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PUBLIC RELATION STRATEGIES AND INDUSTRIAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION: AN ANALYSIS OF ASUU-UUB'S COMMUNICATION APPROACHES DURING NATIONAL STRIKES

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Abstract

The paper explores the development of ASUU as a trade union with the intent of identifying the significant milestones and progression of ASUU's faceoff with the federal government while discovering the issues that precipitated the strike, which are, but are not limited to, decaying infrastructural facilities, university autonomy, and staff welfare. The work reviews the extent to which these issues have been addressed, the unique approaches utilised by ASUU in driving home its demands for the redemption of the Nigerian educational sector, and questions how effective collective bargaining and the tool of strike action have been to the struggle. It attempts to bring to the fore some public relations strategies that could be deployed towards the actualisation of the objectives of the union and resolution of the lingering with issues between the ASUU and the federal government. It recommends the establishment of a public relations unit at the managerial level and top hierarchy of the union, lobbying of relevant stakeholders, including members of the National Assembly, and increased sensitisation of the public on the issues surrounding the strike. The paper also recommends that individual universities should work assiduously towards increasing their internally generated revenue and institute effective fund management systems within each system.

Keywords: Strike, Industrial Action, Collective Bargaining, Public Relations Strategies

INTRODUCTION

The recurrent ASUU strike actions have become deeply ingrained and inseparable from the fabric of Nigeria's university educational system. These protracted strikes are widely recognised as a significant impediment to the full realisation of the

system's potential, with serious consequences for both the academic community and the nation at large. The persistent trade disputes within public tertiary institutions have not only hindered progress but have also been likened to a cancer within the system, progressively eroding the foundations of Nigeria's higher education institutions.

Despite efforts by successive governments to address the underlying issues that precipitate these strikes, solutions have been largely ineffective, with the root causes remaining unresolved. Strikes have often been the last resort for the union to express its grievances over the government's failure to honour agreements and fulfil its obligations. The desire to restore declining university education standards and address the deterioration plaguing the educational system has been the driving force behind ASUU's strike actions.

Opinions on the effectiveness of these strikes are divided. Some scholars criticise the resort to strike action, citing its limited success in achieving the desired outcomes. Others view it as a necessary evil that must continue until the goals are realised, while still others call for a reassessment of the strategies used in engaging with the federal government. There is no doubt that strikes remain a potent and legally sanctioned tool for university lecturers in their struggle to revive a university system that is on the brink of collapse.

Ogbette, Eke, and Ori (2017) note that ASUU strikes have become so contentious that opinions are divided among parents and students regarding who is responsible for the ongoing crises. Some attribute the situation to the government's indifference and lack of commitment to the welfare of the education sector, while others blame ASUU for its radicalism, confrontational approach, and insatiable demands. Ogunbodede (2022) suggests that the incessant strike actions may be partly due to ASUU's determination to fight "until the last man" for a just cause, coupled with the federal government's ego and disregard for the educational system.

Despite numerous rounds of negotiations, the core issues that initially led to strike actions remain largely unresolved, with each successive administration passing on a legacy of unfulfilled promises and agreements to the next. While the fundamental issues have not changed, their magnitude and scope have expanded significantly. ASUU has been commended in some quarters for its steadfastness and collective resolve to advocate for an educational system that is dynamic, value-driven, and capable of competing with peer institutions globally. This includes aspirations for cutting-edge research output, technology-enabled learning environments, and satisfactory remuneration for staff.

The failure to effectively resolve these issues has resulted in several adverse outcomes, including "brain drain" (the loss of competent manpower), disillusionment among union members, extended graduation periods for students, an unfriendly and uncondusive working environment, and the gradual erosion of the university structure.

Public relations tools and strategies have proven effective in helping organisations achieve their goals by fostering mutually beneficial relationships with key stakeholders. If appropriately employed, these public relations strategies could assist ASUU in reaching its objectives and finding common ground with the federal government. Baran (2002) defines public relations as a management function that utilises two-way communication to align the needs and interests of an organisation with those of its various publics.

