADOWS OF PROMISE LINGER, AS A NATION GRAPPLES WITH BROKEN DREAMS AND THE WEIGHT OF UNFULFILLED POTENTIAL.”

Beneath the flag, the heart beats slowly,
A nation rich, but weary from woe.
Her people rise, their dreams entwined,
Yet shadows of struggle cloud the mind.

Once strong and proud, now worn and torn,
Her promises were whispered, hopes reborn.
The streets are filled with silent cries,
While the stars above refuse to rise.

In the chambers, decisions are made,
But the truth of the people begins to fade.
Leaders speak of progress, of better days,
Yet many wonder lost in a haze.

A nation's pulse is felt in the crowd,
In the voices that whisper, in the ones who
shout loud.
The worker, the farmer, the youth with a dream,
Each heart beats with a shared gleam.

But the road is long, and the path unclear,
As cracks in the system slowly appear.
The promise of unity, the dream of peace,
Seems distant, slipping, begging release.

Yet still, there's hope, a flicker bright,
In the hands of those who seek the light.
For a nation's strength lies in the soul,
And in its people, its heart, its goal.

So let the winds of change blow strong,
For the journey ahead is where we belong.
A nation is built on the will to stand,
Together, united, hand in hand.

*Uju Ezenekwe
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka*

STATE OF A NATION

A nation stands, its soul laid bare,
With dreams aloft, yet burdens to bear.
Mountains of promise, valleys of pain,
Hope flickers softly, like light through the rain.

The rivers run, yet thirst remains,
Fields are fertile, yet hunger reigns.
Voices cry out for justice, for peace,
For a time when the struggles might
finally cease.

Leaders speak with eloquent flair,
Yet cracks deepen in the foundations they
swear.
The people watch, their hearts entwined,
With love for the land and anger
combined.

Where lies the path to brighter days?
Through thorny roads or unlit ways?
The answer whispers through toil and
tears,
Through courage found despite the fears.

O nation strong, with spirit so vast,
Remember the roots of your glorious
past.
Rise from the shadows, embrace the sun,
Together as many, yet moving as one.

For though the storms may batter and
break,
The will to rebuild, they cannot take.
A nation's strength is its people's flame,
Burning ever brightly, despite the pain.

*Uju Ezenekwe
Nnamdi Azikiwe University
Awka*

ASUU Adopts Digital Finance Tools to Strengthen Accountability at her 2025 Finance Officers Meeting

Kanang Amos Akims

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has resolved to adopt electronic book-keeping systems across its branches to modernise financial reporting and curb procedural inefficiencies. This was a decision made at the 2025 Finance Officers' Meeting held on the 4th and 5th of April, at the Comrade Festus Iyayi National Secretariat Complex in Abuja. The meeting brought together branch chairpersons, treasurers, financial secretaries, and internal auditors to review the Union's financial practices and explore ways to improve transparency and effectiveness. In his welcome address, ASUU Vice President and convener of the event, Comrade Chris Piwuna, explained that the Finance Officers' Meeting is a regular annual programme designed to strengthen financial reporting across the Union. He emphasized that the 2025 session is aimed to ensure timely and effective financial systems at all levels.

In his opening remarks, ASUU President, Comrade

Emmanuel Osodeke, described the finance officers as a vital organ of the union. He reiterated that ASUU is obligated to submit its audited accounts to the Registrar of Trade Unions annually, usually by mid-year. He noted that auditing of the Union's national accounts for 2024 was near completion in line with this requirement. Comrade Osodeke commended the branches for fulfilling their financial obligations to the

national body. He gave a special welcome to first-time attendees and expressed appreciation for the impressive turnout. He also announced the Union's intention to build a state-of-the-art conference centre at the University of Abuja to host similar meetings and other conferences. He expressed optimism that the centre would be completed by 2026.



ASUU President, Comrade Emmanuel Osodeke addressing participants at the 2025 Finance Officers Meeting. To his left is ASUU Vice President, Comrade Chris Piwuna; To his right is ASUU Past President, Comrade Nasir Isa Fagge;

The Treasurer, Comrade Sunday Olusiji Sowande; Financial Secretary, Comrade Adejobi Adejumo; and Internal Auditor, Comrade Adamu Babayo, also addressed the meeting. In their separate remarks, they emphasized the importance of accountability, prudent financial management, and consistency in the discharge of duties. They underscored the rationale behind organizing regular training for finance officers and expressed confidence that participants would be better equipped to enhance the union's financial systems by the end of the training.



Comrade Daniel Gungula

The guest speaker, Comrade Daniel Gungula, presented a paper on "Financial Management and Effective Reporting System in ASUU." He noted that the Union has evolved from a time when finances were not a major concern to the current era where financial prudence is not only essential but inevitable. Comparing money to a cementing agent in an organisation - just as cement binds building blocks - he emphasized the need for its careful management. He explained that many organizations go through four critical stages: start-up, growth, maturity, and decline. According to him, ASUU can be said to be in the third stage (maturity), and financial mismanagement is often the key reason organizations slip into decline. He stressed that if ASUU maintains or improves its current financial practices, it can avoid the decline stage.



Cross section of participants at the 2025 Finance Officers Meeting

Presentations were also made by the union's external auditors, Akimadi & Co., Chartered Accountants, as well as Comrade Aminu Bala from Usman Danfodio University Sokoto, and Yusuf Osidame, and Musa Azeez of ASUU National Secretariat. They all highlighted the importance of proper and adequate record-keeping in financial management. This, they noted, is essential for informed decision-making.

Kanang Amos Akims is the Editor-in-Chief of the National Scholar.

PHOTO GALLERY OF THE 2025 FINANCE OFFICERS MEETING



PHOTO GALLERY OF THE 2025 FINANCE OFFICERS MEETING



PHOTO GALLERY OF THE 2025 FINANCE OFFICERS MEETING



We Are Cloyed With the Same Dish

Jeff Godwin Doki



Lagos in the 1970s

Photo Credit: Pinterest

It would be appropriate to begin our discussion by recalling briefly the golden age of Nigeria as a preliminary background to our discussion. The simple reason is that since President Bola Ahmed Tinubu took over the reins of government on May 29, 2023 one cannot refrain from looking back to our past, just as a maiden standing on the shore of the ocean, follows with tearful eyes her departing lover with no hope of ever seeing

him again, and fancies that in the distant sail she sees the image of her beloved. And like that loving maiden, we Nigerians too have nothing but a shadowy outline left of the object of our wishes, desires and aspirations as a people. I would be quite satisfied if the virtues of the past will reanimate the present.

The period of the first regimes could be conveniently regarded today as the golden age of Nigeria. Leaders like Awolowo, Azikiwe, Ahmadu

Bello and Tafawa Balewa were able to manage and govern the country with meager resources derived basically from taxes, cocoa, groundnuts and other agricultural products. Although oil was discovered at Oloibiri in the Niger Delta region as early as 1956, its exploration was yet to commence and agriculture remained the mainstay of the economy until the end of the Nigerian civil war. During this period, the Naira was also more powerful than the Pound and Dollar. The three biggest Universities in the country that time namely: University of Ibadan, University of Ife and Ahmadu Bello University Zaria ranked among the best Universities in the world with expatriates vying for teaching appointments in all faculties. These nationalists were aware that only education could be used for the development and liberation of man. Equally important is the fact that the first leaders of

Nigeria had several things in common: patriotism and the refusal to use the resources of the state for their personal benefit. The young Nigerian singer, Wande Coal, nostalgically captures this golden age in a song entitled *Se na like this* (2015). Hear him:

*Once upon a time
Dem tell us say 1 Dollar is
equal to 1
Naira.
Once upon a time
You go travel from Lagos to
London
Dem no need visa
Once upon a time
You go graduate from
school and
Government go dash you
car
Once upon a time
You go take train from
Oshodi down to
Ojuelegba
Once upon a time
Now everything do dabaru
Corruption is unstoppable
The hardship is
unbearable...
Lord I can not take this pain
no more.*

Undeniably, Wande Coal is a Nigerian artist holding up a mirror unto society and the mirror he is holding is a convex mirror. The unique value of his song could be expressed in at least three ways among others. One, he has demonstrated abundantly that pidgin is a succinct verbal art form for expressing feelings and attitudes. Two, he is a critic,

a singer and a man of truth and vision. Three, by enumerating Nigeria's train of ills his song is geared towards socio-economic liberation. When he declares that '*the hardship is unbearable/ Lord I can not take this pain no more*', it is apparent that he is using his medium for social advocacy in the hope of quickening the possibility for the attainment of a better Nigeria.

But it is the stanza '*Once upon a time/You go graduate from school and/ Government go dash you car*' that fascinates me most of all and this brings us the issue of education in Nigeria. We may ask the obvious though relevant question: why is it that when you graduate from school today you cannot even get a job let alone a car?

It all started after the Nigerian civil war when hundreds of billions of Naira began to accrue from the oil sector in Nigeria. This was the time the country began its descent into misery and poverty. A new ethos of cheat or risk being out-cheated had crystallized since Agriculture which sustained the nation was destroyed together with institutions and the nation's sense of honor. Ethics, patriotism, self-respect, responsibility and vision escaped as the new leaders stashed away billions of Naira in foreign bank accounts, investment and real estate.

It is twenty- six years of return to civil rule today and no genuine attempts have been made by the Nigerian leadership to provide quality education for its citizens. The public universities are in shambles and there are about 147 Private universities in the country. There are about 52 federal universities and about 63 state universities. Nigeria is a country where universities are established not for pragmatic reasons but just to score some cheap political points. But more than that there is a deliberate attempt to destroy or privatize the public universities by the ruling elite.

This trend started in the 1980s when the IBB regime introduced certain foreign Neo-liberal policies which gave rise to heavy external debt burdens, economic stagnation conjoined with rampant inflation, the material impoverishment of educational infrastructure, the massive demoralization of university teachers, skill flight etc. Babangida was a soldier with an anti-intellectual culture. During his reign he proscribed ASUU, the union of Nigerian university teachers and had most of its members arrested, detained and brutalized. His reign was characterized by murder, repression, lies and a total neglect of the poor.

But, at the same time, he hired intellectuals like Chidi Amuta and Yemi Ogunbiyi as his megaphones. He was trickish and had a penchant for telling untruths and a strong habit of deluding Nigerian citizens. For his hypocrisy and deceit he earned the sobriquet Maradona or the Evil Genius. In February this year, he made a public presentation of his book entitled *A Journey In Service: An Autobiography of Ibrahim Babangida* in which he displayed uncommon boldness by apologizing to Nigerians about the numerous lies he told and the crimes he committed while he was in power. A good example, one can say, though coming rather late.

Back to education. For more than thirty years, the Academic staff union of Universities (ASUU) has identified and combated the issue of education. The union has accused the Nigerian leadership of conserving its own dominance and monopolizing the country's natural resources rather than improving the abject conditions of the poor.

Lamentably, for the past three decades no Nigerian leader has dealt with the problem of university education seriously, sincerely, honestly and

honorably. From the 1990s to date, the rot in the University system has continued unabated; from 1990s to date the University teachers have embarked on several warning strikes and sometimes indefinite strikes all in an attempt to press the Nigerian government to tread the path of honor by respecting its promises. From Obasanjo to Jonathan, from Buhari to Tinubu ASUU and the Nigerian public has only been fed with a dish of lies and a litany of excuses.

While he was campaigning as the flagbearer of the ruling All Peoples Congress, Bola Ahmed Tinubu declared on the pulpit that if he wins election there would be no more strikes in Nigerian universities. But that statement is now the grossest falsehood. And it is another good example of a dish of lies. Tinubu has done nothing about university funding. He has done nothing about revitalizing public universities and burnishing them up to international standards. Nigerian university teachers are still owed a salary arrears of three and a half months. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) is still struggling, with little success, to get the Federal Government of Nigeria to implement the renegotiated FGN-ASUU 2009 Agreement which commenced since March 2017. The issue of non-implementation of Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs) has

become a thorny and worrisome issue. Perhaps a brief look at the history of FGN-ASUU Agreements would be insightful. It will also reveal the sham, hypocrisy and insincerity of both past and present Nigerian governments.

The first negotiated Agreement with the Federal Government took place in 1981 under the civilian administration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari. This was the agreement that established the principle of collective bargaining. The 1981 FGN-ASUU Agreement also provided a platform for resolving such important issues like special salaries and conditions of service of University teachers. In 1992, ASUU signed another Agreement with the Nigerian Government under Gen. Ibrahim Babangida and the ASUU team led by Dr. Attahiru Jega, highlights of which were university autonomy, academic freedom and most importantly, a separate salary scale for Nigerian university teachers. The last item a 'separate salary scale' was meant to tackle the issue of brain drain in Nigerian universities. To this must be added the fact that the 1992 agreement was to be reviewed every three years. Lamentably, the Nigerian leadership has consistently refused to do that. Of greater importance

is the fact that it was the 1992 agreement that introduced the Education Tax Fund which was later transformed to the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) in 2011, an organ of Government which has brought massive infrastructural development to both Federal and State universities as well as Polytechnics and Colleges of Education across the country. Again, the insincerity of the Nigerian leadership was brazenly displayed by the military Government in 1992 when it arbitrarily and unilaterally ended the negotiation headed by Prof. Umaru Shehu, an appointee of the Federal Government and the ASUU team led by Dr. Assisi Asobie.

Seven years after and in 1999 precisely there was another FGN-ASUU Agreement headed by the then Nigeria's Minister of Education Dr. Samuel Olaiya Oni. What made this agreement rather irksome is the fact that the Federal Government declared that it had no time for any comprehensive agreement with ASUU.

On June 30 2001, the Federal Government signed yet another agreement with ASUU. On the side of the Federal Government was Prof. Ayo Banjo while the

ASUU team was led by Dr. Dipo Fashina. Issues of University autonomy, funding and academic freedom dominated this agreement. It took eight full years for another FGN-ASUU agreement in 2009 to replace that of 2001. The one thing which makes the 2009 agreement peculiar is the fact that it seems to be the most problematic and difficult to renegotiate. The Government team was headed by Chief Gamaliel Onosode while the ASUU team was headed by Dr. Abdullahi Sule-Kano who was later replaced by Prof. Ukachukwu Awuzie. ASUU made series of fruitless efforts to get the government to renegotiate this very agreement. The efforts of ASUU bore fruits in March, 2017 but sadly the Federal Government has turned down the two draft agreements especially the last one headed by Emeritus Prof. Nimi Briggs. By all standards, the 2017 agreement seems to be more forward-looking than previous ones because it has great promise and is aimed at addressing crucial issues like funding, salaries and welfare. The obvious implication is that Government's refusal to accept the 2017 draft agreement is an abundant testimony of the fact that the Nigerian Government does not care about university education. All the examples, I have enumerated, show that the Nigerian Government has a penchant for telling untruths. It is a Government of façade

and sham, it is a Government of pretense and we are already cloyed with the dish of lies it serves us every day.

Jeff Godwin Doki, a Professor of Comparative Literature writes from the Department of English, University of Jos, Nigeria.

ASUU's Ideals: Francis Egbokhare on Merit, Power, and the Crisis of Nigerian Academia

In the corridors of Nigerian academia, few voices carry the weight of both scholarly rigour and unflinching activism like that of Professor Francis Egbokhare. A linguist by training and a comrade by conviction recollects past glories of ASUU and gives a stark audit of the union. With bluntness, he revisits pivotal moments: defying professorial elitism by sitting in the "forbidden" section at meetings, sailing through the struggles of the 1992 strike, and weathering threats for daring to contest the vice-chancellorship in a system he accuses of "chopping" its future.

Yet, beneath his critiques lies an unshakable belief in ASUU's indispensability. Even as he laments the union's short-comings, Egbokhare's resolve echoes: "A terrible ASUU is better than no ASUU at all." Here, in his own words, is a story of rebellion, resilience, and reckoning - a clarion call for the union to rediscover its soul.

Excerpts...

TNS: *May we meet you formally, sir?*

FE: My name is Francis Egbokhare. I am a Professor of Linguistics and African Languages. A former secretary of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), University of Ibadan branch, and an informal publicity secretary during the 1992 strike.

During that strike, some of the leaders in our branch were very afraid. Then, they locked the ASUU office and submitted the keys to the Vice Chancellor on the announcement by the Babangida administration. I was the face of the television that day in 1992. The two television stations in Ibadan: Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State (BCOS) and Nigeria Television Authority (NTA)



Francis Egbokhare

came to campus to interview lecturers (most of whom were in hiding). Given that I was too much of an ASUU voice (for which the older professors referred to me as one who talks anyhow), the media people were directed to me. I gave a mobilising speech and I don't remember myself breathing for almost five minutes while talking. I made it clear that we would resist Babangida's administration, of course, with the ASUU talking points. By the following day when that was broadcast, the University of Ibadan

campus was mobilised.

At that time, the National Secretariat of ASUU was here at the University of Ibadan (UI). We had a very dynamic vice chairman at that point in time. I have never seen an orator like Izilien Agbon since he took charge of our local branch here. Of course, we had Jimi Adesina coming in during that period of crisis and serving more or less as a vice chairman under Izilien Agbon. All is a story now. In the end, we rescued ourselves. By the kind of action that UI did, the rest of the country was mobilized. Basically, over the next 15 - 20 years, the impetus of the 1992 strike was really what gave us the drive in UI branch.

I need to also inform you that I was the foundation editor of The National Scholar and then, of course, I was the chairman of the committee that started the ASUU Library. We started it right here in the Communication and Languages building at UI. I have played some other roles in the Union. I used to be a regular participant at National Delegates conferences (NDC). My last big involvement with the union was the Education Summit in 2014. Since then, I have been localized. I'm a local person here. I just interact with my branch to

the extent that the branch allows me. These should give you an idea that I am not just a professor of linguistics but, also a comrade.

TNS: When you joined ASUU, what were your hopes or expectations?

FE: When we got into the university system, there was a lot of hierarchy. There was too much discrimination in terms of class. The system was too structured in terms of the professoriate and other classes. I felt that something was wrong. If we were to have a good mentoring system within the university, we shouldn't have a subservient relationship between the ranks.

Let me give you a very funny situation within our common room here. The common room had a section for professors and the rest of us will sit in the other section. Even if there is only one professor present, that section will be left empty and the rest of us will crowd around the other section. So, one day, I just told myself that I was going to sit down at the section for professors. C. B. N. Ogbogbo joined me there. A number of the professors on seeing us when they came in would look and just walk away. It was one professor Olatunji who then came and sat with us and we had a discussion and that was how we broke that jinx. But some professors were offended and felt that we had crossed the

taboo. And I made it my duty to break all these taboos. I will go to the social sciences and engage those eminent professors in discussions and debates. I found out that they were waiting for an opportunity to be revived by the younger colleagues. But because of the cultural template that was so much too effusive, they didn't even know how to build bridges. ASUU for me was the opportunity to build these bridges and Congress was the opportunity for this mingling. Of course, you will find some of them who will be offended in congress but the majority of the professors actually loved it. *So, for me, the union then was an opportunity to do two things. One is to restructure the social structure within academia, the intellectual structure; and two, of course, to give a voice for an opportunity to see original thinking, or if not original, a different way of thinking because the old model was no longer working.* It was evident we could see that there was a lot of colonial and mental infrastructure that needed to be pulled down. ASUU, for me, at that point in time provided this opportunity because the leaders of thought on campus (the guys who floated the ideas) were products of the union.

There was a big argument

of ideas on campus where we moved from one programme to the other to hear people speak and learn. How much of the material are you going to read? You will listen to the Bade Onimodes and Comrade Olaoni. You don't have to agree with everything that they have to say. Social theories and political theories will be propounded. There were debates. We had what we called *Abegi*. I don't drink, but we go there under *Abegi* and we debate while people are taking drinks and eating pepper soup. This was the kind of environment that generated the intellectual heat that ASUU stood for. ASUU had an intellectual core, we were not all in one ideological camp. However, the fact that people had ideological position made debates a part of growing up within the university system. That was why I also loved attending the National Executive Committee (NEC) meetings.

You also developed humility when you listen to other people to know that you are not at the top, that you may have all your wonderful, distinct positions but, when you listen to other people, you will discover ideas that you did not envisage. Those discussions and debates, we have come to appreciate

them because, any process of decision making that passes through that system will produce a refined position. So, you develop intellectual elasticity, and the humility to wait and listen to hear what others have to say. This was basically my vision of ASUU. As soon as I found out that the ideas were collapsing and were being replaced by other forces, I felt that something had gone wrong.

TNS: You mentioned some deviation from the ideals of the Union. Can you shed more light on that?

*FE: Yes. We made some miscalculations; I must tell you. One of the miscalculations was the leadership pipeline. I will use my branch as a case in point. Permit me not to mention names. I want to also register at the beginning that I have utmost respect for ASUU. I still hold ASUU in high esteem. Yes, I may have some disagreement but I still believe that the university system will not exist without the union. So, this is basically an expression of ideas rather than a condemnation or rejection of what ASUU stands for. I want to register this *ab initio* so that I can have the freedom to express myself.*

First of all, we have created an opportunity for leadership pipelines in our branch. Before this guided solution session, there was an outspoken idea

that you have to be mentored. Some people will drop by the wayside, but we broke this in this branch. For example, we broke the rule once and then we got somebody who came from a polytechnic whose mentality was informed by different forces. That was when we started to experience political division as part of what we were going through. The second issue was that I never really knew that inside the core of ASUU, there was another core. The Yorubas (I am not Yoruba but I've been at UI for a long time) have this saying, "that a stranger has eyes but he does not see." Applying this to this context, it means basically that there are social and cultural networks that overpowered the union and they started breeding without the union really knowing that they were already breeding. It happened here (in UI), it happened elsewhere. How did it happen here (in UI)? We had a leadership that had other connections. For instance, someone like me would have been destroyed in this university because they said I was the one controlling the union on campus. This was also the information the vice chancellor was fed with. But it turned out that the same people who were giving such information were actually union leaders



Francis Egbokhare

because there are networks of relationships either by marriage, by the old boys, or by ethnicity, which some of us outside of that system did not know anything about. We were guided by union principles, but there were guys who were guided by other principles, which was what again led to a watering down and corrupting of the leadership pipelines. Elements were now infused into the leadership based on that internal core within the corps.