In the context of the recurring conflict between ASUU and the Nigerian government, public relations—particularly crisis and conflict management—presents itself as a valuable tool for managing such situations. Aligwe and Alegu (2018) identify various strategies that are useful in this regard, including negotiation, mediation, inquiry, conciliation, arbitration, mass media, and public opinion, all of which have been employed by both parties at different times. It is against this backdrop this paper examines the effectiveness and adaptability of these strategies in managing national strikes.

ASUU AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

ASUU, the Academic Staff Union of Universities, was established in 1978 during the civilian administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo. It emerged from the upgrading and updating of the National Association of University Teachers, which was founded in 1965 to unite university teachers in Nigeria. ASUU was created in response to the challenges faced by academics in Nigerian universities, aligning itself with the broader landscape of trade unions in the country (Essien, 2022). The primary objective and core mandate of ASUU is to protect and advance the economic interests of its members—university lecturers—by providing a strong platform for them to voice their concerns, express grievances, and negotiate with their employer, the government, for improved working conditions and employment benefits. According to Ogbette et al. (2017), the objectives of ASUU, as outlined in Rule 2 of its constitution, extend beyond professional goals to include elements of economic and political aims. These objectives are part of the union's broader advocacy for the democratisation of political power in Nigeria. Essien (2022) suggests that ASUU's ideological stance on national issues, particularly those concerning the political economy and the university system, is influenced by the fact that the union was formed during a period when the oil boom was beginning to decline, leading to its

emergence in a highly politicised environment. Although there are four registered unions within the Nigerian university system—SSANU, NAAT, ASUU, and NASU—ASUU stands out as the most vocal, vigorous, and prominent. This distinction may be attributed to the intellectual dynamism of its members, the complexity of their struggles, and the significant impact of the union's activities on the overall functioning of the university system. Essien (2022) notes that ASUU presents itself as a union with a patriotic and progressive ideology, with a mission that extends beyond that of a typical trade union or social movement. The union's commitment to the broader development of Nigeria is underscored by its motto, "Knowledge, Truth, and Service." Osaghae (2005) observes that the government's perspective on ASUU strikes is largely negative, viewing them as disruptive, destructive, and unproductive—a sentiment that persists to this day. However, ASUU is regarded by some as playing a crucial role as a watchdog, taking a firm stance against corruption, injustice, and maladministration, particularly in the context of educational development in the country. Although many of the union's objectives remain unrealised due to the persistent indifference of successive governments, Johnson (2023) notes that ASUU's struggles have focused on key areas such as staff development, structural development, and political and economic progress. While modest gains have been achieved over the years, these issues continue to be central to the union's agenda.

CAUSES OF ASUU STRIKE

The industrial action involving the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Federal Government of Nigeria has been a recurring issue, deeply embedded in the nation's educational history. This conflict has persisted for several decades, with numerous issues at its core. Since the Third Republic, almost every administration has been embroiled in a confrontation with ASUU. The lecturers' agitations have spanned over five decades, with the earliest recorded strikes dating back to 1973. Njoku (2022) notes that "what seemed to be the first ASUU strike in Nigeria occurred in 1988, primarily to demand fair wages and university autonomy." This aligns with the views of many scholars who argue that the recurring strikes are largely due to the government's reluctance to adequately fund the education sector and its failure to honour agreements reached with the union at various critical junctures. According to Ogbette et al. (2017), trade disputes between ASUU and the government have predominantly arisen from the government's refusal to implement agreements aimed at revitalising universities.

While strikes are not unique to ASUU as a union, it has a particularly long history of such actions. Over the years, ASUU has engaged in six rounds of negotiations with the Federal Government, resulting in five collective bargaining agreements. The union's longstanding demands have focused on increased funding for universities,

the renegotiation of the 2009 FGN/ASUU agreement, the release of the revitalisation fund as stipulated in the 2013 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), the renegotiation of the 2009 agreement, and the provision of adequate teaching facilities (Shimawua & Onuka, 2020; Ejike, 2015; Lagi, 2020, cited in Njoku, 2022). Ogbette et al. (2017) note that ASUU strikes prior to the Second Republic were largely motivated by issues identified by the National Association of University Teachers (NAUT) in 1978, such as the erosion of university autonomy and academic freedom, poor remuneration and working conditions, underfunding of universities, poor physical conditions within the universities, and delays in the payment of salaries under the elongated salary structure. Unfortunately, these issues remain central to ASUU's demands and continue to fuel crises, with few exceptions. Essien (2022) concurs, noting that since the transformation of NAUT into ASUU, the key issues driving the union's disputes have included university education funding, improved salary packages, better working conditions to prevent "brain drain," academic freedom, and university autonomy, among other concerns essential to the university system's survival. Ogunbodede (2022) highlights that some of the factors prompting ASUU's strike in 2022 included demands for the renegotiation of the ASUU/FGN 2009 agreement, the deployment of the University Transparency and Accountability Solution (UTAS) to replace the Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIS), the release of visitation panel reports for federal universities, funding for the revitalisation of public universities, the payment of earned academic allowances, poor funding of state universities, and the clearance of promotion arrears.

The union argued that the IPPIS, introduced by the government, was incompatible with the university system due to its unique laws and structure. Ogbamosa (2019) documents that since the return of civilian rule in 1999, university lecturers have gone on strike approximately 16 times. The strikes lasted five months in 1999, three months in 2001, two weeks in 2002, six months in 2003, two weeks in 2005, one week in 2006, three months in 2007, one week in 2008, four months in 2009, five months in 2010, two months in 2011, six months in 2013, one month in 2017, three months in 2018, nine months in 2020, and eight months in 2022. This pattern underscores the historical nature of the issues fuelling the strikes, which predominantly revolve around funding. It is well documented that the government's annual budgetary allocation to education has often been less than 15 percent, far below UNESCO's recommendation of 26 percent. From 2016 to 2022, the government allocated only 7.9%, 6.1%, 7.1%, 8.4%, 6.5%, 5.6%, and 5.4%, respectively, to the education sector. This inadequate funding has led to severe challenges within tertiary institutions, including inadequate infrastructure, poor facilities, and outdated curricula. The consequence of this underfunding is that universities struggle to meet even basic needs, such as paying electricity bills, which have increased by over 300% in recent times. Looking ahead, another strike looms in

2024, as ASUU has issued a 21-day ultimatum to the government, threatening to embark on a nationwide strike if pending issues are not resolved. Sampson (2024), echoing the remarks of ASUU President Emmanuel Osodeke, noted that the union's demands include the renegotiation of the FGN/ASUU 2009 Agreement, the resolution of issues related to IPPIS, the proliferation of universities, management crises, victimisation within universities, and the settlement of arrears for earned academic allowances and unpaid salaries.

Expanding on these concerns, Melemi Abatcha, Chairman of ASUU's Gashua branch, as quoted in Adigun (2024), pointed out that the Federal Government, after failing to honour the recommendations of three consecutive committees, unilaterally awarded a meagre 25–35% salary increase without following the established process of collective bargaining. Additionally, the union's grievance stems from the fact that, despite a Federal Executive Council directive in December 2023 to remove ASUU members from the IPPIS, they are still being paid through this platform (Adigun, 2024).