The second issue is that

even at the point where ASUU was at its best, the problem of cultism had cunningly taken over some branches. Some of the initial struggles within the branches were actually struggles between cults. But the union may not have known, most individuals may not have known too. I got to find out that power struggle in certain branches were actually the struggle between some of these forces that have found themselves and found their ways into the union in the branch. I am not talking about (ASUU) National but, in some of the branches. You will never hear some of these issues

debated as the cause of struggle in certain branches because the arguments that will be put up will actually be very good arguments about ideological differences. However, the core of it was that decisions were taken outside and that was why problems could not be solved because the controlling and pulling factors within the union were outside. I do not want to go specifically because I may then have to start mentioning groups and so on, but take it as it is. I'm theorising without necessarily providing

evidence because people will tell you provide evidence, but you and I know that providing evidence involves certain kinds of things.

The third one was the issue of participation in the VC-ship race. Now, I've talked about the cultural model, let's dive into VC-ship race in universities. We made a mistake and I will give an example with my branch. One of the reasons I refused to be chairman of the branch here was because I advised against participating in the selection of Vice chancellor here in terms of determining the outcome. But my chairman then naively was captured and exploited. I think it was one of the reasons why he left the country when he realized that he had been hurt. A very brilliant scholar, the most persuasive human being that I have met, who believed so much with passion in the good of Nigeria and what ASUU stood for. What happened basically was that in that contest, we ended up with a guy that was not the best as our Vice Chancellor. That was when crisis ensued. Even after that had been done, I advised that they should leave him alone, let him be VC, and let ASUU fight for members but they refused and joined his committee. The man asked

me to come and be a member of his committee. I said I couldn't being secretary of the union. I said, I cannot handle the conflict of interest. He said, what is the conflict? Your chairman is also committed. I said, he's a very brilliant person but I'm not that brilliant and cannot handle two complex things at the same time. The man left me alone that day. I made up my mind that I am out of this country because I knew what was going to happen. By the time I came back, UI was in pieces. I suspect, you know, that was under the leadership of Adewoyi as ASUU-UI Chairperson. Since that time, we have not recovered. We only had a little bit of a gap space for 10 years that witnessed some level of normalcy.

So that I do not look localised, I know a lot about the Nigerian university system. Do you know that in some Eastern universities, the division also exists? I mean in the selection process of VC, between Catholics and Anglicans. What do you call it, Insiders or outsiders? When ASUU started to get involved in the racket it was delegitimised. When ASUU started to subvert its own principles of merit, of excellence, of ideological and philosophical and ideological clarity, and was working to outcomes, ASUU delegitimised itself and was swallowed up within the Nigerian maleficence. That was where

we became like a nobody. The point basically is that the leadership pipeline was subverted. Now it is no longer just a matter of ethnicity, religion has crept into it.

It's not just a matter of religion; we are now dealing with political forces. I mean, leadership within the university has even left the hands of ASUU. ASUU controlled it for a while, but we should have known that this is an area where we should not get involved. We should just ask for our members' welfare, standard of education and leave this business alone. What then has happened? The cultural elements took over and we started having people dictating to us from what you call policies and money. Contractors started getting involved. Now politicians are involved. And we are now split within the system between 'political parties'. Now where is the union in all this? For instance, how do we know? As I'm talking to you now, how do I know whether you and I are members of the same union or that union is just a façade? We used to be able to say that they will say these ASUU boys, people were able to identify us as a union. But it's no longer possible to label people. You have to ask certain other fundamental questions to know the

political camp, to know about the membership or belief in the ASUU mandate. This is one of the things I saw that has become a problem.

A system thrives when the intellectual space is vibrant; where groupthink is minimal. The political and cultural space took over and you started seeing group think. The political space has even split the cultural space into two. Nowadays you go to Senate, and it's like a place to eat *puff puff*. In fact, at some point, some people even wash their hands to eat food with the place smelling soup and so on and so forth. So, you now have 'yes men' in the system. This is one big problem; the intellectual space has been crippled. Debates are over. We now have the reign of the godfathers. There are now godfathers in the Nigerian university system. The godfathers in turn have fathers in the political systems. The whole idea of guided democracy was to prevent this same thing from happening; outside infiltration. But we did not do well. When I was involved in the branch, you could not as a branch person official hold a university office. What we did was to send members whom we trust and support them to hold university offices. Even then, we did

not politically participate in terms of supporting one of our members over the others.

Then we started having ASUU candidates, where you prefer one person among your members over the others. That started creating a problem. Once you start having your own candidates you alienate other members of the union. We started having ASUU VCs also. One of the biggest crises we faced actually in the university system was the negative role of ASUU VCs. I mean, there are research positions on this matter; whether we are talking about the University of Benin, the University of Ibadan or any other. If you find any system now where there is peace and there is a succession that is going on, it's not because there is no dissent. It means that that university has been captured completely by forces. Where you find crisis, there is a fair balance of forces. So, you have universities that are graveyards. You have one dominant force and everybody have been brutalized ('peace of the graveyard'). But when you find people fighting here and there, there is still some balance of forces there; contending forces and competing ideologies coexisting in those systems. Now, we have shifted from the positive idea of resource control to where the university system has become the resource, where the locals feel that it is their turn to grab it.

So, you find that the whole business of localising leadership started at the top of the VC, and in many cases, has percolated down to every level to the extent that we lost diversity. Diversity is the hybrid ego in any system in terms of mentalities, ethnicities, disciplinary orientation and schooling. We have lost this hybrid ego in intellectual enterprise. Some of the institutions were recruited to nullify diversity. A vice chancellor will just recruit 500 people without following due processes because he has political capacity.

Another thing I should note is the situation where people started using ASUU as a ladder to climb into offices, go all over the place. How many people became VC because they were ASUU leaders? They were former ASUU chairpersons or ASUU president or whatsoever. Do your survey and you will confirm it. Would they have emerged in a fair competition? Going back to the leadership pipeline that I mentioned. As secretary, I will not be allowed to occupy certain university positions. If I wanted to, I would resign. Those were unspoken checks and balances so that we do not end up with people who are playing 'hunting with the hounds and running with the hare.'

A lot of our members who were leaders of the union started going to council as an opportunity to negotiate for power, for resources and positions. So, if you want to be VC, you go to the council. The chairman and secretary of ASUU will be in council. The problem is that people see all these things. What you now have in many universities is the grand merger between ASUU and management. When that grand merger is implemented in an institution, the voice of ASUU collapses. The VC is now 'chairman of ASUU.' Why because the chairman is the messenger. Having our leaders occupying those positions like in council, though it looked good at the beginning but, in a system where people are hungry, they say now we belong. So that with the existential crisis happening simultaneously, it becomes easy for a number of people to compromise. Look, in a vice chancellorship competition, how do you score an individual 99, 95? And ASUU people are the ones doing these things. What happened to this union?

Another issue to contend with is the recruitment process and mentoring. The recruitment process became defective and then there was a decapitation of leadership. That happened

both at the union and university levels. A VC with religious or ethnic sentiments emerges and he looks around. Every other person senior to him is retired. I am not saying retired in terms of being sent home. But the fact is that he now looks around among people who he is better than within the system, and mainly most of those he is older than in the professoriate to work with. By implication, about 70% of the professoriate is left idle. And this is a system that works with 'Collective wisdom'. We now start seeing a university system in decline in real time. A similar thing happens with the union. A guy emerges as chairman of the union, there is usually this expanded EXCO. He throws out some people from the expanded EXCO and when you raise an issue, they say it's not in the constitution, that it is the chairman's prerogative. What this means is that every other person who disagrees with him is not going to be a member of his expanded EXCO because he does not want anybody to disagree with him. So, it's a combination of issues.

The question basically is, did the union really in all honesty review itself? One of the biggest weaknesses of our union is self-awareness review. Our union does not behave like an intellectual union. An intellectual union that uses a lot of instruments and tools to do academic surveys and

research should first of all start with itself - self-awareness. Who are we? Where are we? Are we in line? A lot of these issues will come up. We must not wait for a chairman to come and start giving fake reports at NEC. Sometimes when we hear some of the reports, we just laugh. What we are dealing with now basically is that we are running tribes. ASUU is now one of the tribes. I am part of the tribe. A tribe has a crude mentality of groupthink. We have to reinvent ourselves because we have reached the point where a new enemy has emerged and that enemy is the academia. It is no longer the government because I actually believe that no matter how strong a government is, it cannot handle this union. The union needs to reinvent itself; it must move away from tribal mentality where you cannot disagree.

I am a systems person. Repeated failure in any system is evidence of a system's failure. When we free ourselves from looking for blame, and who to blame, we can develop the intellectual elasticity to have a holistic look at the system and locate exactly where the system's problem is. If you want to see any problem in any system, go and look at the structure, look at the processes, look

at the interconnections. Every system and structure produce outcomes that are congruent with them. So, when we say the Nigerian University system is not doing well, it is actually performing extremely well. It's just that it is developing negative outcomes congruent with it. External pressures may come. We cannot control external system, but we can control how we react to them. That is why in businesses, people go and look at what, how, when things are going wrong, they don't start by talking about the externals. They look at themselves in terms of how much they have been able to adapt. What are the issues? I think we have a lot of issues with our union and we must dispassionately tackle them.

TNS: Sir, you spoke about the seeming merger between the Union and the University. Can you clarify this?

FE: I do not know about all institutions in Nigeria, maybe there are some that are doing quite well. So, there is need for me to clear it. I also need to say that there are speculations that these mergers are a reality at the branches. In fact, people are thinking that they can project that to the national too; the national also has merged with its own

principal. I think this is not possible. There are constraints to the national because, the power of the national is derived from the powers of the branches. So, people need to be educated about the fact that national does not exist of itself. The National does not have strength of its own, just as a branch does not exist of itself. The strength of the branch is the strength of his members. So, the quality of membership determines the strength of a branch. If a branch is having a problem, it tells you that members in that branch are having a problem with their mentalities and outlooks. I needed to clarify this.

TNS: Talking about merger of the union with management. You once contested for the Vice Chancellorship position of the University of Ibadan. You are a union person yet you vied for that management position? How do you reconcile that?

FE: I was no longer on the union plane. I had actually been kicked aside by the union in terms of relevance, but I was still very much involved as an individual within the system because I wanted to be involved. I believe that the union's spirit is not a function of certain individuals as individuals come and go. The Nigerian University system needs ASUU more than any other, it needs the union more than any VC. That is basically what I think because *I have seen a system without ASUU*

and I have seen a system with ASUU. I believe a terrible ASUU is better than a system without an ASUU at all. That is why I am inside and I continue to be inside. I may not be operating at the national. I will operate at the branch level and when it is critical, I will lend my voice. However, I lend my voice in a way as an elder in this branch in such a way that it is not counterproductive. So, I may not participate or contribute to every debate or everything that is going on so that when the situation arises where people have to mediate, I will still be in a position to mediate.

Now coming back to the issue, yes, I participated in the selection process for the vice chancellorship position. However, what people do not know is that I did not apply the first time I participated in the process. I was searched because of the work that I had done with distance learning but for the second process that I participated in I applied. I deliberately applied the second time because I was facing threats and I wanted to dare them and ask them to go to hell. I knew that I was not under any illusion about the outcomes because I had all my information, but I still applied. So that's basically to let you know about that and to let you

also know that even at the time when I applied, I even applied to run for council but, I did not get the support of the union because the union had been hijacked. That notwithstanding, I was still able to come out as one of the four that were elected.

In one of the instances, the union called me to a meeting and said they were going to screen us and were asking me some silly questions. I have to be humble about this. Amongst us all that they gathered together, none of them had served the union to the same level I did, and they were asking me some silly questions, so I told them off. Some people were saying, you know, you are going to lose. I said, so what? Do you know how many times I lost elections as Secretary of ASUU, and in Senate? I am used to losing elections. I am not afraid of losing elections because I go into elections with ideas and principles. I will not use the method of the other side because I am afraid of the changes that will happen to me. When I ask myself what kind of changes we have to make if I do this, I do not like what I see. So, I would rather lose than to subvert my own principles. So that's basically to put that matter at that level.

TNS: *Specifically, sir, when you contested the Vice Chancellor's position, what was your drive?*

FE: You need to see my vision statement. Without trying to be funny some people who applied for the office of the VC in many universities assessed my vision statement. The truth is I am a transformational person. I do not believe in step-by-step improvement. The world is degenerating faster than your movement so by going step by step, you will never catch up. I believe in quantum leaps. If you know what God has used me to do in the Distance Learning Center, the information is there. We started from being called a Siberia and then we became known as the Promised Land.



My point, basically, is that the Nigerian university system has enough capacity and brains management. What we lack is visionary leadership that is selfless. I do not want to go into details to say I will do this; I will do that. Actually a vision that is longer than a sentence or two with a conjunction or two sentences, that one is a pointless racket.

TNS: *From your experience of participating in the Vice Chancellorship selection process, what major lessons have you learnt?*

FE: Actually, I have participated in that process not just in UI, and I have learnt a lot of lessons. I have written about them. Let me give you some examples. At one university, I was asked to apply. In all cases people always say either I am searched or people who believe in me call me to say I should apply. In this particular case, I was asked to apply. We were asked to bring our publications. So, I took my publications in two 'Ghana Must Go' bags and climbed many staircases. When I got there, they burst into laughter. They said, "Who asked you to bring them all out?" I responded that it was requested. They said that they never meant that. We were served tea and coffee and then discharged. The following

day I heard that I came second in the interview. In the case of UI, in the first instance I came third but by the time I was applying the second time I was not even shortlisted. You can do the math. For me, these things are not a matter of life and death. After this incident, I went to the staff club to eat, some people were abusing me, shouting that if I want to be VC I should go to Benin/Edo. That was how bad the thing was, open insult! And some of these guys were key union members.

It is not just an ethnic thing but a national mentality. In another case, they came here with a team from one university in the South-South of the country. A Professor of political science who is very close to me said he was asked to make certain fundamental changes in the institution and that he should nominate someone who can do that. So, he recommended me and appealed to me. When the team from the institution came to me, I asked them one question. Are you going to waste my time? They said, oh no, no, no! But do you know what they did afterwards? After submitting my application, at the end of the exercise, they claimed that they sent me a letter of invitation to come and participate in the

interview but that I did not show up. I was blamed for disrespecting the council. The truth is that they never sent any letter. I am a distinguished alumnus (recognised by alumni association) of that institution. I wouldn't have acted that way. There are examples like that

I want to write a book on this madness. The VC position is a strong platform where you can change the national disposition of one small institution. A university should model a nation that works. First of all, what you do basically is that you be a generator of ideas. Then you should be a motivator of youth and a person who has a huge integrity footprint. You also must have philosophical and ideological clarity. I felt I was prepared for that task and that I understood the world in which I led and I wanted to offer my service to University of Ibadan. But you don't have to offer your service by force. Even at that point in time, when the political process was trying to motivate me from the centre to say, look, we can still do this. I say I was not interested, you do not become a vice chancellor over people by force. They were disappointed. If a whole village wants to jump over the cliff, and you are the only one who recognizes a cliff there. Then maybe it's better for them to learn from experience. Am I saying that I am the best guy in the world for that office? No!

Of course there could be people in that process who could have beaten me. Because you have not seen another person's farm you will say your own is the biggest. The point is let the process have integrity. That is basically the whole idea. It's not about me. I think I have proven to people that it's not about me.

There was a lot of nonsense that was going on that time. In fact, at one point (when I applied but was not shortlisted), my pastor called me to say that he is hearing my name everywhere, that I am in court. That I am instigating chaos. I just laughed and said to him, if I told you that I was the one, what are you going to do to me? And the man said, nothing. So I told him that I was not doing any such thing because the worse he could do, if I was that person is to stop me from coming to his church. I knew the person doing that because I caught him. But I was not going to give them the information. I just said I am not the one. They can go to hell. I was not a candidate for that process. I was an applicant. If you do not shortlist somebody, he's an applicant. Why would an applicant now be the one fighting for candidates who are aggrieved? It's not logical.

Nevertheless, there was a time when I petitioned. That was the first time I was searched. I petitioned for a very big reason - not necessarily because I thought the process was manipulated, but because our union was involved in the manipulation. I did not petition council. I petitioned the union because I wanted the union to stop what has become a problem today. If I had petitioned the council, I would not be here taking this interview today. Do you know what they would have done to me? They would have set up a kangaroo panel, find me guilty and then I would probably have been dismissed from the university. But I am not that foolish. I wrote a letter to ASUU national. I petitioned and it went viral and I stated what went wrong. I expressed disappointment that the union leadership would be the one involved in this kind of ethical disaster. What did the national union do? I was referred back to the same people I was petitioning. They set up a kangaroo committee headed by one of them. And I told them that I will never appear before them. I had made my point.

I stand by my principles, the day you catch me violating them, please don't fail to take me up. I am not a

perfect man. I know my weaknesses and I don't demand perfection from anybody because we must allow people their humanity. We have opportunities to fail once in a while and opportunities to act once in a while. Any system that is good must create allowance for people to remediate. I do not believe that you should decapitate people for offences or that you close the door against them because of an offence. I am a very humane person when it comes to the way I handle human beings. Likewise, I do not want people to mishandle me. I hate threats. There were all kinds of threats directed at me. I asked, who are these guys? Some of them issuing threats because they feel that I am not from their ethnic group. But then, there is still a nation, there is still a union. I think basically the union must take a stand and must always be on the side of ethical good behaviour, on the side of due process and so on and so forth. The Nigerian university system is very big. It's difficult to manage but there must be a way. As intellectuals, we must define the way businesses must be done within the system. That is my point.

TNS: You made mentioned of a petition you wrote. What informed it?

FE: One of the guys who was in their caucus met with me when he was drunk and he told

me all that was going to happen. How things had been worked out, and the formula they had drawn, and then asked me to join them. That they will find something for me and that was exactly what they did. That was why I wrote the petition. I said, no, this is not going to be allowed to happen. And then, our union leadership was openly partisan canvassing for certain individuals. It was too clear. If they were hiding and doing it, that would have been different but it was too glaring. Some of them even said to my hearing that I should leave UI and go to Benin. I felt that that was the height of impunity. Believe me, I won't worry if these guys were not union leaders but just members, I would not have bothered. That was what I protested against.

TNS: How do you think these tensions between merit-based advancement and other considerations reflect the broader challenges within Nigerian academia?

FE: We have a system that merit functions at the core. It is a capacity-based system. That is why when you are hiring people, you interview them because you want the best people. So, if the considerations for hiring is no longer merit based, you know, first of all,

you won't have the best individuals. Currently, we already have a problem that we cannot attract the best individuals because the salaries are very bad. We say we have no funding but, have you ever seen the accreditation report of universities? Nice reports! If I were government, I will ignore you because you are saying that all you are talking about is in the media, that it is not true. About 2 - 3 weeks before accreditation, we will go and buy equipment that nobody will use. You will fiddle with the accreditation process. Some of us will leave our institution and go and pose in other institutions as lecturers there and collect money. Shouldn't we suffer? That's the point I'm making. I believe that the union should be addressing these issues. Another thing that has been happening is that some institutions are running three or four parallel sessions in one using the same lecturers. Haba! Where's the equality? You want to kill those people? The people want to be killed for ten thousand, twenty thousand naira. It shows that we are crooked and have no self-worth. These are some of the challenges of the system.

TNS: What responsibility do you believe ASUU has in promoting merit-based

systems within our universities and where has the union fallen short?

FE: If you take a simple survey and look at the relationship networks in the system, you will find out that in any university different networks of relationships exist. Everybody is related to everybody. Also, consider the quality of people. Go and check the distribution of entry positions, the capacity of people, the positions in which they enter into the institution. You may find out that the majority have either second class lower or third class degrees. For those with master's degrees, you would probably find that many also did not make a PhD grade. It's a signal telling you how you should react. I cannot tell ASUU how to react without information. We need institutional self-awareness. Let me give you one example. I predicted that the 2013 revitalization would deal the final blow to us. We are trained to forecast one way or the other and the biggest gift we have is the gift of imagination. How many universities have the capacity to spend money? Even if you give money today to the system, most universities do not have the capacity to spend the money. There can be a whole lecture on this. So, what happened is that it bred corruption and the struggle for leadership because a lot of money has been poured into the system.

TNS: You mentioned your prediction that the 2013 revitalization would not augur well. If your opinion was sought after, what would you have recommended?

FE: I would have recommended two things. One is for us to take a longer time to assess what actually are the real needs because most of what were said to be the needs were actually the symptoms; they were epiphenomena. When you ask people what their problem is, they would say that we do not have adequate infrastructure. I would just laugh when I hear this. The primary problem for us is a thinking problem, solving for social problem. When we resolve that, we will resolve the infrastructure problem. We need to first of all sit down and debate these issues for some time. But let the money be escrowed. Then the government will develop parameters. Sometimes what we think are the visible issues are actually symptoms. Although if you leave symptoms unattended to for long, they become fundamental. So, you come to a place that you invest in infrastructure, for instance, you want maintenance. Professional maintenance are not really usually issues because you can easily determine those ones. But

when you now start to deal with the academic climate, the learning infrastructure. It is very good to define the capacity that is available. That is the second thing. But everything is on an emergency mode. There is no planning. In a serious system you will have a training planner. After doing your gap analysis, then there will be a training planner.

TNS: *Besides ASUU's struggle for improved university system, the union also organises national conferences to address broader societal issues. One of such is the 2014 education summit where you played a central role. Can you take us through that experience?*

FE: This was one of the few times ASUU would mobilize other unions. It was not just an ASUU thing. There were SSANU (Senior Staff Association of Nigeria Universities), NAAT (National Association of Academic Technologists), and NASU (Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities and Allied Institutions). Unfortunately, the support that the union needed from the federal government was unavailable. The beauty of that situation was that there was convergence. What I expected to see happen was that the federal government should have facilitated the

next stage of the translation of ideas into practice. But of course, it was dismissed. That is my impression. Of course a publication came out of it. Our big disaster in this part of the world is that we think that once we publish something, that is the end of the matter. Unfortunately for us, people use them elsewhere with AI (Artificial Intelligence) to synthesise them and they adapt and implement them while we outsource our thinking.

ASUU will stop the government from falling prey to Western systems. We need a union like ASUU to be able to generate the original thinking. Our system is different. Our culture is different. What we want to do with education is not the same thing America wants to do with education. You talk of global/best practices, what best practices are you talking about, for God's sake? The problem of Nigeria now is still at the level of bread and butter. What our people will eat. We have not solved it. And then we bring experts who will now sublet their work to our own professors who are underpaid for the same work. Does that seem like a system that understands what it's doing? We are still in the age of slavery. Our people are still selling themselves.

TNS: *In 2024, there was another national conference on the 'State of the Nation', but you were absent despite*

your expertise. Why did you not participate?

FE: My chairman here (in UI) asked me if I was going to be available but I told him the time frame was just too short to get ready (it was barely two weeks to the event). At my level I need some notice because I have other engagements and once I commit to do a thing I cannot go back to say something else came up. I told my chairman that I was not in a position to make it to the conference. I also expressed to him that I do not think they should be organizing a conference with such a short notice. Ample time should be given to organise such events. I didn't participate. Basically, it is not that I wasn't contacted. So, I want to excuse the union on that.

TNS: *Are there other reasons why you did not participate?*

FE: Probably even if I had more time, I still might not have attended the conference because of my experience from the previous one organised in 2014, which was inconclusive, not because I did not want to conclude it, but because of some disagreements. I can be very stubborn. I do not like being controlled. When you have given me an assignment, allow me execute it then

you evaluate it. Another problem that we had during that conference is related to the leadership change in UI that was coming up. Certain individuals were being projected and those things were very obvious. You want to bring someone who has no connection with the union, who despises the union. And because you want to put him in a position of leadership, you start putting him in every union committee and start calling him names as a comrade professor and so on, so forth. Yes, he's a member of a union but look at capacity. We should be seen to act differently. The most intellectual human beings in this world have been union people. They will have facts and data.

There is one big tragedy going on in Nigeria. If we are not careful, it will lead to a desiccation and bifurcation of social statues in the country. We say we want national integration and national cohesion yet we are creating an educational system that is disaggregative and disintegrative. Universities in Nigeria are becoming regional? People are looking for university along their neighbourhoods.

Everything we are doing in education is creating disintegration. So, I can predict the crisis and the

conflicts that will arise when this generation assume leadership position. Traditionally, federal universities and so on and so forth are becoming religious. I have examples. I am going to put some of this in a book and I pray that God gives me life to be able to write the book. We have finished being ethnic, we are not becoming religious.

TNS: To take you back, can you shed more light on the incident of the 2014 conference?

FE: We were supposed to have three drafting committees. There were a lot of materials and papers and you know, in any committee most of the time a few people do the work. We were distributed all over the nation. Adelaja and I were from southwest. Our committee was to do some other thing as well. So, we were meant to come up with some reports before aggregating them. I observed that that arrangement was not going to work. Instead, I offered to come up with a preliminary report. This was not going to be difficult since I had all the papers and I participated in the conference. I will synthesise and summarise and then we will call the committee together to consider side by side the evidence we have in terms of the presentations. That for me, would save time and money, and we would do it efficiently. They did not agree to that. I am using 'they'

because I do not want to mention names. So, we were supposed to call a meeting. Let me be frank with you, Adelaja tried his best, he called the meeting, and then by the time I asked for some material from one of the other committees, apparently, he did not have the materials. And then there was always one problem or the other, we could not meet. After a while, I was not happy with what was going on. This was exactly what I was trying to avoid. I do not want to mention anybody's name. There was an individual who I explained this to but he said that is the way they want to do it. To me, if you wanted results that was not the way to go about it. I just said that maybe he does not trust me to be able to come up with the ideas in a manner that will follow the union's lingo.

At that point in time, I just said, whatever would happen, let it happen. The union took it badly. I felt that if they were really serious, they could have summoned me and the committee to a meeting but that never happened. That was too bad and that created the gap. There was really nothing to gain if the assignment was not accomplished. On the contrary, it would have been to my own advantage

to have my name to a document. It was to my own credibility. To this day, I do not understand exactly why my union could not take that simple step of summoning me and the committee to say we gave you this assignment, what happened that you have not delivered on it? But I heard there was a lot of debates and talk. But the assignment was not completed. Basically, I feel that was how I was kicked out of reckoning in the union. I didn't mind.

TNS: *But you were invited for the 2024 conference...*

FE: Of which I said I was given two weeks' notice. You invite me in two weeks?

TNS: *Would you have attended if adequate notice had been given to you?*

FE: If that was the case, it was most likely that I would have honoured because it is not about individuals but the union. Look, I actually really believe in ASUU. If not for the union, the university system would have long been gone. You may not like an individual now but, somebody else will come up who you may like. So, if you destroy the union, what else would there be? We are in a terrible kind of quasi-dictatorship democracy. If you do not have people who watch

your back, you are gone. The very fact that there is a union that people are afraid of, provides the balance. Do you know that I was approached to take up leadership in the other academic union? That was very long ago. I responded that I do not do that kind of thing. I stay and fight. I won't be part of that kind of treachery. I don't believe in it. I will stay. When I am not talking, I am watching.

TNS: *Sir, how well do you think ASUU has been fairing in fighting for the welfare of its members?*

FE: Well, we sacrifice a lot for the Nigerian public. People felt we could have cut a deal and dam the system. If the government wants to provide infrastructure let them do. But, there is a catch to this, it is not that you cannot have good salaries in a bad system. However, if you do that, eventually your good salaries will amount to nothing. We can have both. So, the union projected an ideological explanation rather than irrational one. People react not to the sense but to the sentiments. The logic is very simple. Nigerian Railways forgot about Nigerian railways and fought for their salary and the system collapsed and everybody was sacked. The same thing happened with Nigeria Airways. When the system collapses, you go. There is a widening space of understanding in Nigeria. It is

difficult to communicate intelligibly. But we have experts in the system that can break information down in a way that people can understand it. But we did not do that. A lot of our releases were very difficult to understand. By the time you read all these our documents for 10 minutes, you are dosing. You don't communicate to ordinary people like that. So that is a big problem.

My understanding about the system is that you are told to go to hell, that is why there would not be remarkable increase to our salaries. If you say you do not have money to pay to 10 people, but go on to hire 50 people, what will happen is that the money for 10 people will now be further shared for the 50 people. Is that not what is happening? Government is creating new universities yet give the same arguments of inadequate resources to fund universities. But they have enough resources to create new universities and many more are coming. So, I do not see anything going to happen in terms of improvement in salaries because the degeneration of the system is going faster than the possible increase in salary. Also, inflation is growing so rapidly that you cannot catch up with it. That is basically what the situation is.

I always say this, if the system fails to take care of you, take care of yourself. Let us begin to see our universities come together and take decisions. For instance, if I make 40 billion naira as a vice chancellor, is there any law stopping me from augmenting the salary of my academic staff? So, I am again saying to the best of my understanding, that the system can do something. There is nothing stopping the system for generating funds for academics to attend conferences, giving bulk money for research. Let the money be there. If you have about a billion naira every year for research, it may not go around everybody at the same time, but by the time you do it for three years, most people would have accessed it. So, there are things we can do, but when it comes to salaries, only God will help us. There is a total negative valuation for intellectuals. They don't care. So, it's like go to hell.

I am the son of a school principal and a primary school headmistress. In the late 1970s to early/mid 1980s, public primary schools went the same way and collapsed. Secondary schools started up to the early 1990s and then collapsed. So, if you see primary school teachers selling pure water today, go back. Academics do not

know what is going on. Do you know that it is our turn now and the signs are there that the public universities are going the same way? I may just be wrong. We may have a president who has a Jesus moment and then wakes up tomorrow and says, oh, we are solving the problem of lecturers and so on and so forth. But then the polytechnic will now say what about us.

The times we go on industrial actions you hear some of us always talking about alternative to strike. I just laugh. Nigerians are deceptive people. Why would people go on strike if there was an alternative? And when you ask them about the alternative, they will be stammering. My father told me that once you ask someone a question and the person responds stammering, know that the person is just not serious. What we are told now is to start having multiple streams of income. As a lecturer, what time will I have for my students, research, and to improve my lectures? So, my office will just become my address while I do other things elsewhere.

TNS: You mentioned the need for the union to improve how it disseminates information. As a linguist, what would be your best model for effective communication for the union?

FE: There are multiple options. For instance, the

union has to have a dynamic website. I do not think there is any single place where you can have as much resources on the Nigerian education system as ASUU Secretariat, both at the national and at the local levels. Every branch should have their branch address with their archive at the center. We can also have a radio station; it can be an internet radio because they won't even give us a license. We can do podcasts from time to time and get our members to generate topics and ideas. Then of course, social media handles for information bits and that people will begin to explain in layman's language the challenges and problems of education and so on. TNS magazine should be on the website. It should be in such a way that you wouldn't have to download the entire document but, article by article. And then you can decide you want to manage comment and feedbacks making it possible for people to be interacting with it gradually. Then the branches should also be allowed to have a social media handle where information is shared. Left to me, I will do a lot of our publication in Naija (pigeon English), Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba in addition to English. We should be multilingual. If we do this, we will cause a revolution without asking

people to revolt. There is information starvation and you cannot mobilize people who are not informed. The other thing is that because many people have limited English proficiency, it is difficult to communicate without arguing when you use it. But when you use our local languages, pitching information flows without disruption.

TNS: What would it take to reengage academics like yourself who have stepped back from active participation in ASUU activities?

FE: We did not step back. We were stepped back. Believe me, in the past, each time I visited Abuja, I would just go and visit the national secretariat. I used to do it but part of the problem now is poverty (laughs). When you look at using fifteen thousand naira to transport to the secretariat and another for the return trip, you will teach yourself small sense. I think the national officers should be more open to bad behaviour. They should accommodate people with bad behaviour (in their own opinion). I like the current president (Victor Osodeke). He has an engaging and inviting spirit. So that, even if you want to take offense and you see his demeanour, it is such that you want to engage branches. However,

they should be vetting what branches are sending to them because the real politics is played in branches. Once somebody has been an official of the union, there should be another layout of consultation with the union at some point. There should be a summit of past ASUU leaders maybe once a year or once in two years with a very structured agenda. I know we have NDC and you may want it to coincide with it. But again, NDC has its own constitutional agenda and usually a lot of items are kept for such.

The summit may be held face to face or virtually. People should be giving opportunity. Even if it's just venting. They may talk trash, it may just be venting, but it promotes belongingness and people know that you are listening to them. We must however, not be under any illusion that we are going to get a meaningful transformation in a short time. Consistency is what matters. There are a lot of bad guys in the system and the only thing that can change them is hunger and trauma. That was where we got to in 1992. Hunger and trauma changed us in 1992.

TNS: We are tempted to ask you a bit about that (1992) experience.

FE: Ah, it was bad. If I tell you some of my stories, you will feel sorry for me. There was a day I went to the bank, I had only twenty naira in my

account for the weekend. It was on a Friday. I was there for three and a half hours and I couldn't bear it again. I became very angry and I spoke for about two minutes. I am sure that I must have been so eloquent that a guy who came to my assistance in the bank must have thought that if somebody can speak this kind of grammar, the person must have a lot of money in his account. So, he offered to help. 30 minutes later he came with 20 naira. He waved it and said it was because of 20 naira that I disrupted everyone. The whole bank erupted in laughter. I snatched the money from him and responded that's the reason why you are working here. And I left. I felt I was crest falling.

The truth is that I couldn't even enter vehicle back home. I walked back because if I spent out of that money to enter a transport it will be *wahala*. Do you know that our colleagues now are sleeping in the office, some of them with children because they cannot afford to come every day to work? We are back in that kind of a scenario. It was a terrible time. It was very, very bad. At that point in time, we were pushed to the world. We are almost there again. If things continue to degenerate like this in another year we will

be there.

TNS: Are there any recent initiatives or changes by ASUU that you have found encouraging or impactful?

FE: I do not know if it is recent. The idea of the NUPEMCO (Nigeria Universities Pension Management Company) and the cooperative are impactful. Then the scholarship award to indigent students is also commendable. These initiatives are making a statement. For instance, a lot of our colleagues are benefiting from the cooperative. Many of them would have been a total wreck. But I also want us to use the cooperative system to create a loan system for people to be able to take loans to go to conferences.

TNS: Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

FE: We should be careful with the way we relate with our members who are in government and those who are hustling to be in government. It is not that we won't interact with them, but we should not put too much value on them. If you know the hierarchy of government, the way the system works, you will know that your member who is in government will fold his hand behind his

back. They will pretend that they can do much but in reality, there is not much they can do.

There is a need for training of ASUU leaders. During NEC or NDC you can have someone to do a little bit of prepping up in certain areas. Training must also be part of every branch. ASUU should develop a training planner that while you are training them about skills that they will need, they are also learning. Those of us who are involved in distance learning know that the content can carry a lot of information that the person will learn a lot why he/she thinks he/she is learning about some other things. My branch (UI) tried to do a program for newly recruited staff in the past. Sustaining it is very important. The training can be for heads of departments in our institutions. This way you re-energize the whole basis of leadership in a university system.

I needed to also observe that one of the mistakes we made was going to get involved in elections. We did it because of our member then in INEC. There are unexpected consequences of that and we are still suffering it.

TNS: But academics who serve as collation officers do not participate as the union.

FE: At the beginning we did. We validated it. It is difficult

for you to tell people now that it was supposed to help the system.

TNS: How can this impression be corrected?

FE: Anytime ASUU members are going to participate in elections, the union should issue a statement and publicise it that we are not sending anybody; any person who goes there is going on his/her own. The problem is that people do not always draw a distinction between ASUU and the University management. Everything affecting academic staff, they say ASUU. Initially it was a good thing because it was evidence of dynamics and involvement. But now everything is ASUU. If the Vice Chancellor takes a decision, how is it ASUU's business? We have Senate. Why must ASUU be the one fighting for us in Senate? If you go shut up in Senate, do not come to Congress. You come to congress and what you should have said in Senate, you want your chairman to go and say.

TNS: Thank you so much for your time.

FE: You are welcome.

POEM

The Stages of Enslavement...but he was still a slave!

So, he was captured along the West Coast.

He was like any other slave as they began the long walk, in a file, through the rain forest, to the harbour. He had his hands 'cuffed', his feet shackled with ankle chains, and his neck didn't lack an iron collar.

He was well behaved and the slave master took a liking to him...but he was still a slave!

He had his iron neck collar taken off, now he can turn his neck to all four directions of the wind ...but he was still a slave!

He followed the rules and regulations to the delight of his master, never questioning any of them. He finished his assigned tasks timely and with finesse, but he was still a slave!

His master ordered the removal of his ankle shackles, which revealed his bruises, and YES, he no longer has an iron collar on his neck, nor does he have shackles on his ankles, now he "can dance" ... but he was still a slave!

They were aboard the ship and sailed on a voyage to the land with no return, but he was still a slave!

His conduct is quite exemplary, and his master couldn't help but set his hands free...he took the cuffs off...but he was still a slave!

He shook his wrists as if to yank off a venomous viper, he cracked his knuckles as if to confirm that they are now free, yes, they are free... but he was still a slave!

They had arrived at the haven, and the ship had been set to anchor—but he was still a slave!

As they disembarked from the ship, he observed that other slaves were not as fortunate as he had been:

Some of them got their bruises infected by bacteria and died in the mangrove forest.

Some others irritated the slave master so much that he became infuriated and ordered them thrown into the deep sea to the delight of waiting whales and sharks.

Some, yet, have their hands 'cuffed', some others have their hands 'cuffed' and their ankles knotted in shackles, and some still have their hands 'cuffed', ankles knotted in shackles, and necks not lacking the iron collar.

He is free of all such chains, shackles and iron collars...but he was still a slave!

His master now loves him and invites him to dine and feast at the table. he has a taste of the sumptuous delicacies and his master's choice wine. So much for obeying rules, he ate to his fill, even belched and farted ...but he was still a slave!

His master made him the Head of slaves, he was given a whip to command their respect, he no longer laboured but tasked other slaves with the aid of his whip...life couldn't be better, he thought...but he was still a slave!

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The State of the Nation: Governance, Democracy, and Political Stability in Nigeria

Nwamaka Adaora Iguh and Onyeka Christian Aduma



The Nigeria Senate

Photo Credit: The Guardian Nigeria News

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa and one endowed with vast human and natural resources, continues to face significant governance issues, democratic shortcomings, and political instability that shape its current reality. Although the country transitioned to democracy in 1999, its electoral process has been marred by irregularities and voter suppression. In addition, persistent security threats (ranging from terrorism to

communal violence) have further disrupted the nation's political landscape. These interrelated challenges not only impede Nigeria's socio-economic development but also erode public trust in leadership and democratic institutions. Effectively confronting these issues is essential to realizing Nigeria's immense potential and building a future grounded in stability, inclusion, and sustainable growth.

Nigeria's governance woes remain entrenched in

corruption, inefficiency, and a persistent lack of accountability - factors that have stalled development in a nation brimming with human and natural wealth. Successive administrations have struggled to tackle pressing issues like unemployment, inflation, and crumbling infrastructure, fueling widespread public frustration. A striking example is the 2023 removal of fuel subsidies, a move intended to ease fiscal

pressures but one that has instead deepened economic hardship, pushing more Nigerians into poverty and driving up the cost of living.

Meanwhile, the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA), touted as a turning point for transparency and reform in the oil sector, has yet to deliver on its promise, hampered by ongoing political meddling and entrenched corruption. Efforts to revive the economy through policy reforms have largely been met with public skepticism — an unsurprising reaction in a country where trust in political leadership remains dangerously low.

Beyond Nigeria's governance challenges, the nation's democratic fabric is increasingly strained by political intolerance and interference. The recent suspension of Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan, following her allegations of harassment, serves as a stark illustration of systemic issues plaguing the political landscape. Many view the suspension as politically motivated, igniting serious questions about the independence of the National Assembly and its commitment to democratic values.

In a functioning democracy, the legislature is meant to act as a vital check on

executive power, ensuring accountability and transparency. However, when legislative bodies are weaponized for political retribution, democracy weakens, and the electorate's will is undermined. Further fueling concerns is the declaration of a state of emergency in Rivers State, which led to the suspension of the governor and lawmakers. This move has been met with accusations of a power grab, raising alarm bells about the potential for abuse of state authority. History shows that emergency rule, if not carefully managed, can erode fundamental democratic principles, granting security forces unchecked power with the potential for human rights abuses. The declaration of a state of emergency has ignited a fierce debate over whether it is a genuine attempt to restore order or a calculated political maneuver to consolidate power and silence dissenting voices. Indeed, the silencing of lawmakers who express opposing views points to the corrosion of democratic norms and a slide towards authoritarianism.

Adding to these concerns is the state of the Nigerian judiciary, intended to be the ultimate arbiter of justice. Increasing reports of judicial interference, where court decisions appear to favor those in power, are undermining the rule of law and fostering an environment of uncertainty. This perceived judicial corruption and interference have far-reaching consequences, potentially

detering foreign investment, weakening the protection of civil rights, and exacerbating political instability. When the courts are perceived as biased or politically influenced, public faith in the system erodes, increasing the risk of social unrest and threats to national unity. Many Nigerians now fear that the judiciary is being instrumentalized for political ends, rather than serving as an impartial guardian of justice.

Nigeria's political stability remains fragile, undercut by persistent security threats ranging from terrorism and armed banditry to communal violence. A recent attack on the Trans Niger Pipeline in Rivers State underscores the deep-seated unrest in the Niger Delta region, where volatility continues to disrupt both livelihoods and national economic output.

Compounding these challenges is the fluid nature of the country's political landscape. Frequent defections and shifting allegiances among politicians—often driven by personal ambition rather than ideology or public service—have eroded party discipline and injected uncertainty into the democratic process. This unpredictability not only undermines effective

governance but also discourages foreign investment, as investors grow wary of a climate where policies can shift abruptly and without warning.

Adding to the nation's woes are the growing threats posed by separatist groups, insurgencies, and ethnic militias. These movements, driven by grievances rooted in economic disparity, marginalization, and poor governance, continue to challenge Nigeria's unity. The government's failure to provide comprehensive, long-term responses has resulted in a troubling cycle of violence, protests, and civil unrest. Without meaningful efforts to address the structural causes of these conflicts, Nigeria's political instability is unlikely to abate.

Nigeria finds itself at a pivotal moment - one where the decisions taken today will shape the trajectory of its democracy, governance, and political stability for years to come. Meaningful reform, anchored in a genuine commitment to democratic values and backed by decisive action on the country's economic and security challenges, is essential to charting a path toward sustainable development and national cohesion.

But the stakes are high. Continued inaction or half-measures risk compounding the country's crises, further eroding public trust and fueling instability. The urgency is clear: Nigeria needs a united, focused national push to overhaul governance, reinforce democratic institutions, and lay the groundwork for a more secure and prosperous future for all its citizens.

Nwamaka Adaora Iguh and Onyeka Christian Aduma are both from the Faculty of Law at the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

ASUU Launches Revolutionary Citizens' Education Program to Transform Nigeria's Governance

Ogo Ogo



At the CEPED sensitisation interaction. L - R: Ademola Aremu, Immediate Past President of ASUU, Biodun Ogunyemi, and Bauchi Zonal Coordinator, Timothy Namo. Standing is the Immediate Past Chairperson of UNILAG, Dele Ashiru.