IMPLICATIONS OF ASUU STRIKE FOR NIGERIA'S EDUCATIONAL SYSEM

The recurring strike actions by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) have had a profoundly detrimental impact on Nigeria's educational system. Stakeholders and scholars widely acknowledge that, despite the legitimate reasons for these strikes, their frequency has had severe and negative consequences for the nation's academic landscape. The persistent disruptions have eroded the competitiveness of Nigeria's public institutions on the global stage. For instance, the 2024 ranking of universities in Nigeria by the British publication **Times Higher Education** (THE) revealed that a private university now holds the top position in the country, surpassing all first- and second-generation public universities. Similarly, the latest World University Rankings 2025, released by leading higher education analytics firm Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), placed two of Nigeria's highest-ranked universities in the 1100–1200 range globally. These rankings, based on factors such as academic excellence, reputation, and global diversity, indicate a troubling decline in the standing of Nigerian institutions, a decline that can be directly attributed to the frequent strikes by ASUU. According to Njoku (2022), the negative effects of incessant strikes include disruption of academic activities and calendars, demotivation of students, and prolongation of study periods. Moreover, the loss of productive time for both lecturers and students contributes to the high incidence of crime and social vices among the youth. If this trend of unceasing industrial action by ASUU continues, it will likely prevent Nigerian universities from gaining competitive advantages or securing prominent positions among globally recognised, high-ranking institutions. This challenge is exacerbated by the fact that Nigeria loses trillions of naira annually to educational tourism as many students leave the country to escape the declining

quality of education and the unpredictability of the academic calendar. Some Nigerians even opt for education in less developed countries such as Togo, the Niger Republic, and the Benin Republic. This situation has also contributed to the proliferation of private universities across Nigeria, as parents and guardians seek institutions where their wards can complete their studies on time. Kawugana (2016) confirms that, due to the incessant strikes by ASUU, the quality and standards of education in Nigerian public universities have significantly declined. Nevertheless, despite these challenges, public universities in Nigeria still maintain a reputation as the home of some of the brightest minds and scholars in the country.

However, the myriad issues plaguing the educational system, compounded by years of governmental neglect, threaten to bring the system to a standstill. If left unaddressed, this situation could further tarnish the international reputation of Nigerian universities, demoralise academic staff, and undermine the valuable contributions of Nigerian scholars. Consequently, the nation could face an unprecedented level of brain drain as its brightest academics seek better opportunities abroad. Bello and Isa (2016, p. 11) note that many lecturers have resorted to private practices—often outside their areas of expertise—to supplement their incomes, which distracts them from their primary responsibilities of teaching and research. The ongoing cycle of strikes and their far-reaching consequences underscore the urgent need for comprehensive reforms and sustained investment in Nigeria's educational system.

ASUU'S STRATEGY AND APPROACH TO RESOLVING ISSUES

As a trade union, ASUU has often followed the path of collective bargaining, pressing home their demands from the federal government for a competitive, reformed, and conducive university system. Competitive bargaining is an aspect of industrial relations that is a powerful tool for conflict resolution and management in society. This approach entails conflicting parties, in this case the union and the employers, engaging and discussing employment terms and conditions with the goal of producing an agreement to guide their future processes.

Essien (2022) mentions that collective bargaining usually ends in an agreement between the employer and employee that is not incorporated into the individual contract of the employer, nor can it be legally enforced or binding on both parties. Collective bargaining, in the view of Ogbeite *et al.* (2017, p. 19), presupposes that both parties in a conflict are seen as mature, responsible, and selfless in trying to resolve any clashes of interest.

The government's failure to honour and keep their part of the agreement they freely entered into with the union has always led to strike actions. Since its inception,

ASUU has frequently resorted to using strikes as an instrument to compel the government to converge at the negotiation table. Sadly, this has often not produced the desired results, as there remain several unmet demands, the most recent being the accumulated four months' salary accruing to the lecturers for the period of the last strike, which lasted from February 14 to October 17, 2022. Regrettably, the then Minister of Labour and Productivity, Dr. Chris Ngige, at several forums, declared that Nigeria is broke and the Federal Government does not have the funds to meet its obligations in the agreement signed with the unions (Ogunbodede, 2022). But such statements could be easily dismissed by right-thinking members of society who consistently watch the government expend humongous funds on projects that have little or no bearing on the welfare of the citizens and do not contribute to public good.