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has taken a bold step toward addressing Nigeria's governance challenges with the establishment of the Centre for Popular Education (CEPED), a groundbreaking initiative aimed at empowering citizens through educational transformation.

A strategic sensitisation

interaction was held on Sunday 9th February, 2025 at the Africa Centre of Excellence for Mycotoxin and Food Safety, Federal University of Technology Minna for newly appointed CEPED coordinators across all ASUU branches.

The national convener, Comrade Isa Fage, outlined the centre's vision of equipping Nigerians with essential knowledge and skills necessary for advocating and

implementing good governance practices. The coordinator stated that "CEPED represents ASUU's commitment to moving beyond critique to concrete action". He explained to the assembled coordinators that "Our goal is to create an informed citizenry capable of demanding and contributing to better governance in Nigeria."



L - R: Past President of ASUU, Nasir Isa Fagge, Ademola Aremu, and Immediate Past President of ASUU, Biodun Ogunyemi each making presentations at the CEPED sensitisation interaction.

The initiative marks a significant shift in ASUU's approach to national development, expanding its role beyond traditional academic union activities to actively fostering civic education and democratic awareness. The centre will operate through a network of coordinators stationed at ASUU branches nationwide, ensuring broad reach and local relevance. Contributing to the interaction, other members of the CEPED team provided insights into the

operational framework of CEPED, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of local coordinators. The presentations were followed by an engaging discussion where participants (branch coordinators) expressed strong support for the initiative, with many highlighting its potential to create lasting change in Nigeria's political landscape. "This is exactly what our nation needs – an educated and empowered citizenry that understands their rights and responsibilities," remarked one of the participating coordinators.

The establishment of CEPED represents a strategic intervention by ASUU in Nigeria's democratic development, potentially creating a new pathway for citizen engagement in governance. As the program rolls out across university branches, it is expected to create a ripple effect of informed civic participation across the country. This initiative of the union comes at a crucial time when Nigeria faces various governance challenges, positioning the academic community as a key driver of social and political transformation through educational empowerment. Branch coordinators were charged to be prepared and ready to participate in further trainings to equip them to deliver on their mandate.



Cross section of CEPED Branch Coordinators at the sensitisation interaction.



Cross section of CEPED Branch Coordinators at the sensitisation interaction.

Comrade Ogo Ogo is the Managing Editor of The National Scholar.

Our friend is in a dilemma!

I'd tell you a riddle!
Our friend is to embark on a journey
The type that'd make him Mr Odysseus
He's to walk or ride on a donkey
He's being sold a donkey for the journey
But it's never walked
He'd have to carry it on his back as he walked
He'd carry it until it learns how to walk
This'd last at least one-half the duration of the journey
Then, he'd hope it'd be able to walk
Then he'd hope it'd know the way by itself
Then he'd hope he'd be able to ride on it, the rest of the journey.
Our friend walked alone on a lonely road
He walked fast because he wasn't going far
Then he noticed that he couldn't hear the clinking of his coins anymore.
Odysseus had two silver coins in his pocket
They clung in rhythm as they walked the way
Now, he's suspicious of their sudden quiet
He hurriedly dipped his hand into his right pocket but found nothing.
He let out a cry!
He sat on the ground in despair; that's his dinner gone.
Then, there came 'the good Samaritan'
He asked and was told a pitiable story of the lost coins
He brought out his bag of coins without hesitation
There was a clinging sound again
It's familiar & pleasing to our friend's ears
He, Mr. Good Samaritan, gave our friend two, two silver coins
Our friend jumped up in excitement
He grabbed the Samaritan by his feet in gratitude
The Samaritan disappeared
Then our friend began to cry, again
Tears of joy you'd be quick to judge
Nay, you're wrong!
They're tears of greed!
Our friend let out a loud cry
By now, I'd have had four coins instead of two
He hissed & shook his head severely
If only I didn't lose those two coins
My four coins would have clanged louder
Almost as loud as that Samaritan's
Oh, my two coins!
Our friend cried out louder.
He's gotten two free coins, but he's in anguish.
Our friend is the dilemma!

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Economy is not driven by faith, economy is driven by processes *-Prof. Ode Ojowu*

In an era where university funding has become a battlefield of competing priorities, Professor Ojowu who navigated both the hallowed halls of academia as a lecturer at two prestigious universities, and the pragmatic corridors of power as Economic Adviser to a former President of Nigeria strips away the rhetoric to expose the raw reality facing our educational institutions. What makes his perspective particularly compelling is the dual lens (of an educator and policy architect) through which he views these challenges. In this exclusive interview with The National Scholar (TNS), Professor Ode Ojowu (OO) speaks candidly on the critical issues of university funding, the intersection of academia and economic policy, and other matters of national importance.

Excerpts....

TNS: Good morning, Prof. We are delighted to have this interaction with you sir. Can we meet you formally, who is Professor Ode Ojowu?

OO: Well, I want to thank you for finding me worthy for this interview. First, let me say that I am a family man. I am married with children and I have grandchildren too. I am from a village called

Ohuhu-Owo in Owo Council Ward of Oju Local Government Area, Benue State. I am approaching 77 years of age. I graduated from Ahmadu Bello University in 1974 and did my mandatory National Youth Service with the second batch of NYSC in 1974. I had the privilege of a postgraduate training at the University of Connecticut, United States of America. Also, I had the privilege of being employed in the university as a



Ode Ojowu

graduate assistant right from the point of graduation, so I have had a teaching experience in the university that transcended two institutions (Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and University of Jos). I've had a stint in academia to the point of being a professor that you want to know. In between, I've had experience in the public sector, first as a Commissioner for Finance and Economic Planning in Benue state in 1984, a member of the National Economic Intelligence Committee (NEIC) during

Abacha's regime, and famously, Chief Economic Adviser to former president Olusegun Obasanjo. I've been in and out of government ever since. Let me say here that I voluntarily retired from the university about 17 years ago because I was no longer satisfied with the university life, so I decided to quit earlier than the retirement age.

TNS: From what you've said, I think a larger part of your experience is in the university sector.

OO: Absolutely.

TNS: What is your view on the funding challenge in the Nigerian university system?

OO: First, let us start by saying that every sector has a funding challenge, so, it is not limited to the university. *The challenge is not just funding, rather, what is the priority of government in funding?* When you look at it from this perspective, you will see that there is a disconnect between government's desire for capital development, human capital development, and the funding requirements of the sector that will make the government achieve that objective. So you will see that the clear evidence of inadequate funding of universities is demonstrated

by the constant restiveness of the universities, either by way of strikes or by university students' agitations, collapse in infrastructure, and so on. In reaction to this, the academic staff union of universities (ASUU) has been very creative. The union agitated for and got the TETFund created. One would have thought that would have been the major source of funding for the universities, and the issue should have been put to rest.

But the challenge I see is that while the union has the initiative of creating an 'institution' that will fund universities, they have, ironically, lost control of that same 'institution'. Instead, people who do not have a feel for the universities control the disbursement of funds from TETFund. The real challenge here is that there is a very weak link between the private sector that provides the funds to TETFund and the universities who benefit from it. One would have thought that the private sector will see the need and continue to appreciate their funding of TETFund. So, what do I think can be done to enhance funding for our universities?

First, the academic union should do all it can to ensure full participation in the control of TETFund. Like other professions, for instance, in the medical profession, you cannot take an economist to head their agency. But here, you can take a politician to head TETFund. Hence, the academic union has

very little control over its decisions. The board members of that fund should comprise of mainly proven academics who can contribute meaningfully to TETFund's utilization of funds. Likewise, the Fund's budgeting should not be the sole responsibility of TETFund. The universities through their representatives in the unions should sit along with the authorities in TETFund, who themselves should be previous academics to contribute to a debate on how that fund is going to be used for all the universities that are qualified to benefit from it.

As of today, what I know is that TETFund decides through application from individual universities, what to give or what not to give. That is not good enough. It is a divide and rule when they now ask you to bring your report, bring your application, etcetera. The universities and ASUU should come together and do a university wide budget to be presented to TETFund, including capital projects. That does not mean each university should not have its own budget.

Currently, the funding of universities through TETFund is discretionary - whatever the head of that place says is what you get. Sometimes they will give out a particular sum based on

what they consider is good for you, but that consideration is not driven from your own input. By saying this, I'm emphasizing efficacy in the use of funds because sometimes the funds may be there, but they are not appropriately utilized. That is one aspect.

Second, when we talk of funding, there is excessive focus on physical infrastructure. *I think very strongly that TETFund should fund a chair for each professor in the university.* When you get to the rank of a professor, like in other establishments, you should have a chair of your own and TETFund should fund it.

TNS: *How will that work?*

OO: As a matter of fact, when you are a professor, you should have a research budget and a research assistant to work with you. You know, in the university, we have graduate assistants but they are anything but graduate assistants these days. As soon as they are hired, they are sent to the classrooms to teach. This means that they are not assisting anybody. The irony is they do not have the requisite experience to teach immediately. Graduate assistants should assist professors both in the classes and in their researches. And for that

reason, a professor, like a permanent secretary, should have a budget and that budget should be properly accounted for. The size of the budget of a professor will be determined by how well he/she is performing and it should not be a uniform budget. We may start in a uniform manner, but subsequently and dynamically, the size of a professor's budget should be such that it is performance reflecting; if you are doing well, you get more research funds and vice versa. As of today, there is nothing spectacular about being a professor. All they know is that, you have moved from one grade level to another. That is alright, but it should not be. A professor should really have a budget.

To attract more funds to the university from the private sector, I strongly recommend that this practice of sabbatical, where academic staff will merely go from one university to another should be reviewed. Because one university is as poor as the other, there is no value addition. You just go there and for the year that you are there, you will get double salary. That is the only attraction. But that shouldn't just be the only attraction. Rather than going to other universities, professors should go for sabbatical in industries, and government ministries and agencies. When they are there, two things will happen: first, they will get the particular experience of what the real

world of implementation of their knowledge is, and two, they will be able to form a contact relationship with the industry. Those who form that kind of relationship effectively will be able to bring resources from their ministries or industries to their departments in their various institutions. Those who do so should receive additional benefits besides the funds they have brought in. In that way, it will be very difficult for a professor to want to go on strikes. Also, it will be less harrowing for graduate assistants who may find it difficult to get funding for their Masters and Ph.D programs.

The other part of it is that in order to put appropriate pressure on government, the budgeted provision for the universities should be a matter of discussion. It is not enough for a minister of education to go and make a budgetary provision and then go and defend it at the national assembly. It is the responsibility of the universities to promote and produce their budget, take it to the minister of education. The representative of the university will also need to go with the minister of education to defend the budget. Sometimes I see ministers of education (I am not underrating them), they are doing well, but sometimes I see them rather

struggling to defend the budget. This should not be. The other thing is that there is a lot of research funds out there for researchers to access. I used to benefit a whole lot of funding when people were complaining of lack of it. There is funding in World Trade Organisation (WTO) and United Nations Commission for Trade and Development (UNCTAD). This suggests that there is funding everywhere. So, if you are able to penetrate and get funds to the university you would have also contributed to the funding of the university.

TNS: As teachers, one of the usual nuances we hear is that, “what we train students is not what is required in the industry”. Would going on sabbatical to the industries bridge this gap?

OO: Yes. When you go to the industries, you should be able to understand their needs. As of today, curriculum development and approval begin and end with National Universities Commission (NUC). They should not be the one to develop the curriculum for the universities. People who are on ground teaching should be the one to initiate curriculum development. This can be done by going to the private sector people to ask them for their specific needs. So, we have two lines

of research in the university: the one dedicated to promoting knowledge for the sake of knowledge, and the one that is applied to specific needs. When researches are tailored toward the need of industries, we would see funds coming regularly to the university.

I do not agree wholly with that people are not qualified for the job they are trained for. If somebody graduates, and does not find a job in four years, he has lost all the skills anyway. But, you know, sometimes just watch; many of our universities are not in the recognition radar. However, when these students from the so called low-rated universities go overseas for postgraduate training, they outperform people from the organised universities! What is happening? A lot of our students, at least from BSU (Benue State University) that I was pro-chancellor; go out and perform way above the average of those Ivy League or well-known universities. You see, there is a whole lot of things in this recognition or non-recognition of universities. It is a technical calculation: firstly, if you are on strike for so many months and they use that as a criterion for assessing you, you are down; secondly, if your results are not coming out as quickly as possible, it will be a minus for you; thirdly, if people ask for transcripts and they cannot get them promptly, that also affects your rating. There are a lot of things. Nonetheless, I can tell you that Nigerian lecturers teach a lot

more than lecturers anywhere else. And that compensates for lack of infrastructure. That also explains why when our students travel abroad, they do a lot better than people who claim to have come from the classified ‘A’ university. I am not saying that the ratings are wrong but, I am only saying that those things that make us not to shine can be tackled because they are actually technical issues and not academic issues.

TNS: Before you conclude your submission on the funding issue, what should the government do differently?

OO: Let us reorganize the question a little bit because it is not what I think a government should do differently. Government does not want to do anything differently. It is what would the universities do differently to ensure that they get the correct funding from the government?

In any case, when they say that a university is a TETFund university, I do not have any problem with that because TETFund is specifically set out to fund tertiary education. What they are seeing is what they should see and they should see more. If a government ministry decides to put all its funding through the TETFund, what is wrong

with that? If the private sector can make contributions to TETFund, why can't the federal government take its own money and put in TETFund too?

TNS: There seems to be a grand plan to technically abrogate TETFund in the Nigeria Tax Bill 2024. In the proposal, TETFund will expire by 2030. What's your take on this?

OO: To me, these guys who drafted the tax reform proposal have done an excellent job. But I do not know whether they came to the university to say anything. Did they come to the university? Are you aware? I previously stated that there is a weak link between the suppliers of funds to TETFund and the beneficiaries of that fund. It is likely that it is the industries that have lobbied the task force on Tax Reforms to have TETFund phased out but they are afraid of doing it abruptly for fear of a backlash; hence the option for its gradual phase out. With TETFund gone, it is the industries that would benefit but they hide under the guise that, oh, there are too many taxes. However, if that has relevance to the growth and development of industry, they will not complain. *It is the responsibility of the universities, I think, to*

ensure that their own creation does not get phased out.

What they are providing as a substitute for TETFund is not effective. What we need to do is to make sure that they do not succeed. I think the national assembly is arguing against it. Make sure that the relevance of the university to the industry is enhanced. Go to them, ask them questions like what do you want? What can we do for you? They will fund the research. The industries fund research to outsiders. So, make sure it does not go out. This way, it increases your relevance and it keeps your contact with the industries.

TNS: Looking at the activities of ASUU vis-a-vis the struggle for improvement of university education in Nigeria, what is your assessment of its performance?

OO: I first encountered university strike in my first year in the university between 1971/1972. I became interested even as a student and I can say upfront that the government of Nigeria has never been interested in solving the crisis or the problem that causes strike actions. In 1972 or thereabout, when academics, (I do not think they had formed the union that time) went on strike to complain, the first thing government did after three days was to ask them to vacate their residential places. And within a week, the strike

crumbled because all of them were in university accommodation. This strategy of government continued up until 1990s. I think I was already in Jos when there was a strike, and they said, we should get out of the houses. I told my wife then that the next time they asked me to get out, I will get in (laughs). What does that mean? It means that I will get into my own house instead. Nowadays, many academics have their own houses therefore, it is difficult for the government to employ that same strategy successfully.

Generally, the government is insensitive to ASUU strikes because they are not like those of PENGASSAN and electrical unions wherein their impact is felt immediately by the people. Also, the people in government have found an alternative to our university education; first, abroad and now private universities. So, while you are on strike and the victims are basically those who do not have the means to send their children abroad or to private universities, there is no sensitivity.

To me, strikes are not the best solution. I started agitating against strikes right from 1982. I said, we do not need this strike anymore. I can tell you for free that anytime we go on

strike behind closed doors, the government is very relieved! This is because what government hates the most is noise about them. When you go on strike, everybody disappears to their homes and the noise is gone. *So, if you ask my advice, I will tell universities not to go on strike. Make noise, organize noise, write constructively about them, tell them what they are doing wrong, give them credit where they are doing right, get the students to join you in this agitation but do not go on strike.*

In Nigeria, no amount of strike can make a government collapse. Otherwise, some universities have gone on strike for eight months yet nothing happened. Instead, the government threatened with NO WORK, NO PAY! ASUU in turn came up with the idea of NO PAY, NO WORK! Now, when you come back to university to give you back your money, they will drag it from now to eternity. They can even go on strike again on top of that strike. You see, government is not really sensitive to the impact of strike. Though it is extremely damaging to the society, it does not threaten government. It is not like a petrol station closed or no electricity or water supply. Those are the kind of physical things that they appreciate. I think that,

what the union has been doing in terms of being creative in finding solutions is better than going on strike. It is not your duty to go on strike. When there are no adequate facilities, you should turn the heat on those who are coming into the university. You want the university as much as they want it. So, you should not admit beyond what the facilities can carry. When you admit more, you are the one to turn round again to ask for excess work load. This excess workload started in 1998 – something, under Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). The universities were hit hard by SAP, and many people left the system which led to what they call then ‘brain drain’; which now World Bank is telling us we are gaining remittances. Nonsense! As many people left the amount of work for those who stayed behind became known as excess work load. They demanded to be paid for that. This subsequently became a ‘strikeable’ item.

If I were the universities and I am asked to admit 1,000 candidates, I will say we only have facilities for 200, we cannot take the remaining 800. Let the remaining 800 and their parents go and fight the government to create a space for admission. But you take the 1,000 and then you go and strike on account of the number that you have taken, which you know you cannot handle. It is the people who are

losing from inadequacy of facilities that should put pressure on government through their representatives or demonstrations on the streets. If 800 of this or so cannot get admission nationwide, they should organize themselves to say, look, we want admission. And then you put your data on to the public view; we cannot admit more than 200. If the pressure is exerted at the right place, the government will be threatened and will be forced to do the needful. You know university issue does not appear in the campaign, turn it into a campaign issue by refusing to admit people. In that way, we may see some change. But as to effectiveness of ASUU, I think they have done pretty well in the face of these challenges that they face. The way they have done well is to create innovative solutions, but government is not taking these suggestions seriously. For instance, the 2009 agreement is not fully implemented until today instead, they have manipulated it by signing MOUs.

TNS: How do we get the support of prospective beneficiaries so that we can curtail the number of admissions?

OO: That's a very good

question and an important challenge but the simple answer is continuous sensitisation. I was in the university as a pro chancellor, we engaged stakeholders and tried to sensitize them because the government, and even to some extent, the university administrators see ASUU as a problem because they (administrators) are appointed by government and can be removed by government. There is no clear solution than sensitization of these people. There are a lot of avenues to this; a lot of social media platforms that can be leveraged on. We can tell the masses do not blame us, put the heat on government and hopefully, over time you would achieve it. The details of how this will work can be studied. So, how to bring those people in is a challenge that we must work on and research into. In other parts of the world, what they do is to segment education. Like in the US, we have community colleges. Some of them offer completion certificates where your job is to put tires. There are technical schools like that here. So, if we emphasize various stages, we have community colleges, which offer associate degrees after two years. If you want to do academic more, you build on that one. If we can



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encourage government to establish community colleges, people who want to do bricklaying can get a certificate, people who want to get a subordinate certificate after two years and those who don't have interest in academics can stop there so that our academic institutions can be reserved for research and learning and then applied research for industries. So, when you do the applied research for industries, implementation is carried out by students who have graduated from community colleges. That's what is basically done in the US.

TNS: Can you recall your interactions with university-based unions during your time as pro chancellor and chairman of governing council at the Benue State University, Makurdi?

OO: Very well. When I

assumed duty, the first thing I did was to have an interaction with ASUU. I told them, look, we are one. I am here, let us work together and they agreed. Much later, even though I had not changed my attitude, they became reluctant coming to meetings because they looked at it as 'sell out'. They looked at us like the other side. But when I went there, I went there with a clear purpose of what I wanted to achieve, having gotten university experience for a reasonable length of time. With this, I thought that I had understood my position.

Generally, academics do not become principal officers of a university except for the positions of VC and DVCs. But when I went there, I said no to that. Academics should be the principal officers of the university. I said my principal officers, whether by law or by convention, will include all deans and directors. And the entitlements of the vice chancellor, registrar, bursar, will also be their entitlement. I bought all of them cars. I did this in the hope that the union will understand that I'm not there to join that dividing line. It did not work much. I secured an agreement that whatever agreement was reached between the federal universities and the

government that will be automatically implemented in my university. So, you can go on sympathy strike, but don't run down this university for nine months, six months when we agree that whatever they do, let us be free riders, it didn't work. When the time came, they proceeded on prolonged strike. Interestingly, when some of them became members of the council, they tweaked their positions. But overall, what I find in the university is that there are many, many brilliant people in there, but they don't have the correct outlet for expressing their brilliance. And that extended even to scholarship provided by TETFund. When I went there, so many staff were not given scholarship, and yet our scholarship fund was piling up. So, I asked, what the reason was and was informed the university's position is that their scholarship is restricted to science-based scholars.

I sent someone to TETFund and he confirmed that it was the university that decided who should get the scholarship, not them. I said, okay. I then sent a note to TETFund, that anybody from this university who has a scholarly attitude, whether it's in theater arts or in business or in science should be sponsored. They

gave us this special grant of 3,000,000,000 because when we got there, they were abusing us of not using our funds.

At BSU, I had a very friendly relationship with ASUU, but they were not ready to join me the way I wanted them to. I didn't want to push hard. In fact, I called some ASUU leaders and I said to them, you are stuck here. This union is good but when you leave, the union will not follow you. You have no benefit of the union after leaving office. So, I am going to give you a scholarship on TETFund, go and do your postgraduate programmes. I did that just to show them that I am not against them and the council was not against them. But they still wanted to maintain their independence by not coming too close to us. They showed cooperation, but that fear that they have been bought over was a barrier.

TNS: From your experience interacting with ASUU as pro-chancellor, do you recall any challenging incident you have had probably during negotiations? Any incident you can term as the most challenging?

OO: What I found most challenging was the unwillingness of my branch union to accept our suggestion that whatever decisions arrived at the other end (I mean federal universities), we will implement it here (at our university). On that one, they

were not willing to cooperate. It looked like, everybody must be seen to be on strike. I told them that when you are in this disagreement with the federal government, I am not in disagreement with you, why do you want to join the strike? But they still decided to go on the strike that I could not resolve until I left.

TNS: Do you not think that part of that challenge also could have been the fact that hierarchies and channels of communication in the university are organised in such a way that the council is not supposed to interact directly with ASUU?

OO: Yes, structurally you are correct, but functionally, in my time, no. We operate in committees and we do not have a direct relationship with ASUU. But under the arrangement that I had, the senate had confidence in me, and the vice chancellor too had confidence in me. There was an incident in which the students' union leaders wanted to have a meeting with me and I wanted to use the vice chancellor's office but she was not available. The reason for that was to make sure that she attended meeting because I did not want it to look like I was taking over a relationship that did not belong to me.

So, I called for the vice chancellor but she was out of town, and I already promised that I was going to meet the students, so I was in a dilemma. I went to one of the vice chancellor's offices, and held the meeting with the students. Upon return, the vice chancellor was not happy complaining that I had 'taken over' her job because I was not supposed to be in routine involvement with management. But this was a student leadership group wanting to talk to me. Turning it down was going to be a problem; doing it was going to be a problem. So, I thought that hurting the vice chancellor on this occasion and to apologize later would be better than turning down the request of the students. So, I took the students in and had our discussion. It turned out that my discussion with the student leaders was very useful even for the office of the vice chancellor. Understandably, when she came back, she was angry but I explained, I cannot hold a students' leadership union meeting to undo you in your own office as VC. So, that was resolved but that structural challenge is still there and people would rather keep to it.

TNS: What reforms in university governance do you believe could mitigate some of the recurrent

tensions between university administrators and ASUU?

OO: First, I think that the 'stand-alone universities' that the federal government is creating are too many. I would recommend to FG to establish only six universities; one for each geo political zone and make the remaining universities satellite campuses of the six universities. With technology in place, you can handle the functionality of this new system. By this I don't mean they should create new universities, rather, they should take any of the existing ones as the major university in a particular zone, and the satellite campuses within the same zone can be various areas of specializations.

The other is what we touched on before; let us not make university look like it is the beginning and end of life. As I said before, the reform should be a little more comprehensive in terms of delineating specific functions for specific levels of education. I would say, for example, that I do not want people to become teachers until they have acquired a degree in a subject. The way we operate now is that a secondary school person will go into a university and say he/she is learning physics education, chemistry education, or biology education without any prior experience in those subject areas beyond secondary school. If I had my way, I would cancel all these things. I

tried it when I was pro chancellor but it did not work. The right thing to do is whoever wants to teach should first have a degree in a subject, and then your training on how to teach should be built around the subject matter of your training. So, you can be a physics teacher in secondary school, or any other school, even primary, but you must have a degree. So, the promotion of teaching, whether you are in primary or secondary school, you have the same line of promotion. You can be specific to training how to teach primary school pupils. I would go for the best teachers to be the ones to teach at the first entry (primary school). For the same reason, *in the university, only professors should teach first year students and general studies to get them properly set up for those other staff in between.*

Another reform would be that graduate assistants should not be allowed to be a lecturer until they are totally qualified as lecturers. And controversially, I will not allow any lecturer in the university to get tenure until he/she is a professor. Once you are a professor, you should be treated like any other profession in the country. If you retire as a commissioner of police, you get all your benefits,

salaries, and your aids. If you are a general in the army, you get all the benefits, and take home. But if you are a professor, you are ignored in the university, and forgotten at home. I would not want a situation like that. If you want a situation where universities will retain the best, once you become a professor, government should give you life insurance, and like I said before, government should give you budget through whatever means. And at the age of 70, you can retire voluntarily if you want. Academic work is not so physical, it's intellectual. Yet, the work that is very physical in Nigeria, which is holding political position has no age limit (worldwide). You can see that in America, someone at over 70 is planning a third term, and in Nigeria, a president at the same age will at least get a second term. But when you are in the university, you are asked to retire at 70, to go where? One way is if you have a research fund, your capacity to use the research fund will determine how long you stay in the university. So, you can voluntarily retire at the age of 70 and retire formally at the age of 80 as long as you have that capacity because in university employment, one person does not substitute for the other; it is a little

more flexible. In other words, just because, in the ministry, you are a director and until you die or leave, nobody else can be director there; it is not like that in the university. So, if you have older hands in the university who will train graduate assistants, the professors can voluntarily retire at the age of 70, but they can stay beyond that to 75 or 80 before they finally leave. In that way, you have a core of the elderly people. You may say, what about their capacity to deal with modern technologies? They are two parts: dealing with modern technology and dealing with knowledge are not exactly the same. These young people who are training under them, can also train the elderly to use new technologies. Already a lot of old people like me use computers. I have also seen a lot of people who are old, and are determined to use these gadgets. Using the gadgets does not amount to knowledge. A lot of people who are leaving the university should not leave. When I was pro chancellor, I did not allow any of the older academics to leave. But as soon as I left office, they were all sacked. You need them to be the foundation base for the people we are bringing in as graduate assistants, because the other lecturers are too busy to train them; they themselves are in training. It is the elderly people who have all the time to train and guide the younger ones. I think Ibadan does that. Ibadan does not formally, say

so, but many of the old lecturers still have their offices in the university. I called one of my friends there who I once appointed as a statistician here and he said he still has office in Ibadan. So, the university should not allow their old academic staff to go away. They should remain until such a time they can no longer function. So that would be my recommended reform. A lot of university staff must retire with comfort. When I say insurance, I mean insurance for life. When they are going, at least let them go with their salary. And check, all other professions do this except the university, and we are the ones teaching those people to become soldiers.

TNS: What's your take on recruitment and mentorship in the university sector?

OO: Let me take you back a little bit. When I graduated in 1974 with a first-class honor, there was a lot of excitement being recruited into the university system. Down the line, nobody even wanted to be recruited again. People who get a first class do not want to be in the university system again. And so, this issue of mentorship started from what we called tutorial. Tutorial classes were classes held for small groups of

people. The class divided into small groups of 10 or so where what you were taught in class, you now come back literally to regurgitate and get the students' feedback. That way we were able to identify the stars or shooters who would then be isolated and prepared for postgraduate studies. So, mentorship is no longer popular because the mentor does not get paid (there is no incentive to be a mentor). The mentee on the other hand does not see the benefit of being mentored. I know of someone who after securing a teaching employment in the university decided to decline the appointment after he was told the salary. His reason was that what he got monthly from his uncle and his friend was more than his university salary. There was a time when the only thing worse than university employment, both in image and income, was full unemployment. We were treated so badly during the structural adjustment program. Down the line, President Obasanjo came and raised salaries, but it was for everybody. The salary structure, the incentive structure, and the work environment, all combined, do not allow for mentorship. In our time, it was not really very formal. But if you had a lecturer taking interest in you and training you, you know

what you would be expecting. During that time too, ministries used to come to the universities to recruit people ahead of graduation. So, if, for example, you are interested in issues relating to customs, maybe you may have people who know those things and would prepare you for the interview. But today, even university graduates do not know how to write a letter of application for employment anymore, and it is no longer a mandatory requirement. Nowadays, if you are going to get any employment, they will simply ask you to fill your name, etc – that's all. So, things have changed. But if the university follows those changes, the university will not survive it. Although I am looking forward to a situation where formal universities may fade, but mentorship would take the place of a fading university.

TNS: Given your vast experience in economic policies across different administrations and various international organisations, how would you assess the current state of our economy?

OO: You know, there is an aspect of the economy that we call political economy and there is the statistical, technical economy and the likes, but most often, many people juxtapose them. So, there are different kinds of assessment, where somebody thinks that everything happening is good,

or everything happening is bad. That is not scientific. Economics, though social science, is scientific. The current situation is a carryover. By current, we mean as you see it now. But the economy has a force of its own, where you meet it as a government and decision maker, take it up from there. When you enter, you now see the full dimensions of the problems that you have taken over, which you promised to solve. Now what is the current situation in terms of variables or factors? *The current situation is that we have huge unemployment, even though our system has been under pressure to use international measures.* If you work for less than one hour you should be considered as being gainfully employed but the international measures say otherwise. That is why the unemployment figures is the way it is. But if you do not go by that, we would have high unemployment figures, poverty and, what we call multidimensional poverty. Within the multidimensional poverty, access to education, access to electricity, infrastructural deficit, low revenue to GDP growth, food inflation, insecurity which is strictly an uneconomic issue, but which bears very hard on the economy. We also have challenges of exchange rate, corruption and bad

governance. These are the issues that are current among many others. The question is not about identifying them but what is being done about them. As I have listed above, some are causes while others are effects. Poverty is an effect; inflation is an effect but exchange rate is both an effect and a cause. Putting all these together, I would say the current situation is very challenging.

If you consider the exchange rate for instance, when the current administration came, we had four hundred or so naira to a dollar. Then fuel subsidy was removed and alongside this, the exchange rate was 'harmonized'. The outcome is that we have moved from N400 to one dollar to N1,500 to a dollar with fluctuations. The government institution responsible for tackling this situation is the central bank. The central bank tries to manage the demand for foreign exchange by putting in some dollars once in a while to make it available and to try to shove up the value of the naira against the dollar. The crisis caused by the combination of removal of fuel subsidy and merging of the rates is what we see as the exchange rate now (that is the current situation). The positive side of the current exchange rate is that it has removed

arbitrage - people trading between the two rates. Also, people who were taking undue advantage of the subsidy, have been eliminated. These outcomes are necessary but not sufficient because the overall objective is to grow the economy such that people have improved income. Such that the growth of output is significant enough to dampen inflation and people will have a better living. The current situation has not achieved this objective. So, what is the government doing about it? Government through the central bank tries to acquire more dollars to support the naira. Also, government through the ministry of agriculture, you will recall, declared food emergency. And obviously that has failed. They simply said we have now opened up the borders for food importation without prior assessment. The challenge with all this is that they did not show us the analysis that they had done in order to move from one to the other. Now they have opened up the borders for food importation without doing the analyses for us to see what happened to the emergency declaration and what they said they will do within it. And those of us who made some suggestions were ignored. We forecasted that there will be food riot right from the day it was done and it happened. So, when they were under pressure, they buckled. At the time that this food crisis was reaching a certain point, rather

than opening the borders, it would have been easier and faster to support the farmers at home to do the production. But instead, they opened the borders, thus, distorted the investment decisions of local farmers. You will notice that the price of maize and other things has come down but is it sustainable? Meanwhile, you have the dollar that is at a level that everybody is groaning. But we have done nothing to take the benefit of that dollar.

What is the appropriate strategy for the exchange rate? The appropriate strategy is not a groaning bullet but to take advantage of the lowering of the rates. Don't forget that the naira is not an international currency. It only interacts with the dollar when we import, not even when we export crude oil or anything. In measuring exchange rate, there are two variables; you have the direct exchange statement, and the purchasing power parity, which compares what would be, if a dollar is 1,500 naira now, what would the dollar do in America compared to what 1,500 will do here? You will see that 1,500 will probably buy more things than \$1 in America will buy. Now, how do you work on it? The exchange rate has two sides: on the one side, which is



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completely within your capacity to handle, is that it acts as a barrier to importation. On the other side, it flattens the barrier for exports. Now the extent to which it acts as a barrier to import depends on your capacity to respond positively. And then the elasticity of prices depends on what you are bringing in. Food for the whole length of period is the lead indicator of inflation. It drives inflation. So that helps us to say, okay, if food is the driver of inflation in Nigeria, food is something we can produce. And so, what do we do to produce it and what is government doing? At the state levels, some state governments have imported more than a thousand tractors over a year ago. The federal government has planned and is planning for 4,000

tractors. About a thousand or so of those tractors have arrived at Abuja already. Now, when you buy tractor and keep on ground for a year, it looks impressive, right? But it does not have any impact on food production. We have millions of hectares of arable land that they tell you every year, 34,000,000 of which is said to be under cultivation. Out of this 34, 000,000 only about 4,000,000 is tractor-able. So, if you bring in a lot of tractors you still cannot use them unless you prepare the land. Unfortunately, there are no agricultural equipment for land preparation in Nigeria. What we are doing is to use construction equipment to prepare agricultural land by use of bulldozers to pull up the trees. Those are not agricultural equipment. The question is how come we have access to bulldozers? Is it because the government policy

on construction is certain enough for people to buy bulldozers to come and do road construction? Hence, the use of the equipment for agricultural land is residual. When they are finished, they pack them, borrow them and use them. But why is it that people do not buy agricultural equipment for land development? The answer is that the policy is not consistent enough for anybody to go and put his money in buying such equipment. The end result is that, you buy the tractor, which is like putting the cart before the horse, so, all over the place now, we have tractors that we cannot use, both for technical reasons and for economic reasons. The technical reason is that, there is no enough land to use those tractors. The financial reason is that, many people cannot afford the money to get the tractors or hire their services when the lands are available. So, the end result is that a lot of money is being pushed into agriculture but it cannot bring the desired change because they have not followed the due processes required to develop agriculture. *The current situation in agriculture is that there is a desire to do mechanization but the process and procedure for the mechanization is misplaced.*

The second current

situation is that we do not have basic infrastructure that is good enough. Let me break it down. Take electricity for instance, *as long as government believes that electricity is a commodity to be bought and sold as a profitable item, we will never get it right*. I used to do some consultancy for the ministry of power in the 1990s. Electricity in our current situation should be considered an infrastructure required to develop other sectors. It is not a commodity like yam or bottled water or a car to be bought and sold. As long as you do not recognize electricity as an infrastructure whose supply to the users is subsidized or at least not more than cost recovery, you cannot get it right. America tried around the year 2000 to liberalize and commoditize electricity (to make it like commodity). They put it into stock exchange market but it was disaster, they had to withdraw it. If only government can understand that electricity should be treated as the basic infrastructure for economic growth and development, they will realize that they will get their money back from the profitability of the other sectors.

One solution, therefore, is to engage in value-added productivity. And you

cannot engage in value added productivity if you do not have the correct infrastructure on ground. You will see that the problem of foreign exchange may appear to be in central bank but the solution to it is not wholly with the central bank directly. Anything that contributes to increase production and value addition, will enhance the value of the naira. So, it's not like something you can say okay, let me solve it. It cannot be solved on its own. It derives its strength from the force of demand and supply that gives you the face picture of the naira. So, you need to engage in production. But modern production goes through processes that we are in a hurry to follow. So, everybody wants to buy tractor to produce more, to mechanize agriculture. But tractor is the last in the process of agricultural mechanization. In the immediate, for example, I think in 2022, Nigeria's food imports were somewhere around 3 billion naira. But food waste and post-harvest losses was estimated at 3,500,000,000 in the same year. For the perishable products, around 60 to 70% of what is produced is wasted even in the face of this biting inflation. For tubers and the likes, it is around 40%. The government needs to work alongside the Nigerian tubers institute and the river basin development authorities to go to the farmers, and engage in extension services at the point of harvest. I am talking of

regular subsistent farming. If you do that, it will minimize post-harvest losses in Nigeria, the price of food will come down, and the farmers will earn more income simultaneously. But as it is today, Nigeria's economy is primitive. I am not using primitive in a derogatory sense but in a sense of primary production. Check the statistics, the lead production in Nigeria is crops and when agriculture accounts for more than 20% of your GDP, you are in trouble. Primary produce should not dominate the GDP. The contribution of manufacturing to GDP in Nigeria is below 10%; at best times, 12%. If you check the statistics in other places, manufacturing is around 20 - 30%. And then the services sector in Nigeria, which is more than 50% of GDP is MSMEs (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises), with over 40 million Nigerians are involved in it. That is the harbinger of poverty in Nigeria. The lead sectors contributing to GDP are services and agriculture, giving us more than 70% of our GDP are also the harbinger of poverty. So, we are just relying on the law of large numbers to arrive at that. If you rank Nigeria by value addition, we are not even among the top 10% in Africa. So that is why the Naira is giving us that face

value that you see and somebody is sitting down wanting to solve it by bringing more dollar. You cannot bring in more dollars except if you are generating the dollars through production. There are two ways to generate the dollar. One, is to substitute for it. So instead of looking for the dollar to buy food, you substitute for dollar by buying food with naira. A dollar saved is as good as a dollar earned. Two, of course, is to expand your export capacity. You have to do so in a value-added fashion. Like in the oil sector now, you can see the struggle between selling for naira and selling for dollar.

Consider our crude oil sector, we are supposed to produce 2,000,000 barrels per day we are down to 1,400,000 barrels per day. Because our crude oil is our immediate source of foreign exchange; if we are able to sustain it, the value of the naira will rise through the public-private partnership (PPP). Now if you check Indonesia, their currency is called Indonesian rupiah. The Rupiah as of March 2025, was somewhere around 16,000 Rupiah to \$1. But it does not harm them because they are able to use the PPP to ensure that their inflation rate is single digit as well as the unemployment rate. So, the economy is insulated

(protected) from the direct transmission of inflation in the exchange rate to the economy. But, in Nigeria, we get a direct transmission of imported inflation to the pockets of everybody. We can, and we have the base, resource, and the wherewithal to ensure that we strengthen the naira through productive capacity, not through the management of demand. It is also curious that at a time when the economy is down, the demand for foreign exchange is going up. That it is going up it's not enough and it cannot be explained by the fact that, oh, people are going for medical tourism or paying for their school fees. That cannot be the reason. Part of the reason is that the way the government has treated the windfall from the subsidy, is a significant problem. That is, you know when subsidy was on, we argued that there are many beneficiaries of the subsidy who had 4 - 5 cars to fuel. So, the idea was if you take away the subsidy from them, they should pay the equivalent in relation to how they consume. But what did we do? We removed the subsidy. Where does this show positively? It shows up in the federation account. Everybody, even government boasts that it has improved the federation account. But this has happened without conditions attached to those who benefit from it, the governors. So, for an extended period of time, there was this correlation between the

distribution of FAAC (Federation Account Allocation Committee) and the decline in the value of the naira. I have not done any research on that but even government circles already know that governors had access to dollar. After FAAC, two or three weeks down the line, the value of the naira goes down again, which suggests that somebody somewhere is using the excess naira they have gotten, to buy up dollars at whatever rate.

Nobody is following it up. I for one, supported the subsidy removal, but I was thinking that since there is a formula for revenue sharing, we already know how much of the FAAC is accounted for by the removal of fuel subsidy. I thought that portion of the FAAC will be domiciled somewhere. And every state governor, must give us a blueprint on how they want to use that money to help, particularly in the area of health, primary education and the rural infrastructure. If they have done that, it would have helped the naira. But what we have done is shift the benefit of the removal of subsidy from one group to even a more powerful group. And that is not helping government. The idea that over time it will help - Well, we can muddle through but the capacity to muddle through

our challenges is becoming thinner and thinner with time. *The exchange rate in summary, can only be improved when we organize scientifically to improve our production capacity, to add value and expand the value of production.* Once you achieve and expand production, these other related issues would have been addressed. You will get the unemployment down and you will get poverty reduced over time. What we see today are outcomes of policy failures or inactive policies in some direction. They do not stand alone. Once you solve the fundamental, the other will also follow. So that is the outline, it is something to discuss and give a whole series of lectures.

TNS: *When you were at the other side of the divide, what changes were you able to bring to bear?*

OO: Well, you will recall that when we were in Obasanjo's administration, things changed a little bit. The problem is not lack of change. The problem is sustenance of change. When Obasanjo took over in his second tenure, we had the privilege of improved earnings. And what Obasanjo did was simply to clear our international debts completely. We gave out or paid \$18 billion or so to clear our external debts.

When the subsequent administration came, they did not take advantage of what they saw, instead, they went back to borrow again. So, it was not sustained. The benefit of what Obasanjo did was to be taken over by the next administration but government went back to borrowing even when there was no visible need for that borrowing. We have become victims to international traps. There are some international multilateral agencies that are here just to lend. And when you now show that you do not need to borrow, they can convince you successfully that look, you



need borrowing, and you take it. There is a lot of irresponsible borrowing from the World Bank. You know, there is this thing called, "the state fiscal transparency sifters" where the World Bank lends money to the states for them to do what their responsibility is. That is, you are supposed to present your budget at the right time, publish it at the right time and put it on the internet for everybody to see. You are also expected to bring out your accounts and open a state website for you to place those

things there for people to see. Why would we pay you to do what you are hired to do? And check, when the World Bank gives them that money, the World Bank does not follow-up to see how that money is used. That is irresponsible!

Sifters took center stage during the period that Jonathan came in. Another people started lending money again. Even if you do not need money and I can convince you as a banker that you need to borrow, and I know that you can pay me back. Do not forget that borrowing is not the return; the payment of the debt is not tied to the project for which you are using the money. The payment of that debt is tied to the overall performance of your GDP and revenue. So, you pay not from the project, or from your overall approach. That is why you see debt servicing has become a first line of expenditure in Nigeria not from the project that are funded. We don't even know what the projects are anymore. And so, government has accepted that debt service is a number one item even in the medium-term expenditure framework. This is irresponsible. I am not saying we did very well when we were there, but I am saying that whatever we did, the little that we did was not used, it was not

followed. It was wiped out immediately. *So, government sometimes is driven by extraneous interests and inadequate knowledge of the international workings but more importantly, driven by interests that are not institutional.* It is not that these people don't know, it's that you can go and do things and you don't get punished. That is why.

TNS: If you insisted that the major challenge in economic policies was sustainability. Having been part of successive governments after Obasanjo's administration, why is there so much lack of consistencies in our governance system?