Consequently, the strike has not been hinged on a particular issue but on a plethora of cases that culminated over time. Leye (2022) indicates that ASUU's position as in the case of the last strike was that all demands must be met by the government, as the lack of implementation of previous agreements has put it in a position where it finds it hard to believe that the government will honour its agreements. The right to protest and organise a strike is essential in the process of collective bargaining, as collective bargaining has been argued to be ineffective without a credible threat to go the way of industrial action if demands are not satisfactorily met. "The strike option is what makes collective bargaining not to degenerate or sink to "collective begging" (Essien, 2022, p. 114).

Though strike actions seem to be the only language the government understands and has come to be recognised as a means to earning government attention and compelling it to rethink its stand on certain issues, it is believed in several quarters that trade unions should rescind their constant decision of deploying this tool consistently, owing to the attendant negative consequences it portends for the students and the system as well as other identifiable accompanying limitations, especially in recent times. The government's refusal to pay university teachers their outstanding four-month salaries resulting from the last eight-month strike indicates that there is a need to modify the strategy of engaging with the government and pressing on them to meet their obligations to the educational sector and lecturers alike.

ASUU UUB AND NATIONAL STRIKES

The ASUU- UUB has undeniably been one of the most active and vibrant branches of the trade union across Nigerian universities, consistently demonstrating a strong commitment to advancing the collective interests of its members. Over the years, ASUU-UUB has shown steadfast solidarity with the national body by actively participating in strike actions, reflecting its deep commitment to the welfare of its

staff. The branch has frequently been at the forefront of advocating for better working conditions and benefits for its members, aligning its actions with the broader goals of the union at the national level.

Historically, ASUU-UUB has closely followed the directives of the National Executive Council, except in a few instances where local issues have necessitated independent action. For example, under the leadership of Dr. Aniekan Brown, the branch was particularly vocal about the non-payment of salaries for Uniuyo Staff School staff and the federal government's practice of paying fractional salaries to university staff (Oluwagbemi, 2016). These issues were specific to the branch but were nonetheless consistent with the broader grievances expressed by ASUU at the national level.

However, the extent to which this solidarity can and should be sustained is a topic worthy of further exploration. As universities strive for autonomy, which they should inherently enjoy, they may increasingly pursue self-sufficiency through prudent financial management, the exploration of alternative funding sources, and efforts to boost internally generated revenue. As a result, the economic realities and challenges faced by each institution could become increasingly distinct, necessitating different approaches to problem-solving. This divergence implies that a one-size-fits-all approach may no longer be feasible, as the issues confronting individual universities might require tailored solutions. After all, no two universities in the Western world develop at the same pace or in the same manner; their unique, strategic approaches to development account for the variations in their growth patterns.

PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING STRIKE BY ASUU-UUB

Public relations (PR) is a critical management function that drives institutional goals by strategically aligning the interests of an organisation with those of its various stakeholders. It involves a planned effort to secure the goodwill of relevant publics while advancing the objectives of both the organisation and its audiences. PR encompasses a wide range of activities, including the dissemination of communications through press releases, newsletters, and brochures, as well as the organisation of events and implementation of programs designed to build trust and confidence in the institution.

Given that the primary source of conflict within organisations often stems from misunderstandings, resolution of conflict inherently requires the achievement of mutual understanding, which is facilitated through effective communication. As such, public relations plays a crucial role in utilising communication to resolve conflicts and foster peaceful coexistence between disputing parties.

The practice of public relations, as defined by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), is a deliberate, planned, and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics. PR serves a wide array of institutions within society, including businesses, trade unions, governmental agencies, voluntary associations, foundations, hospitals, educational institutions, and religious institutions. To achieve their goals, these institutions must cultivate effective relationships with diverse audiences or publics, such as employees, community leaders, members, customers, local communities, shareholders, and other relevant entities within society.

Public relations communication strategies are particularly valuable in addressing and transforming negative situations into positive outcomes that benefit society. As noted by Oluwagbemisola et al. (2018, p. 5), PR strategies such as news and information management, publicity, and crisis management can significantly enhance the ability of universities in Nigeria to effectively manage strike actions.