OO: You see, leadership change is very important. As president Obasanjo said that people were criticizing him for nothing. He said you are only my adviser, it's only an advice; I don't have to take it. So, if you suggest an advice and it is not taken there is nothing you can do. For example, even within that period of Obasanjo's administration, what we did at the national level, we tried to extend it to the state level. That time it was NEEDS (National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy) at the national level, and also did SEEDS (State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy)

at the state level. We tried to do an assessment of the performance of the state to be used as a functional basis for federal government to provide grants to states, not this uniform allocation where, if one state has 10,000, everybody else must get 10,000, but they were not functional. The results came, and we got fired. And that thing has been canceled. Because what we did was to show the performance of skills, not in projects executed, but in the process of decision making to execute a project.

That is where the crisis is, that is where each time we talk of implementation, it is the ability to process things to a point where you can examine and ensure that what was given here, the correct procedures were done to the last point. That space in between was what we were assessing, and the states came and it was fireworks. And every government succumbs to it. So, you do not see state assessment anymore since that 2005. We need some kind of pressure groups. We must know what states are doing, and how they are doing it. You see the state governors, once you are a governor; you are given the authority to collect revenue on behalf of your state, right? But there's no commensurate requirement to tell your people how you have used the revenue. That thing has to be corrected. Instead, when you collect your revenue, whether

this is from a federation account or the IGR, you have an immunity not to be forced to explain. So anytime there is a threat to you, you have this immunity. What is the immunity about? Is it not to protect you from harassment over how you have used state resources? What are you there for? You are there to represent the people in the decision making that enables you to use their resources. But you are protected by immunity. This was a military mentality that was handed over to us. So, there's no way that we can trace truth to the end and say, look, how have you used that money? We do not like it; we are taking you to court. But no, they have immunity. These are not perfect; I am just telling you what I know and there are various opinions on this. It's just like the economy is now. People are saying oh, we are hoping for the best. Economy is not driven by hope; *economy is driven by processes and the expectation of what that process will bring in.*

But what is happening now, you know, the challenge here is that whatever happens well now, you will say, ah, yes, it is a measure of the reform. But there are certain things that will happen on their own with or without any reforms. If it happens bad, and you say it

is bad, they say you are a pessimist. So that is the challenge that we face and all these things are, to some extent, correct, because there are no institutions following up. Up till now, we are two years into this administration, other than what government itself puts out as its own performance assessment, there are no independent assessors to say no, this is the situation - I mean, objectively, there are no critics of government. I know what I am saying the people who objectively think and talk are not there. You can say, what about you? I don't have money for security to do that; I am struggling with my survival as a retired person too. So that is the challenge.

TNS: Thank you so much for your time. It will be interesting to know what you do now in retirement.

OO: I read oh! I have four books that I am reading now. The only thing that keeps me alive and awake is that I read. This year, I decided to take myself out of social media. I used to have access but I have decided, anything that does not give me three things: first it is not informing me, second, it is not educating me, and third it is not entertaining me, I get myself out of them. Because when I read social media, I am reading somebody's quote

against another person, somebody insulting someone else, and I am spending my time reading insults. So, I got myself out of Facebook and I am not in any of these social media platforms except WhatsApp, which I use very restrictedly for my peace of mind. I am not ready to go and be reading all sorts of gossips and insults. In social media, people write before they think or if they think at all. I do mentorship for free. I also do farming but this has been very challenging because of the economic situation. I still have local farmers that I partner with. We do our farms in the village. I have trained them on how to manage a farm without my presence. They are doing pretty well. We produce yams, cassava, we do about 30 hectares of farm work. Last year, I was attacked in one of those farms. Did you know what they said; that the particular parcel of land that my parents were using before I was born, and I joined them; somebody laid claim to it last year. And they started fighting over it. So, there are a lot of challenges.

PENCOM Holds Workshop to Clarify the Enhanced Pension Benefits for Nigerian Professors

Kanang Amos Akims

The National Pension Commission (PENCOM), in collaboration with the Nigerian University Pension Management Company (NUPEMCO), held sensitization workshops across four Nigerian universities between the 21st and 28th of February, 2025. The universities include Bayaro University Kano, University of Lagos, University of Port Harcourt, and University of Abuja. The event which recorded attendance of over 2,000 participants both physically and online, focused on elucidating the retirement benefits framework for professors under the Universities Miscellaneous Provisions Amendment Act (UMPAA) 2012, including critical updates to the Programmed Withdrawal Template and data recapture requirements.

The workshop underscored UMPAA 2012, which guarantees eligible professors 100% of their final salary as a pension. To qualify, professors must retire at age 70 after a minimum of 20 years of continuous service in National Universities Commission (NUC) - recognized institutions.

Pension Fund Administrators (PFAs) are tasked with calculating pension shortfalls, with federal universities' gaps funded via PENCOM budgetary allocations, while state and private institutions must independently cover their professors' deficits.



The Vice Chancellor of Bayaro University Kano and his management team, Representative of the DG of PENCOM, Chairman of the Board of NUPEMCO and the Company's MD, and some ASUU Leaders at the sensitization workshop in Kano

A key emphasis was placed on the mandatory Data Recapture Exercise for Retirement Savings Account (RSA) holders registered before July 1, 2019. Professors must link their RSAs to their National Identity Numbers (NIN) to access benefits, transfer accounts between PFAs, or correct personal details. PENCOM warned that failure to comply would bar retirees from claiming entitlements.

Eligibility for accessing benefits includes mandatory retirement (age 70), medical retirement, death benefits for next of kin, temporary job loss (permitting 25% RSA withdrawals), and housing equity contributions (25% RSA access). Pension options include Programmed Withdrawal with a lump sum, annuity plans with lump sums, or employer-funded shortfalls if RSA balances are insufficient.



Representative of the DG of PENCOM and some staff of the Commission, Immediate Past President of ASUU and Member of the Board of NUPEMCO and the Company's MD at the sensitization workshop in University of Lagos

To address pension liabilities, the Federal Government approved a N758 billion bond, specifically targeting outstanding shortfalls for university professors. PENCOM clarified that accrued benefits is excluded from the 2025 budget's service-wide votes, ensuring dedicated funding. PFAs must submit to PENCOM annual shortfall estimates for professors in federal universities by the first quarter of the preceding year, while for professors in state and private universities, PFAs shall forward shortfall

amounts to the Employer within the first quarter of the previous year for it to be provided for in the budget of the following year.

Federal universities must provide retired professors with confirmation letters of service, signed by registrars, and submit nominal rolls to PENCOM to resolve contribution remittance issues dating back to 2004. For post-2020 discrepancies, staff are directed to liaise with IPPIS desk officers in the universities. PENCOM also urged professors to notify employers of PFA transfers to ensure accurate remittances.

The workshop fostered robust dialogue between professors, university officials, PFAs, and regulators. PENCOM reaffirmed its commitment to engaging state governments on adopting the Contributory Pension Scheme. Presentation materials and templates were shared for nationwide replication, ensuring consistent implementation.

The workshop marks a pivotal step in securing dignified retirement for academics. By clarifying processes and reinforcing accountability, the future of those who have shaped Nigeria's educational excellence can be safeguarded. The sensitization workshop recorded widespread acclaim for its transparency, equipping stakeholders with actionable insights to navigate the evolving pension landscape.

Kanang Amos Akims is the Editor-in-Chief of the National Scholar



The Vice Chancellor of University of Port Harcourt, Representative of the DG of PENCOM, and MD of NUPEMCO with some of the Company's staff at the sensitization workshop in Port Harcourt.

Maryam Umar is ASUU's adopted daughter – ASUU President.

Dakwom Long'gul

Maryam Umar, a third-year Economics student at Gombe State University (GSU) and a resident of the BCGA quarters in the vibrant capital of Gombe State, has emerged as a symbol of tenacity and strength after overcoming formidable obstacles to achieve academic excellence. Born without hands, Maryam's extraordinary journey has inspired many as she continues to excel in her studies despite her physical challenges.

The President of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Comrade Emmanuel Osodeke, accompanied by ASUU Vice President, Comrade Chris Piwuna, and EXCO of ASUU GSU Branch, describes Maryam Umar as an adopted daughter of ASUU. Maryam's incredible ability to adapt shines through in her skill to write and navigate a computer using her legs, showcasing her steadfast

commitment to learning. Her guardian, Abdon Ali Balanga, shared that Maryam's narrative is one of remarkable grit. He deeply appreciated ASUU's invaluable support, describing their involvement as transformative for Maryam's education journey.



L - R: ASUU President Emmanuel Osodeke, Maryam Umar, and ASUU Vice President, Chris Piwuna

Before receiving ASUU's scholarship award, Maryam begged on the streets to make ends meet. Her fortunes took a turn when the national leadership of ASUU gave her a scholarship, granting her the

chance to pursue her dreams of higher education. When ASUU President, Comrade Emmanuel Osodeke visited Maryam's family's home she expressed her heartfelt gratitude to the union for recognising her potential and allowing her to continue her academic pursuits.

The support from ASUU for Maryam goes well beyond just the scholarship. The union also grants her a monthly stipend of N250,000 - recently raised from N150,000 - to assist with transportation and educational costs. This financial backing is part of ASUU's broader initiative to uplift education and aid students with disabilities. Comrade Osodeke urged the government to enhance the accessibility and inclusivity of university environments for students like Maryam.



ASUU President, Emmanuel Osodeke observes Maryam using the computer while on a visit to her family home in Gombe

Comrade Suleiman Jauro, the chairperson of ASUU GSU branch, emphasized Maryam's stellar academic record, noting that despite her physical challenges, she has not encountered any carryover in her courses during her three years at the university.

Maryam Umar's narrative is a powerful testament to resilience and the transformative impact of

targeted support in empowering students with disabilities to realise their full potential.

Dakwom Long'gul writes from the Department of Theatre and Film Arts, University of Jos



ASUU Leaders during the visit to Maryam Umar

TETFUND UNVEILS ITS 2025 INTERVENTION ALLOCATIONS:

Universities, Polytechnics, and Colleges of Education Set for Major Boost

Kanang Amos Akims



TETFund Headquarters, Abuja.

The Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) has unveiled its 2025 intervention allocations, with a significant financial boost for Nigeria's public tertiary institutions. Each university across the country will receive over N2.8 billion, while polytechnics and colleges of education will receive N1.9 billion and N2.1 billion, respectively.

The Executive Secretary of TETFund, Architect Sonny Echono, made the

announcement on Thursday March 13th, 2025, during a strategic workshop held in Abuja with heads of beneficiary institutions. According to Echono, this round of funding is one of the most substantial disbursements in the agency's history and it reflects a strong commitment to revamping the country's educational infrastructure and academic development.

Breaking down the figures, he explained that each university would receive N2,560,562,352.66 as part of

the normal allocation, along with an additional N300 million under the zonal intervention fund, bringing the total to N2,860,562,352.66. Polytechnics are to get N1,794,335,731.71 in normal funding and N200 million zonal allocation, totaling N1,994,335,731.71. Colleges of Education will receive N1,978,428,260.79 in normal allocation and N200 million in zonal funds, totaling N2,178,428,260.79.

Echono urged heads of

institutions to ensure that all 2024 and previous allocations are fully utilised and that procurement processes are fast-tracked to enable timely access to the 2025 funds. He emphasised that the bulk of this year's infrastructure funding would be directed toward rehabilitating and upgrading dilapidated facilities in the institutions, in line with the Federal Government's directive.

He also detailed the structure of the disbursement: 91.08% of the total fund is dedicated to direct disbursements - 48.90% for annual direct interventions and 42.18% for special direct interventions. 8.72% of the funds are set aside for designated projects, while 0.20% is reserved for a stabilization fund.

Among the special projects under the 2025 disbursement are key national priorities. These include the completion of the National Library in Abuja, establishment of mechanised farms in select universities, and development of student hostels through both Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) and direct government construction efforts. TETFund is also prioritizing the expansion of infrastructure for medical education, including simulation technologies in response to national healthcare training needs.

Another notable feature of this year's plan is the enhanced emphasis on research and innovation. The Fund plans to sustain its support for the National Research Fund and expand the Triple Helix initiative, which fosters collaboration between academia, industry, and government. This is alongside a renewed push for commercializing research outputs to create real-world impact.

Additionally, TETFund will launch several new initiatives in 2025. These include Diaspora Exchange Program, Staff Support Fund for all categories of institutions, provision of electric tricycles for campus transportation, creation of 12 innovation hubs across polytechnics and colleges of education. A Student Startup/Innovation Grant program is also set to kick off, which is aimed at nurturing entrepreneurship among young Nigerians.

Earlier on, TETFund revealed that its special intervention will focus on providing sustainable power solutions to tertiary institutions nationwide. This was announced on Wednesday, March 12, 2025, by the Chairman, TETFund Board of Trustees, Hon. Aminu Masari, during the inauguration of the newly constituted Steering Committee on Alternative Energy Solutions for Tertiary Institutions in Abuja. Masari, a former Governor of Katsina State and one-time Speaker of the House of Representatives,

emphasised the critical role of electricity in academic research and learning. He noted that rising electricity tariffs and poor infrastructure have placed an overwhelming burden on institutions, stifling innovation and academic performance. "A reliable power supply is essential for research and learning, which are fundamental to students' academic development," Masari stated.

The newly inaugurated steering committee is chaired by Rt. Hon. Sunday Adepaju, a member of TETFund's Board of Trustees. The committee is comprised of energy experts, university administrators, and student representatives. The committee is tasked with developing a blueprint for implementing renewable energy solutions within Nigeria's public tertiary institutions. Their first deliverable: a preliminary report would be due in two months.

Nigeria's universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education have long struggled with erratic power supply, often relying on outdated generators and irregular grid electricity to power classrooms, laboratories, and hostels. This new intervention aims to change that narrative.

Kanang Amos Akims is the Editor-in-Chief of The National Scholar

STRENGTHENING OUR ROOTS:

A Reflection on the Benue Professionals & Mentoring Group

Isaac Ogbogo and Co-Founders of BPMG

The Benue Professionals & Mentoring Group (BPMG) is a network founded by six (6) alumni of Benue State University (BSU): Dr. Andrew T. Tyowua, Isaac O. Ogbogo, Dr. Joseph A. Gbertyo, Dr. Iveren W. Nyinoh, Dr. Tseke Kavnen and Godwin U. Ekor. Together, they bring their wealth of experience spanning the academia, civil society, public service, and global development. BPMG is dedicated to fostering academic excellence, mentorship, and professional development among students and young professionals from Benue State. In just a few months, this initiative has transformed into a dynamic platform where potential meets purpose, and leadership is intentionally cultivated.

The Benue Professionals & Mentoring Group emerged from a shared recognition: young talents in Benue face a critical gap in mentorship, access to global opportunities, and

structured career support. Our founding vision was simple yet powerful - create a bridge between achievement and opportunity, and this is led by those who have walked that path before.

Our mission and purpose at BPMG is to create awareness and support excelling Benue graduates by connecting them with local, national, and international opportunities. From scholarships, fellowships, internships to leadership development programs, BPMG is committed to equipping candidates for impactful futures while also fostering societal development.

2025 marks the maiden edition of our support to students for their final-year project work. Nominees from different departments within the Faculty of Sciences at the Benue State University, Makurdi were evaluated through a transparent, merit-based process. First, we collected the names of three final-year students with the highest academic CGPAs in

each of the departments. Then, each candidate was required to submit a 250-word abstract of their final-year project work, a 100-word career plan outlining short- and long-term goals. Those who performed excellently made it to the finals. At the finals, they each made presentation about their completed project works.

This approach ensured that participants were not only academically outstanding but also articulate, goal-driven, and forward-looking. In the end, 15 students (see table below) from 6 programs in BSU were awarded with the sum of forty thousand naira in support of their final year project. This pioneering effort sets the tone for future engagements as we are rooted in academic excellence and shaped by holistic support.

S/No	Names	Course of Study
1	Miracle Lazarus Ullam	BSc Chemistry
2	Isaac Odeh	BSc Chemistry
3	Becky Ngurumun Akpera	BSc Chemistry
4	Obiye Mercy Ikpati	BSc Industrial Chemistry
5	Anthony Isaiah Gabriel	BSc EMT
6	Ngongu Deborah Kwen- Orngu	BSc EMT
7	Charles U Obekpa	BSc EMT
8	Orngu Shiekar	BSc Physics
9	Tabitha Ngukuran Tombu	BSc Physics
10	Kator Kenneth Hembaga	BSc Physics
11	Thomas Fanen Yanmar	BSc Biochemistry
12	Simon Oche Emmanuel	BSc Biochemistry
13	Amos Terkuma Agber	BSc Biochemistry
14	Tertor James Azua	BSc Zoology
15	Ene Betty Ameh	BSc Zoology

Besides our support to students for their final year project BPMG is also involved in activities including free webinars, strategic learning sessions, and mentorship initiatives. Thus, reinforcing our commitment to ongoing professional development of students and young professionals from Benue State. Our story is still being written. As we scale up our programs and deepen our reach, we remain guided by one principle, ***“When one of us rises, we all rise”***.

We hope this model of mentorship and community-driven excellence will inspire similar efforts across universities in Nigeria and beyond.

BPMG

bpmgofficial@gmail.com

Remarks from Awardees of BPMG Final Year Project Support

“I am sincerely honored and grateful to be selected as a recipient of the BPMG Final Year Project Support Award. This generous support means a great deal to me, not just financially but also as a source of motivation to excel in my academic journey. Your generosity not only eases my research expenses but also inspires me to strive for excellence. I truly appreciate this recognition and hope to one day support future students as you have supported me”.

– Ullam Miracle Lazarus (Chemistry Department)

“I am truly honored to be among the selected students, and this achievement motivates me to work even harder to seize more opportunities like this in the future”. –

Shiekar Orngu (Physics Department)

“I am glad to be a beneficiary of the BPMG undergraduate project support. This gesture is crucial at this time of my academic journey and I am really grateful for the support”.

– Agber Terkuma Amos (Biochemistry Department).

“I wanted to take a moment to express my heartfelt gratitude for your assistance with my project. Your guidance and support were invaluable, and I truly appreciate the time and effort you invested in helping me. Thank you again for your kindness and expertise. I’m grateful to have had the opportunity to work with you”. –

Charles U. Obekpa (Environmental Management & Toxicology)

“I am writing to express my sincere gratitude and excitement upon receiving the news that I have been awarded the Maiden final year project work support by BPMG. I am truly humbled and honored to have been selected for this prestigious award. Thank you for believing in me and for investing in my education. This scholarship will have a significant impact on my ability to pursue my academic goals, and I am deeply appreciative of your support”. –

Mercy Ikpati (Industrial Chemistry)

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: Reclaiming Respect and Discipline in Nigerian Universities

Gabriel Chy Alonta



University of Awka NO Photo Credit:

The recent expulsion of a student from Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU), Awka, following an altercation with a lecturer, has sparked conversations about discipline, respect, and the growing trend of selective obedience among students. While disciplinary action serves as a deterrent, the real lesson lies in understanding the root causes of such misconduct and reorienting students and lecturers toward fostering a culture of

respect and responsibility within the university community.

A disturbing trend has emerged where students only acknowledge lecturers who teach them directly, disregarding those from other departments or faculties. This misplaced sense of authority has led to increasing incidents of disrespect, as seen in the NAU case. A university is not just a collection of departments but an integrated academic environment where every staff member, whether

teaching or non-teaching, deserves respect. Every lecturer represents the institution's authority and must be accorded the same level of regard, regardless of whether they directly instruct a student or not.

Education extends beyond the classroom; it is a transformative process that shapes character, values, and ethics. Universities play an important role in nurturing responsible individuals, ensuring that discipline and ethical conduct are upheld. Lecturers, as custodians of knowledge, stand in locus parentis - a position of guardianship and moral responsibility over students. The erosion of this principle is evident in the increasing cases of indiscipline, where some students fail to recognize lecturers as figures of guidance and authority.

Indiscipline is not an overnight occurrence. It is a seed planted at home, nurtured in school, and eventually harvested by

society. Parents lay the foundation for discipline, but the university environment reinforces and solidifies these values. If students are allowed to show disregard for authority figures in the university, it is only a matter of time before they extend this behaviour to their workplaces and the broader society. What starts as defiance against a lecturer today could evolve into a culture of lawlessness, professional misconduct, or even criminal tendencies in the future.

While student behaviour needs urgent attention, lecturers themselves must also introspect. Some lecturers sow division among students or instigate conflicts between departments, creating an environment of rivalry and hostility. This unprofessional conduct often manifests in students taking sides, leading to disrespect for lecturers outside their immediate academic circles. Rather than fuelling these unnecessary conflicts, lecturers should instil in students the values of unity, respect, and professionalism.

Additionally, the issue of ethical misconduct among lecturers cannot be ignored. The menace of sex-for-

marks and financial extortion weakens the moral fabric of the university system. When students are subjected to exploitation, they develop resentment towards authority, often leading to rebellion and defiance. Lecturers who engage in such despicable acts give students a reason to challenge the system. On the other hand, those who uphold academic integrity and professionalism deserve recognition and commendation. It is their commitment that ensures the university remains a place of learning, growth, and ethical development.

Nnamdi Azikiwe University stands on the principles of *Discipline, Self-Reliance, and Excellence*. These are not mere words but guiding values that should shape the actions of every student and staff member. Discipline lays the foundation for success, self-reliance fosters creativity and resilience, and excellence ensures that graduates of the institution stand out in their respective fields. Students must internalize these principles, understanding that their conduct today will influence their future opportunities and reputation.

This incident should serve as more than just an example of punishment. It is a wake-up call for all stakeholders in the university community to re-examine their roles. Students must understand that respect is

a fundamental virtue that transcends departmental boundaries. Lecturers must embrace their responsibility as role models, instilling values that foster personal and professional growth. The university administration must strengthen policies that promote discipline, ensuring that both students and lecturers adhere to the ethical standards that define a respectable academic environment.