Conflicts within organisations are more effectively resolved when issues are identified early, and communication plays a central role in this process. Anatsui and Ojunita (2015) assert that the most effective approach to managing issues that could lead to conflict or crisis is a proactive one, which relies on the tools of information, knowledge, and communication (IKC).

Edafejirhaye and Alao (2019) further highlight four key public relations strategies that are essential in conflict management, emphasising their importance in fostering a harmonious organisational environment. These are:

- 1) **Collaboration:** This strategy involves engaging in constructive dialogue between the conflicting parties to identify and resolve the underlying issues. The interests of both parties are clearly articulated, with an emphasis on finding a solution that equitably satisfies all parties involved. The goal is to foster an amicable relationship through mutual understanding and cooperation.
- 2) **Negotiation:** Negotiation is a bargaining process in which each party seeks to maximise the satisfaction of its own interests, often involving significant power dynamics. Neither party wants to concede, leading to careful balancing of demands. Ultimately, a middle ground is reached and agreed upon by both parties, with the resulting agreement serving as a binding document that governs their cooperation and relationship.
- 3) **Mediation:** Mediation is the intervention of a neutral third party to facilitate conflict resolution. The mediator, who must be a confidential and respected figure among the disputants, assists in fostering reconciliation and peace

between the parties. The mediator's role is to guide the parties towards a mutually acceptable solution without imposing a decision.

- 4) **Arbitration:** In arbitration, both parties present their arguments and positions to a neutral arbitrator, who is authorised to act as a judge. The arbitrator's decision is legally binding, and the parties are obligated to accept the judgement, even though it may result in one party winning and the other losing. This strategy is often used when a definitive resolution is required and both parties agree to abide by the outcome.

Another crucial public relations strategy that can be effectively employed in government relations is lobbying. Lobbying serves as a strategic approach to secure goodwill and favourable consideration for policies that align with an organisation's interests. It involves a subtle, diplomatic, and technical effort to persuade policymakers to endorse the organisation's viewpoint by presenting well-founded facts. Asemah (2002) describes lobbying as a professional endeavour designed to influence government or other authoritative bodies to modify public programs or policies in favour of an organisation, cause, or group. This strategy often involves logical deliberation and exploration of better alternatives based on current and anticipated realities, as well as engaging with relevant stakeholders behind the scenes. The aim is to sway opinion and influence actions that benefit the organization. Lobbying employs persuasive communication to advance the organisation's cause, often involving an intermediary between the public and decision-makers. Key policymakers targeted in lobbying efforts include the Senate President and members of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives and its members, as well as the Presidency and Coordinating Ministers for Education, Labour, and Productivity. Additionally, lobbying efforts should extend to influencing the nomination and appointment of an education minister who is well-acquainted with the Nigerian university system, understands the political landscape, and is committed to a functional and effective university system. Channels of communication used in lobbying may include memoranda, visual aids, and oral presentations. A related strategy is the involvement of a third party or neutral intermediary with credibility and character to represent the organization. Anatsui and Ojunita (2015) suggest that third-party involvement can take the form of mediation, where a neutral party assists in reaching a negotiated agreement when direct resolution seems unattainable. This can be conducted formally or informally. A notable public relations strategy employed by ASUU-UUB is shaping the narrative and enhancing public understanding of the issues surrounding strikes through sensitisation programs and media engagements. By hosting these programs and participating in interviews on radio and television, ASUU-UUB helps the public gain insight into their agitations and fosters goodwill and sympathy towards the union.

Professor Wilson, a retired professor of ethnocommunicology, highlighted during the Heroes' Day Celebration in Uyo last year that the union's struggles have been exacerbated by fifth columnists and other government agents seeking to create confusion (Ogenyi, 2023). This underscores the importance of sustaining public relations efforts in sensitisation to counteract the manipulation by saboteurs, who aim to tarnish the union's image and incite public and critical stakeholder opposition.