Education is not just about acquiring knowledge but about developing character and values. A true university graduate is not merely someone who has passed exams but someone who embodies discipline, respect, and a strong moral compass. This incident should be a lesson not just in enforcement but in reflection, transformation, and the collective responsibility of shaping a generation of students who understand the essence of respect, discipline, and ethical conduct in their journey through life.

Gabriel Chy Alonta writes from the Department of Business Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

DIGITAL REVOLUTION MEETS HUMAN INVESTMENT:

Professor Shehu Abdul Rahman Reimagines the Nigerian University Education

At a pivotal moment when Nigerian universities stand at the crossroads of tradition and transformation, Federal University Lafia has found in Professor Shehu Abdul Rahman (SAR), a visionary leader who refuses to let the future arrive without invitation. He believes that the modern university must dance to the rhythm of technological evolution or risk becoming a relic. He however reiterates that technological revolution without human capital development would be counterproductive. His administration's commitment to timely staff promotions and welfare initiatives reveals a profound understanding that educational excellence flows from a motivated and valued academic community.

In this exclusive interview with The National Scholar (TNS), Professor Rahman speaks with the authority of experience and the urgency of someone who recognizes that yesterday's educational approaches cannot prepare students for tomorrow's challenges, emphasising that there is no alternative to blended learning environment.

Excerpts...

TNS: *The National Scholar appreciates you for accepting her invitation for this interaction. May we meet you, sir? Who is Professor Shehu Abdul Rahman?*

SAR: Thank you very much. I welcome you, my distinguished guest from The National Scholar. I am Professor Shehu Abdul

Rahman, the Vice Chancellor of Federal University Lafia. I am a professor of Agricultural Economics. I attended and graduated from Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Zaria where I obtained all my degrees, and I also started my career there. I spent about 9 years as a lecturer at ABU from 1994 to 2003 when I transferred my services to Nasarawa State University Keffi (NSUK) after



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my PhD in 2002. I left ABU to assist NSUK in establishing the Faculty of Agriculture where I became the pioneer Dean of the nascent faculty. I was later appointed the deputy Vice Chancellor (Administration). I was on that seat when I was also appointed the pioneer Vice Chancellor, Federal University Gashua in 2013.

After my three years as Vice Chancellor, there was some sort of political summersault and I was removed from office along two other VCs (who were Professors Chuk Okeke and Suleiman Bilbis of Federal University Gusau and Birnin Kebbi respectively). Thereafter, I proceeded on sabbatical to the Federal University of Lafia for one year before returning to Nasarawa State University, Keffi, where I was before being appointed as the Vice Chancellor of Gashua.

Following the expiration of my sabbatical at FULafia, I was offered a visiting appointment up till the time when the former Vice Chancellor felt that with my experience in establishing the faculty of Agriculture at NSUK, and my experience as pioneer VC, Gashua, where I also championed the establishment of the same faculty, I should be the one to start the faculty of Agriculture at FULafia. Because of that request, I transferred my service from NSUK to FULafia and started the Faculty of Agriculture there. It was in that process that I still applied for this position and eventually got appointed as the Vice-Chancellor of FULafia.

TNS: *Your rich resume indicates that you have had a lengthy administrative experience. Are you still a member of ASUU?*

SAR: I have always been part of ASUU. In fact, in this university, I am even running the system with ASUU; ASUU is part of the management and I know even my chairman here can attest to that. To further buttress this, anytime I receive a communication from TETFund, I would call for representation from ASUU on TETFund Project Intervention Committee to handle the matter. Infact, we were supposed to even

meet today at that committee but I was informed the committee's report was not yet ready. To me, this is to show transparency and inclusivity on how we use TETFund resources for all the projects in this university. So, you can see that it's ASUU that is even running the system. I know, because of the objectivity of ASUU in everything, we are not having problems with students in this university. That objectivity is also helping in ensuring good welfare package for all stakeholders. That is why we are a good example - you can see unity, peace and whatever you think represents a harmonious system in the Federal University Lafia.

TNS: *The appellation, 'Comrade VC' is then appropriate. Our informal interactions on campus show that you have a good working relationship with both staff and students. What principles drive your leadership style?*

SAR: You see, in any system, if you really want to achieve good results, you have to focus on how to raise productivity. If you want to raise productivity in any system, you cannot get it right without improving the welfare of the stakeholders of that system. When I came on board, I felt that to improve productivity in this system, we must first of all, create a dedicated unit for that purpose, which we created and called **Staff Productivity**

Promotion Unit. This unit is saddled with the responsibility of developing strategies that can raise productivity of staff in the various units. Through this way, we are able reorganize things for better outcomes.

Any unit can make submission to the Vice Chancellor highlighting areas of attention (or specific deficiencies) of staff, which are then collated and treated accordingly. At the end, we can identify appropriate strategies to deploy in addressing those issues, which mostly revolves around training and retraining of personnel. For such purposes, resource persons are identified and invited to train the affected staff in specific areas of need. In fact, it's even cheaper and effective for us to get resource persons, even if it's one or two from somewhere to come and train hundreds of staff at a time. This we have been doing more often.

Another aspect of Welfare is the issue of promotion. As I speak with you today, we do not have arrears of promotion in this university; whether professorial, non-professorial, teaching or non-teaching cadre. Our promotion for 2024 has been completed. In fact, I have directed the registrar to send a memo to all

faculties to kickstart the process of 2025 promotion exercise, which is expected to be concluded by November when Council meets. The reason why I want to do that is because by February 2026, I will be exiting this office, and I do not want to leave any pending case of promotion behind. I also would not want to leave any arrears of promotion unattended. In addition, we try to interface with various stakeholders in this system. In fact, I always present myself to the stakeholders in this system to give me feedback about my administration. That will at least give me the opportunity to explain myself in order that everybody will be on the same page on issues about the system. We have so many fora that we interface with staff in this university. You can see, this is part of the welfare matter I talked about earlier.

On the part of the students, I always interface with the student body. In fact, I also organize training for students, particularly student leadership. So, you see, I do not just sit down in my office to wait for information. Sometimes I even highlight issues based on what I feel the faculties should be doing that I'm not seeing, and draw their attention to that. In fact, yesterday, I was in the

Faculty of Arts, and today, I was in the Faculty of Agriculture. In fact, this week, I have it in my plan to cover about four faculties. Apart from that, we make sure that every staff in this university have opportunity of attending a forum where s/he can have opportunity to bare their mind on anything that bothers them. Because of that, we put in place in this university, the End-of-Year get together where all the staff, irrespective of cadre interact. It is on such occasion that we honour staff who are more productive (that is adding value to the system). This creates excitement and motivation among staff. This is how we are organizing a system to make sure that the welfare of staff is not tampered with negatively.



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TNS: *Given the context of the Nigerian leadership, leaders do not like their subordinates or followers to give them constructive feedback, but you appear to be doing that here. Don't you think you are you doing something wrong, sir?*

SAR: Yes, you may be right but I am not doing anything wrong

because there is no office that is personal to anyone or group; leadership is holding trust for others for a period of time. For me, what I look at, particularly, in university administration is that you find it easy to run the system when the entire stakeholders own the decision-making process. If you want to people to support the decision you are making, they must be part of it. And for them to be part of that decision, they must be well-informed about the system. That is the reason why I always carry my people along. Right from the day I was announced the VC and I assumed office, I considered myself a visitor. If you are a visitor in a place, whatever that you are doing is not personal; it's for the system. That is why I don't feel uncomfortable to present myself for public scrutiny. It is only when you have something to hide or you have something that is too personal to you that you will be afraid. Even then, those things you feel you are hiding, if it's official, will definitely be exposed when you eventually leave office. So that's why from the beginning, I try to do what is right. And if I also go for any meeting including senate, I don't micromanage it as some VCs would first have caucus meeting before they go for senate. I don't do that.

Because it is in Senate that you have the best decision that will put the university in good shape.

Sometimes, I delegate the responsibility of chairing senate meetings to the Deputy Vice-Chancellors, depending on the context. I do this because I have no personal agenda or vested interest; I am always ready to travel or take on any assignment for the good of the University. A Senate meeting should never be cancelled simply because the VC is away, No. That only happens when individuals are driven by personal gains and avoid showing up before stakeholders. There is no congregation or gathering within the University that I shy away from. I always encourage open dialogue; I ask people to share their thoughts and suggestions on what should be done. I have never sat here to approve anything that hasn't already been vetted and recommended by the appropriate committees. So, what would I be hiding? Every committee report should be accessible to anyone who seeks it. Transparency is essential.

TNS: Having transversed administrative corridors from being a former DVC to a pioneer former VC and now a sitting VC, has your perspective on ASUU's

relevance changed over time?

SAR: No! You see my perspective about ASUU has never changed but what I also believe is that at every stage of development, there is always room for improvement. I know ASUU has done a lot for the university system because if not for ASUU, many universities in Nigeria would have gone out of existence. I am saying this because of TETFund. If you go round our university, almost 98% of the infrastructure you can see here is from TETFund. This TETFund is the brain child of ASUU. If anyone says ASUU has not done well, that person is not being fair. The struggle that we are pushing as a body is always a genuine one. But sometimes we have to look for a way to get acceptability for our struggle. I have said this in one of ASUU meetings. Yes, sometimes I attend ASUU meetings. I say If we don't know how to push our struggle, we will get ourselves into the hands of those that do not want us to succeed.

For example, look at the introduction of central payment platform, IPPIS that has crumbed our system. *Ab initio*, my opinion is different from that of ASUU with regards to centralised payment. I have maintained that ASUU should never allow federal government to centralise salary payment but they did by proposing UTAS as an alternative to IPPIS.

Because when you agree that someone should centralise the payment of your salary, the person determines when he pays, how he pays and will have much control in doing all sorts of things that may affect the system negatively. When I was at Federal University Gashua, from the beginning up to when I left, payment of salary never went beyond 21st of every month. How were we to do this? Whether subvention comes or not, we have agreement with our bank to pay our staff salaries on a specified date. When the subvention eventually comes, the bank takes theirs and leaves our balance. For every month, we still have evidence to show the balances for previous months, which we can then use to engage visiting lecturers, sabbatical or resource persons. But if you allow someone to centralise your payment, you as the chief executive of a university, you don't have any right to engage anyone anytime because if you do it how do you pay? So, for me ASUU should have said no to centralization of salary payment outrightly. It is not necessary for ASUU to provide UTAS as alternate because as long as UTAS is with them they will still frustrate your efforts. Now they said they will move us from IPPIS but they still did not move us; they still have

that control. I can tell you that I have a lot of visiting and sabbatical staff; some of them have worked for 4 months but we are unable to pay their salaries. In fact, last week my SA was in Abuja for the whole week, struggling to sort out the matter. For me, this is the only aspect I disagree with ASUU, otherwise, ASUU has been encouraging, integrity, transparency, innovation and excellence, which align with our core values in this university. For me, I view ASUU as an organisation that epitomises objectivity and a university is a place where such should be promoted. And that's why I don't have problem with ASUU here. Because everything I do, they are in line with ASUU principles. There were problems that I met when I came here, which caused a lot of disaffection among the academic staff. Some of them were demoralised as a result of promotion delays or non-implementation. But when I came in, we were able to navigate around the issues and remedied the situation. And because I am happy with ASUU and that's why I encourage my management staff that we don't want anything that will cause problem in this university. Whatever you are doing, if you obey principle of objectivity, you won't have any problems.

TNS: As VC, how do you balance the competing demands of government directives and staff welfare expectation amid limited funding?

SAR: You see, I tell people that for every situation, there are opportunities. In every problem, there is also an opportunity. I have never sat in my office and raised excuses or shifted blame on others. The university is meant for research and finding solution to problems. Once we have any issues, I call my team and we brainstorm in a bid to find a workable solution. Let me give you one example. During the last ASUU strike which lasted for 8 months, JAMB did not stop conducting exams and giving admissions. Consequently, many universities had backlog of admissions for two sessions to deal with. That time, our quota for 2021 and 2022 was 3,500 each, which gave us a total of 7,000 students for 100 level admission for the two sessions.

How do we manage that population? Which hall will accommodate that population? So, what I did was to convene a meeting of all Deans and inform them that JAMB had said they will not stop admission because of backlog and directed every University to find solutions to their own problems. The Deans and I agreed that we should just admit 50% of our quota for 2022 and add it to

100% of 2021. But eventually, we couldn't stop at 50% because of the pressures. What I did was to call some other people within the system including Directors of MIS and ICT. We sat and deliberated on what to do to accommodate 100% admission. The solution of blended or hybrid learning came up. That was agreed at that meeting. Can you see how we solved internal problems without waiting for government? Thereafter, we selected three people and asked them to visit other universities like Nile University and University of Abuja to understudy their e-learning operations. We gave them deadlines. So, when they came back with their report, we constituted an e-learning taskforce that brought up the proposal on how to establish e-learning in our university. The proposal gave rise to the establishment of the Directorate of Open, Distant and E-learning.

We quickly took the proposal to senate and council where it was approved. I appointed the chairman of the taskforce to be the director of the directorate. I instructed the Directorate and the task force to meet and these decisions gave rise to an effective e-learning strategy utilising the FULAFIA consult to sort this problem.

The consult was able to put in place a proposal on cost implication of the e-learning platform. We sat down as a committee, deliberated and approved the proposal for implementation. Components of the proposal included how much students would have to pay for participating in the e-learning semester by semester. Some were to pay N3,000, while others were to pay N5,000 depending on the sessions covered. We always tell students what we plan to do, so immediately we started, and up to today, we have no problem.

So, what I am trying to say here is that sometimes if we sit down thinking that a problem can only be solved by government, we will not make progress. There is nothing wrong if we continue to push government to do what is expected of them for the university but we must also look inward and be creative to identify strategies to reduce our problem to some extent. In doing this, it is easier when you bring people together to think out solutions. At such meetings, I would always allow everybody to talk while I'll be noting the points. At the end, you harmonize all suggestions and take appropriate decisions. In doing so, you make people

to be part of your decision-making process, and this way, implementation becomes easy. So, this is how we are running our administration because it's no longer about resource economy but knowledge economy where ideas rule. The principle of knowledge economy dictates that little resources can achieve a lot for you with cross fertilisation of ideas. But if you just depend on the resource economy, you may have much and achieve little. This is the way we are working here and we are transparent about it.

I have been encouraging our people to be proactive at all times because it is cheaper and safer to be proactive than to be reactive. If you are reactive, a damage must have been caused before you would want to put it together. Because of our proactiveness, we admitted 8,000 students in 100 level and were able to manage them effectively because of the introduction of e-learning platform. Although, when we started the e-learning, some staff expressed some reservations wondering if there were adequate facilities for implementation. There were also concerns about remuneration for extra work done. To address staff concerns, we put in place some allowances framework for staff who participate in online teaching. The lecture hours were pegged at a minimum of five and a maximum of seven hours where the staff are

expected to record their lectures in the studio, edit and upload for students to access.

For every lecture you do, you are paid 5,000 Naira, irrespective of your rank. If you do for seven times, that is 35,000. Apart from that, we have what we also call rank advantage. If you are a professor, 10% of that total will be added to that money for you. If you are an associate professor, 7% of that will be added to you. If you are a senior lecturer, 5% will be added to you. And this is what we did, logically. And in fact, this serves as incentive for lecturers, and everybody now wants to be part of the e-learning system.



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TNS: *Can we say that you now have a functional lecture studio that facilitates hybrid learning at the Federal University Lafia?*

SAR: Exactly. We even have for both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

For the undergraduate programme, we have both audio and video studios while for PG programme, we have only video studio, and all are working.

TNS: *You earlier stated that TETFund is a creation of ASUU. What is your assessment of ASUU participation in the management and allocation of TETFund resources?*

SAR: It is good for ASUU to be part of the utilization of funds from TETFund because they are supposed to serve as a monitoring agent on TETFund since it was established for a specific purpose. When something is established for a purpose, for you to know whether the practice as well as the operation is working in line with that purpose, there must be a monitoring agent. That monitoring agent should be there to at least call the attention of those that are operating the system to ensure that they do not derail from their core mandate. So for me, I am in support that ASUU should always be involved in the operation of all the TETFund activities. But sometimes when you look at what is happening in this country, some people that did not even know how TETFund came about are the very people that want to be at the centre of the

operation of TETFund.

My suggestion is that ASUU should resist this external interference to avoid unwarranted influence on TETFund. This is already evident in the way the agency disburses her funds to benefitting universities. Often times, many universities propose what they would want to use TETFund money for; however, external forces may act to give a different outcome, which may be wrongly interpreted as the fault of university management. Also there was a time when TETFund was the one dictating what we use ICT allocation for without assessing whether that university is already having such in place. This is NEEDS assessment. But when you look at it, again, sometimes it may be difficult to fault TETFund because of the attitudes of some universities. When funds are allocated for certain projects, some universities tend to deviate from that original purpose and use the funds for other projects without due process. But in our own case, we don't do that. In fact, there was a time when I had the need to redirect my allocation but I did not do that unilaterally. I had to write specifically to TETFund asking for permission to use the funds for a more pressing need. When they saw the genuineness of our request, they gave us the go ahead to use the funds. This was what

gave rise to improvement of internet connectivity through laying of fibre optics on our campus. This is also the reason why you can see the 2025 allocation that came from TETFund, I am involving the unions (ASUU, NAAT, SAANU, and NASU) because they will see more urgent needs on ground and inform me for necessary attention. This is how we do it, *involvement of ASUU in utilisation of TETFund allocations is very important. If it is not happening anywhere else, it is happening here in FULafia.*

TNS: *During the last industrial action by ASUU, the voice of the Committee of Vice Chancellors was not loud. How would you assess the relationship between CVC and ASUU in promoting quality of higher education in the Nigeria?*

SAR: Well, at the centre I can say that I am not satisfied with the relationship thus far. The point is that we are all stakeholders and we are supposed to be working and speaking with one voice to advance the cause of university education in Nigeria. But based on my experience, some VCs feel uncomfortable with ASUU because they often feel that ASUU is too rigid as a

union. For instance, I know of a time when I was in Gashua, and the federal government wanted to introduce the TSA (treasury single account); the CVCs did their analysis about the TSA and submitted that it was a good idea in that it would help to harmonise different accounts being operated by some universities. CVC advised that ASUU should sit down with FG and identify certain funds that should go to TSA such as research grants, and some other special funds. But ASUU felt that some VCs had ulterior motives therefore did not take the advice from CVCs. But if we really want to work together, we need to listen to one another. There was only one time CVC and ASUU came together probably to avoid one strike. The fact is that, we should really sit down together to evaluate the problems and shouldn't wait for problems to come. There is need for ASUU as a body to look for ways to interface with CVCs. The university belongs to all of us and we must always evaluate the university together. In this university, it's different because we are a family and we interface regularly.

TNS: *From your CV, you were a consultant to German Technical Agency and the World Bank. Given*

that every academic has this tripod responsibility for research, teaching and community service, what would you say are the benefits of your involvement in those two organisations to your community?

SAR: Yes, it did benefit my community because most of the training they were offering to the community members on specific areas of need. Before those organisations would intervene, we would have done our surveys; identified areas of need and made recommendations to them. When we make these recommendations to them, they usually send their agents to carry out the required capacity building and other forms of interventions. I believe the university too should impact on the environment where it is located.

TNS: *Bringing your last point home, what can you identify as the benefit of establishing the Federal University of Lafia to its host community?*

SAR: The host community has benefitted a lot. In terms of education, the community is more enlightened now than before the establishment of FULafia because the number of graduates has increased in the households. Additionally, the socioeconomic condition has also improved significantly. Whenever a student goes home and stays for a while, the

parents usually ask when we are going to open the school again. This shows that the institution certainly has some positive impacts on the community.

TNS: *What effects do you think your length of teaching as a specialist in agriculture has had on food security in the country?*

SAR: Well, the direct answer to this I can say is what I have as a summary in my inaugural lecture, where I talked about the farm production efficiency being a scale of success in agriculture. What I am trying to say is that our farm production in Nigeria and in most developing countries has never been efficient because in some cases we do not use improved technology, and sometimes we under or over use resources. All these are inefficiency in farm production.

Most of my research work focuses mainly on efficiency in farm production. For example, for some farmers that are poor, we can ensure they make use of local materials that can enable them boost farm their production. During the course of my MSc in the north, I discovered that many people grew cowpea as their major crop. One major worry back then was insect infestation. The

common intervention most of them adopted was use of insecticide, despite the cost implication. But right in their environment, there are easier and cheaper things they could use as a replacement to insecticide. I found out that there is a neem tree, very plenty. I read somewhere in a book that these neem extracts can control insect. I went to an environment where neem plant was abundant and introduced some farmers to the use of its leaf. The leaves were dried, pounded and extract made and sprayed on crops. At the end they compared results between the insecticide-sprayed area and the neem extract-sprayed area. The neem extract proved effective in significantly reducing insect infestation. Because of the cost implication of these ready-made insecticides, the farmers now use the local means of fighting insects. So this is part of the things we should be doing to improve production.

TNS: *Comrade VC, you were turbaned as Shetima of Opanda (Umaisha Chieftdom). Did you see that coming at that time? How did you feel?*

SAR: I did not see it coming. But what I know is that there must be some parameters used. What I know I did right from my youthful age. When I was in the school of preliminary

studies Keffi, each time I go home during holidays, I do go to my former secondary school to teach for free. I also used to organise evening lessons free for children in my community. I know so many people don't do that. At a point in the university, I was made president of Umaisha student development. I used that position to organise educative activities for those in primary and secondary schools. I guess a lot of people were watching. During that time, I even attracted some projects to the community; some drainages and bridges were done. They mentioned lots of these during the 'turbaning' ceremony, meaning people have been watching. The lesson in this is that whatever you are doing, people are watching, they might not pay you back instantly.

TNS: *The national scholar team congratulates you on this recognition. By this honour, you have automatically become a member of Umaisha traditional council. Do you attend their meetings?*

SAR: I do attend but some times when I am not able to attend in person, I send my apologies. There are times too that when meetings are scheduled with agenda that require my input, I would be contacted for my opinion, which I usually avail them.