CONCLUSION

Over the years, Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has endeavoured to draw the government's attention to the critical needs of Nigeria's post-secondary educational sector. These efforts have been pursued through various means, including the implementation of public relations strategies. This paper identified several public relations strategies that ASUU has employed in its engagements with the Nigerian government. However, despite these efforts, new issues continue to arise, and fundamental concerns remain unaddressed by the government. The consequences of these recurring strikes are significant and far-reaching. These include an elongation of the academic calendar, increased crime rates, a decline in educational standards, and a deterioration of the reputation of Nigerian universities and their graduates on the international stage. It is evident that, although the identified strategies have yielded some positive results in specific instances, they have not produced the desired outcomes in ASUU's quest for quality education in Nigeria. This is reflected in the ongoing decline in the quality of Nigerian tertiary institutions. Consequently, it may be beneficial for ASUU to consider adopting a hybrid approach that incorporates additional public relations strategies. This could help address the underlying issues contributing to recurring industrial actions and conflicts with the government. ASUU should explore alternative conflict management methods, including conciliation, mediation, negotiation, and lobbying, to address the root causes of the strikes more effectively. If government insensitivity persists, university administrators and governing councils may need to consider increasing tuition fees as a last resort to prevent the complete collapse of the educational system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While ASUU's strategy of addressing all pressing issues simultaneously may be logical and justifiable, the leadership might benefit from prioritising problems to achieve more effective outcomes. It would be prudent for ASUU to focus on resolving high-priority concerns before introducing additional matters for negotiation. Specifically, ASUU could concentrate on issues directly related to their members' welfare and avoid engaging in unrelated topics, such as the student loan scheme, which may distract from their primary objectives. Given the current circumstances and the need for Nigerian tertiary institutions to be globally

competitive, a review of school fees may be necessary. However, any such adjustments should be accompanied by the establishment of a dedicated fund to provide partial or full scholarships, grants, and bursaries to support underprivileged students. A well-coordinated plan involving the government, university management, and ASUU should be developed to address the core issues at the heart of the ongoing disputes. This plan should include creating a sustained platform for dialogue among all stakeholders. To enhance its effectiveness, ASUU should consider the following strategic reforms:

1. **Establish a Public Contact Unit:** The union should create a unit comprising politically active and academically distinguished individuals who understand governance and can effectively represent ASUU's interests. These individuals should have the capacity to engage persuasively with key decision-makers.
2. **Create a Public Relations Office in Abuja:** A dedicated public relations office and secretariat should be established in the nation's capital to facilitate prompt responses to urgent matters and engagements.
3. **Foster Government Relations:** ASUU should align more closely with government entities by sending congratulatory messages to new government appointees and participating in relevant government events. This engagement could improve access to decision-makers and create opportunities for favourable interactions.
4. **Government Funding:** The government should remit the outstanding 800 billion naira revitalisation funds, clear the four months' salary arrears, and settle other academic allowances due to university staff. This will help restore commitment and enhance the educational system's performance.
5. **Increase Budgetary Allocation:** The government should review and increase the education budget to meet the UNESCO recommendation of allocating at least 26% of the national budget to the education sector.
6. **Enhance Internal Revenue Generation:** University administrators should explore and implement strategies to increase internally generated revenue, reducing dependency on government funding and improving financial stability.
7. **Ensure Transparency and Accountability:** A robust framework should be established to ensure transparency and accountability in the management of university funds, preventing mismanagement and corruption.

8. Focus on Existing Institutions: To ensure optimal operation, the government should refrain from granting licenses to new public universities and instead focus on adequately funding and stabilising existing institutions.

9. Careful Appointee Selection: The government should exercise caution when appointing people to the Ministries of Education and Labour. Appointees should have a strong public image, effective people management skills, and a thorough understanding of the educational landscape.

10. Intensify Public Sensitisation: ASUU-UUB should increase efforts to inform the public about the union's activities and its efforts to resolve issues with the government. This will help maintain public support and confidence in the union's actions. Implementing these strategies could improve the effectiveness of ASUU's engagement with the government and address the fundamental issues affecting Nigeria's higher education system.

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