TNS: *How do you balance*

your job as a VC and leisure? Do you relax at all?

SAR: Well, I relax. I have been telling people that in time management, we also have what we call time budgeting. The way you budget your money is the same way you budget your time. In fact, if you do that well, you won't have this common health issues. For example before you came in, I had treated my mails. Some VCs take mails home, I do not do that. When I go home, it's a different activity which is for me and my family. If I come to the office, this is what I do. In fact, I do not even have time for someone to come and engage in idle discussions with me because my time is already tight.

TNS: *Do you engage in any games at all?*

SAR: Well, occasionally. I do take walks.

TNS: *Can we get to know more about your family?*

SAR: Well, I have one wife and five children.

TNS: *Thank you Comrade VC.*

SAR: You are welcome.

A TITAN'S CLASH, A NATION'S FATE: Nigeria on the Razor's Edge of the US-China Saga!

Dakwom Long'gul

Good day, fellow Nigerian, my esteemed reader and imaginary viewer!

Today, we stand at the precipice of a global drama, a high-stakes confrontation that echoes through the hallowed halls of power and reverberates across continents. The behemoths of the world stage, the indomitable United States and the ascendant China, are locked in a titanic struggle, a contest for supremacy that casts a long, dramatic shadow over the destiny of nations – including our very own Nigeria! The air crackles with tension! Accusations fly like poisoned darts across the Pacific! Walls of tariffs rise, brick by digital brick, threatening to choke the arteries of global trade! The American eagle, wings spread wide in perceived defence of its dominance, eyes the fiery Chinese dragon, whose shadow stretches further each year. This isn't merely a squabble over spreadsheets and

bottom lines; this is a clash of ideologies, a battle for technological supremacy, a raw contest for global influence that will indelibly mark the 21st century! And where, you may ask, does our vibrant, resilient Nigeria stand amidst this earth-shattering collision of titans? We are poised precariously on the razor's edge, our fate intertwined with the unpredictable trajectory of this global power play.

**Behold!
The Glimmer of Gold!**

Could this conflict and dramatic fracturing of established trade routes present a golden opportunity for the Giant of Africa? Imagine! As the American and Chinese behemoths exchange blows, could Nigeria enter the breach? Could our fertile lands, our burgeoning industries, finally find their moment on the global stage? Picture Nigerian cocoa beans, no longer overshadowed, finding eager buyers in a world seeking alternatives! Envision

our sesame seeds, groundnuts, and tomato Jos, once bit-players, now commanding attention in the grand theatre of international commerce! The Chinese Ambassador has hinted at this prospect, a lifeline thrown amidst the turbulent waters!

Furthermore, consider the desperate dance for global favour! Could Nigeria, strategically positioned, attract the gaze of both giants, each vying for influence in our resource-rich land? Could we become the coveted bride, showered with investments in our long-neglected infrastructure? Imagine gleaming new railways slicing through our landscape, powered by Chinese ambition! Envision American technological prowess igniting a digital revolution on our shores! This, my friends, is the tantalising promise, the shimmering mirage of potential prosperity born from global discord!

But beware! The Shadow Looms!

Yet, let us not be blinded by the dazzling possibilities, for a sinister shadow also stretches across our horizon! This struggle between titans could unleash a tempest that could batter our fragile economy! What if the world's economic engines sputter and stall, choked by tariffs intended to wound their rivals? Our lifeblood, the volatile oil price, could plummet, plunging our national coffers into darkness! Consider the insidious creep of inflation! We, a nation reliant on imports, particularly from the workshops of China, could see the prices of essential goods skyrocket, further burdening our already struggling populace! Imagine the cost of machinery and technology, vital for our development, soaring beyond our reach, stifling our progress!

And what geopolitical tightrope must we walk? Can we, a nation finding its footing on the world stage, deftly navigate the treacherous currents of allegiance? Will we be forced to choose sides, to alienate one giant in favour of the other, potentially sacrificing invaluable partnerships? The pressure will be immense, the stakes

dizzily high!

Nigeria! The Crossroads of Destiny!

We stand at a critical juncture. The unfolding drama of U.S.-China relations are not a mere spectator sport; they are a force that will shape our economic destiny, political landscape, and future. Our leaders must possess Solomon's wisdom and a seasoned diplomat's agility to navigate these turbulent times. We must seize the fleeting opportunities with both hands while bracing ourselves against the looming threats. The world watches, and Nigeria's fate hangs in the balance, caught in the dramatic crosscurrents of a global power struggle. The final act is yet to be written. Will we emerge stronger, a beneficiary of this global realignment? Or will we be swept away by the tide of a conflict not of our making? Only time and the astute decisions of our leaders will tell. **As we hail Nigeria, may we find our footing in this dramatic new world order!**

Dakwom Long'gul writes from the Department of Theatre and Film Arts, University of Jos.

USING TECHNOLOGY FOR SOCIAL GOOD:

How can digital skills be leveraged to promote transparency in governance?

Isma'il Husain Mshelia

The Race

In 1991, Times Magazine considered booking an unfinished hotel for December 31, 1999. The day was called 'the greatest New Year's Eve of all' upon arrival. The New Year (2000) was highly anticipated, ushering in a millennium that dawned a century filled with mind-boggling technologies. Sooner or later, the 21st century introduced 'disruptive technologies', including artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, and cloud computing. As these Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) permeated all social realities and changed the paradigms of everything, they also sparked a race among world nations.

Like other tools, disruptive technologies are prone to ethical and unethical usage. Governments worldwide must promote and mitigate the former, hence their race

to the Web 3.0 era, or 'smart' destination. It is a destination where citizen-centred digital governance totally replaces bureaucracy-centred analogue governance. Few have arrived, while others, including my country, Nigeria, are left behind.

My Dream

Since dreams are free, as Martin Luther King Jr. would attest, I dare to have a dream that we (Nigeria) will soon arrive. This dream is worth a million efforts, given the enormous grandeur of the smart destination. Among the infrastructures are three magnificent e-bridges, which decorate physical environments and enhance living conditions. Let us glimpse their splendour through the intellectual lens of [Iréne Bernhard](#).

1. E-democracy

This connects government (and governance) with the governed. It is constructed with social media, webcasting, open-source, and other network technologies. These digital tools solidify

participatory and inclusive governance structures, facilitating decision-making, acceptance, implementation, transparency, and accountability. With them, governance is in the citizens' hands through smart mobile phones.

Getting there requires digitalising our democracy. Our electoral process, for example, must include an e-ballot system, which would reduce cost, mitigate malpractice, foster transparency, and promote participatory democracy. Voter education and party membership would also require digitalisation. For instance, a Nigerian Voting Advice Application (NVAA) would be developed like Germany's 'Wahl-O-Mat'. This would match voters to their preferred candidates (or parties) based on information they provided, and 'an algorithm used to compute issue distances'.

2. *E-administration*

This connects the government with private and international organisations. Constructed using network-based systems and database-based analytics software, it also creates interactive relationships within and across government tiers. This removes encumbrances and breeds an atmosphere of transparency, accountability, and credibility.

The price we must pay to get there is the digitalisation of the Nigerian public sector. This would require developing various software for automated decision-making systems and 24/7 administrative functions.

3. *E-service*

This connects citizens with 24/7 public services and upgrades them from mere consumers to co-designers, co-producers, and co-deliverers. Biometrics, cloud computing, and open-data technologies are some of the tools it uses. Through the government's open data initiatives, for example, citizens freely access, use, modify, and share comprehensive open data. The government, according to Tim O'Reilly, is a 'platform' that develops an

'App Store' of mobile applications for public services.

To get there, we must conquer our strict 8–4 (Monday–Friday) organisational routine. We must develop live sites to extend public service access beyond self-service channels. Thus, wired public officials would be available for 24/7 live chat and (voice or video) calls to guide citizens accessing public services. Geospatial, retinal identification, and facial recognition applications must also be developed. This would improve our public service delivery, promote transparency in governance, and stimulate innovations.

Our Realities

In my dream, I saw Nigerians reclining and relishing in that smart destination. Making it a reality, however, requires facing our prevailing realities through two queries. First, how close are we? Unfortunately, still far away, going by our 139th/163 ranking in the [2022 United Nations world SDG index](#). As our former president admitted in our 2020 Voluntary National Review (VNR) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 'modest progress has been achieved' but 'challenges remain'.

Second, are we utilising any weapon lethal enough to dismantle the stumbling blocks

slowing down our voyage? Fortunately, yes! We leverage digital technologies—the most lethal weapon for combat—as we navigate through rugged terrains. We are also guided by veritable compasses embodied in the *Nigerian e-Government Master Plan*. With it, we have identified five coordinated paths as revealed in the 2020 VNR and discussed below.

1. *Inclusive Economy*

The compasses aiding our navigation of this path are the National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy (NDEPS) and the Nigeria Digital Agriculture Strategy (NDAS). However, we are being obstructed by endemic financial exclusion, inflation, unemployment, and poverty, all stemming from overreliance on the oil sector and corruption. To dismantle them, we must explore digital initiatives like digital Agricultural solutions (e.g., Hello Tractor, Zenvus, and Agricore) to accelerate economic diversification and smart grid systems to conquer energy poverty.

This requires the development of digital platforms to educate local farmers on best farming practices, assist them with digital tools, and connect them with the global

market. For example, a mobile application teaching the use of, and how to obtain improved seeds varieties should be developed. It should be made available in 'Nigerian app store', which should have 24/7 live customer support services.

2. *Health and Well-Being*

Here, we are guided by the second National Strategic Health Development Plan (NSHDP). But our quest for Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is being impeded by the trio forces of unavailability, inaccessibility, and unaffordability of medical services. An effective neutraliser of these is digital health, exemplified by telemedicine. Therefore, this should be incorporated into public health services with the development of mobile applications for online consultation, diagnosis, and prescription.

Further, preventing disease outbreaks and improving hospital conditions require ubiquitous devices for monitoring pollution and hospital admissions. For improved emergency response, an auto-visual detection and reporting software—e.g., the Nigerian Emergency Response Application

(NERA)—should be developed. This should be embedded with live channels for transmitting victims' whereabouts and advice on first aid measures.

3. *Education and Gender Equality*

We seek to navigate this light path through the National Policy on Information and Communication Technologies in Education (NPICTIE), and the National Implementation Guidelines for ICT in Education (NIGICTIE). Yet, we are groping, having been engulfed by the darkness of illiteracy. This stems from the tide of [20 million out-of-school children](#), low quality of education, and gender imbalance. Fortunately, they, too, cannot survive the onslaught of digital technologies, hence the need to deploy them effectively.

Illiteracy should be confronted with mobile applications for Learn at Your Convenience Programmes (LYCP). Biometric attendance should ensure commitments to knowledge delivery to mitigate teachers' absenteeism, and online platforms should enable learners to assess teachers' conduct. Knowledge delivery should be enhanced through synchronous and asynchronous learning platforms at all levels of education. Nevertheless, gender imbalance should be mitigated through online

Gender Equality Packages (GEP), like the Learning Passport (LP) of the United Nations International Children's Education Fund (UNICEF).

4. *Enabling environment of peace and security.*

The foregoing paths would lead to this. Security cuts across military and human dimensions. Threats to human security (like poverty and illiteracy) disproportionately fuel threats to national security (like crime and conflicts), which decelerate our ride to peace. Accordingly, using digital technologies for improved public service delivery would arrest human insecurity and curtail national insecurity. Crime, which is nonetheless inevitable, can be controlled by other digital initiatives.

Security forces can detect crimes using big data analysis technologies, as the 2013 timely arrest of the Boston Marathon attacker in the United States proved. To cultivate such success, however, we need big data and cloud computing centres, which should oversee the storage and processing of data from social networks and mobile devices. The prosecution process should also be digitally facilitated through special mobile applications.

The recent use of Zoom to broadcast some gubernatorial election petition verdicts was a step towards this direction.

5. Partnerships

This is the intersection of all the paths. It thus connects governments, citizens, civil societies, and international actors through multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPS). In the partnerships for the SDGS online platform self-reporting implementation in Nigeria, over 134 MSPS involving over 150 national/international stakeholders are registered. The foregoing threats have been drawbacks to their success, which calls for more digitally induced partnerships.

In the transportation sector, for example, public agencies should work with freelancers to develop mobile applications for the profiles of registered cars and licensed drivers. They should also partner with a private company, like the Chinese government does with Didi Chuxing, to develop digital traffic cameras for identifying traffic violators.

My Conviction

My dream of Nigeria's arrival as a smart destination is not a pipe

dream. We are apparently making headway. This is evident in our government's digital initiatives, such as the National Identification Number (NIN) and Treasury Single Account (TSA).

Notwithstanding many stumbling blocks, my dream has even metamorphosed into a conviction. Fortunately, the conviction is objective, given that the 'net generation' (youth) constitutes the bulk of the Nigerian population!

Isma'il Husain Mshelia writes from the Department of Sociology, University of Abuja, Abuja

POEM

**"A NATION ON ITS KNEES:
WHERE PROMISES FADE
AND STRUGGLES PERSIST"**

The nation stands on
trembling ground,
With hopes once high now
fading down.
The streets are filled with
dreams untold,
But the weight of silence, loud
and bold.

The leaders speak of plans and
change,
Yet the people feel the gaps, so
strange.
Promises float on a fleeting
breeze,

While beneath the surface,
no one sees.

The land is rich, but
hunger grows,
The seeds of discord
quietly sow.
The youth look on with
weary eyes,
Seeking truth where the
echo lies.

Yet, amidst the storm, a
spark remains,
A yearning deep that will
not wane.
For change is born from
broken hearts,
From voices rising, from
humble starts.

O nation, hear your
people's plea,
For unity, for peace, for
liberty.
Let not despair take root
and reign,
But plant the seeds of hope
again.

In every soul, a fire burns
bright,
A longing for the dawn's
first light.
And though the road be

rough and long,
Together we'll rebuild,
strong and strong.

*Uju Ezenekwe
Nnamdi Azikiwe
University
Awka*

THRIVING IN THE ERA OF TINUBUNOMICS AND WITHHELD ALLOWANCES:

Practical Tips for Reducing Food Waste in Nigerian Households

Mahcit Margaret Kazi

Nigeria's current economic landscape, called "Tinubunomics," has placed significant financial strain on households. Tinubunomics, a term coined from the economic policies of the current administration, is characterised by:

- I. High inflation rates
- II. Currency devaluation
- III. Reduced government subsidies
- IV. Increased taxes

These economic shifts have led to:

- I. Reduced purchasing power
- II. Increased cost of living
- III. Higher food prices
- IV. Limited access to necessities

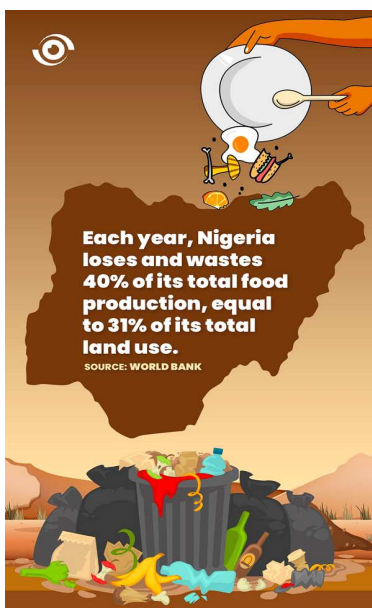
The situation is further worsened by the withheld allowances for ASUU members, making it even more difficult for families to afford essential goods. In these challenging times, adopting sustainable living practices—particularly reducing food waste—can help households save money, improve food security, and contribute to environmental sustainability.

environmental degradation, as decomposing food generates methane, a greenhouse gas that is 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide (UNEP, 2021).

Common Causes of Food Waste in Nigerian Households

Several factors contribute to food waste in Nigerian homes, including:

- a. **Overbuying:** Many consumers purchase more food than needed due to a lack of planning or bulk discounts.
- b. **Poor Storage:** Inadequate storage facilities and erratic power supply lead to food spoilage.
- c. **Inadequate Meal Planning:** Cooking without a structured plan often results in excess food that goes uneaten.
- d. **Cultural Practices:** The tradition of preparing large quantities of food for guests sometimes leads to waste when



The Food Waste Crisis in Nigeria

Food waste is a significant issue in Nigeria, with estimates suggesting that up to 60% of harvested crops are lost due to inefficient supply chains, poor storage, and household mismanagement (FAO, 2011). According to the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2020), food inflation remains a pressing concern, making food affordability challenging for many families. Furthermore, food waste contributes to

leftovers are not correctly managed.

Practical Strategies to Reduce Food Waste

By adopting these strategies, households can minimise waste and maximise their food supply: Meal Planning and Smart Grocery Shopping

- I. Plan meals in advance, considering ingredients already available at home.
- II. Make a grocery list and stick to it to prevent impulse purchases.
- III. To reduce costs, buy non-perishable staples in bulk, such as rice, beans, and pasta (World Bank, 2022).

Proper Food Storage and Preservation

- I. Store perishable foods in airtight containers to maintain freshness.
- II. Follow the "first in, first out" method—consume older items before newer ones.
- III. Freeze leftovers and perishable foods to extend their shelf life (UNEP, 2021).

Creative Ways to Repurpose Leftovers

- I. Use leftover rice to make fried rice or rice cakes.
- II. Transform vegetable

scraps into soups or stews.

- III. Turn stale bread into breadcrumbs or a hearty breakfast dish.

Utilizing food scraps and reducing waste

- I. Use bones and vegetable peels to make homemade broth.
- II. Compost food waste to create nutrient-rich soil for gardening.
- III. Blend overripe fruits into smoothies instead of discarding them.

Thriving Despite Economic Challenges

Beyond reducing food waste, these strategies can help households stretch their food budget:

- I. Buy in bulk: Purchasing staple foods in large quantities reduces overall costs.
- II. Choose budget-friendly alternatives: Instead of expensive meat, choose affordable protein sources like beans, eggs, and canned fish.
- III. Cook nutrient-rich, low-cost meals: Meals based on local, affordable ingredients—such as bean stews, yam porridge, or okra soup—provide essential nutrients at a lower cost (Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, 2023).

Conclusion

Reducing food waste is an

environmental necessity and a financial strategy for Nigerian households facing economic challenges. By implementing practical steps such as meal planning, proper storage, and creative repurposing of leftovers, families can cut expenses, improve food security, and contribute to sustainable living. In times of financial uncertainty, small, mindful decisions regarding food management can make a significant difference.

Kazi, Mahcit Margaret writes from the Home Economics Unit, Faculty of Education - University of Jos.



source : <https://pachamamafoodsng.com/>

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HOW DECEITFUL, MR. PRESIDENT: A Student's Fiery Monologue

Dakwom Long'gul



Photo Credit: Shutterstock

Imaginary social Scene: A crowded town hall meeting in Abuja, Nigeria. President Bola Tinubu sits on a raised dais, a microphone before him. Protected by 50 DSS agents. The air is thick with the scent of sweat and simmering frustration. A young woman, Nanret, pushes her way through the crowd, her eyes blazing. She clutches a worn copy of a university textbook.)

Nanret: (Voice trembling, but resolute) Mr. President! President Tinubu! I have a question... a burning question that claws at my soul! You speak of student loans, 'empowering' the youth, and 'investing' in our future. But I ask you, sir,

with the weight of my generation on my shoulders, how deceitful must you think we are?

(She holds up the textbook, its pages dog-eared and marked.)

This... this is the symbol of my

dreams! The key to unlocking a future you promised! But you offer us loans? Loans that will shackle us to debt before we taste the sweetness of our first paycheck? Loans that will turn our graduation gowns into the chains of indentured servitude?

Tell me, Mr. President, do you think we are fools? Do you think we cannot see the chasm between your words and actions? You speak of 'building the nation' while building a mountain of debt on the backs of its most promising minds!

Where is the investment in our education, the actual investment? Where are the grants, scholarships, and funding that allow us to focus on our studies, not the looming spectre of financial ruin? You offer us a ladder made of quicksand and call it progress!

My father, a farmer, sells his meagre harvest, his hands calloused and worn, to pay my tuition. My mother, a

market woman, haggles and pleads, her voice hoarse, to buy us food. They sacrifice their present for my future, and you offer me... debt? Haba!

You speak of 'empowerment', but empowerment is not a loan, Mr. President! Empowerment is a level playing field, a chance to compete without the crushing weight of financial burden! Empowerment is funding our universities, equipping our laboratories, and paying our lecturers a living wage!

You ask us to build a better Nigeria, but how can we build on a foundation of debt? How can we innovate when we are drowning in interest payments? How can we dream when the fear of financial collapse haunts us?

(Her voice rises, echoing through the hall.)

Mr. President, I am not asking for handouts. I am asking for justice! I am asking for the same opportunities that your generation enjoyed! I am asking for a chance to contribute to this nation without being burdened by a debt that will haunt us for decades!

So, I ask you again, sir, how deceitful you must think we are to believe that a loan is

the same as a future? How long will you continue to mortgage our dreams for political expediency? How long, Mr. President, before you see the actual cost of your deception?

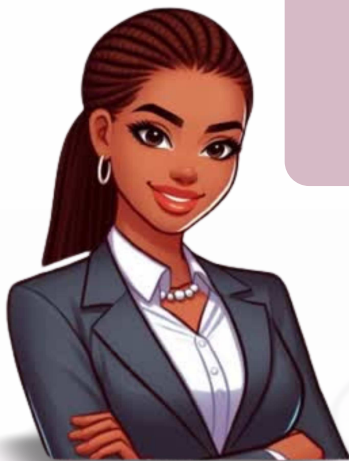
(She gazes intently at him, the stillness in the corridor thick with unvoiced inquiries. Yet, to her dismay, Nanret recognised it was merely a figment of her imagination, and the Nigerian police officers stood nearby; she expressed her regrets for such whimsical dreaming)

Dakwom Long'gul writes from the Department of Theatre and Film Arts, Faculty Of Arts, University Of Jos, Nigeria.



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