

Nigerian Union of Local Government Employees and the Struggle for Wage Control in Enugu State Civil Service

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Abstract: *The wide media publicity given to the roles of the Nigerian Union of Local Government Enugu State, provided the initial impetus that gingered our interest to embark on a critical study of the interaction that exist between them and Enugu State Government as it pertains to Wage Control. The study reveals that Nigerian Union of Local Government employees do to not influence policy decisions on wage control in the state. Corruption and inability of the state to pay the wages of local government employees was a source of conflict between them. In view of the above, it was recommended that both employers and representatives of workers should at all times observe the tenets of consultative collective bargaining. Salaries, Wages and allowances, in short monetary incentives form the recurring decimal in all industrial disputes in Nigeria in general and local governments in particular.*

I. Introduction

In an attempt to control work relations, the condition of employment and the day to day activities, employees inevitably come into conflict with their respective employers. Unfortunately, the economic power of the employer is so strong due to tactical support from the state (government). On the other hand, employees' ability to exercise control over their work relations as individuals is non-effective (Olise, 2001).

Consequently, only when workers come together in common actions as a team can they make significant impact on the struggle for wage control. Karl Max in explaining the origin of trade unions developed the "thesis of concentration" which asserts that the consequences of large scale industries concentrating thousands of workers in the same place and under similar conditions would be a pervasive awareness of common problems.

Although, competition might initially divide their interest, the maintenance of a reasonable level of wages would ultimately unite workers in common thought to resistances and hence combine to form organization such as trade unions. Such collective organization might at first act as a means of defending wages, but in the end, it will develop its own identity and dynamics. The ensure conflicts "veritable civil war" would serve to generate among workers a consciousness of class unity, transforming them from a class in itself to a class for itself (Olise, 2001).

Trade Union organization therefore, becomes the only viable options for workers "common actions" and influence in determining the terms and conditions of services in the Nigerian civil service. Critical in the struggle for wage hike is the group popularly referred to as Nigerian Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE), Enugu State. It is an umbrella organization championing the cause, welfare and interest of all workers employed in state local governments. It was formed in 1978/79, although its origin dates back to 1943 as part of the Federal Union of Native Administration Staff (FUNAS) (Agalamanyi, 2004).

The broad objectives of the Union is to: organize workers who are qualified for membership; establishment and maintenance of just and proper hours of work, rates of pay, and conditions of work; establish and maintain high standard of workmanship and professional practice; advancement of the education and training of members and employees of the local government, encouragement of dialogue and participation in the decision-making process of its members at the local, state and national/federal levels; cooperation with other trade union bodies and the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) in championing the cause and welfare of workers generally, and local government employees in particular, among others.

Recently, the National Assembly Promogated the National Minimum Wage Act 2011 which has increased the minimum wage from N7,500 to N18,000. This has generated negative reactions from the state government contrary to the aspiration and wishes of the Nigerian Union of Local Government Employees.

Ultimately, the impact and usefulness of a minimum wage policy depends on whether minimum wages are paid. This in turn depends on the effectiveness of the enforcement mechanism; penalties for violators, adequate compensation for workers whose rights have been breached and suitable resourcing of the enforcement authority, are all crucial factors. But the active involvement of social partners in both the design and operation of minimum enforcement regimes is essential to enhance their impact and breed industrial harmony (Ilo, 2008). It is against this background that this study intends to dwell on Nigerian Union of Local Government Employees and the Struggle for Wage Control in Enugu State Civil Service.

Trade Union

Trade union has attracted variety of definitions from scholars. A particular definition depends on the perception of scholars and the definition imposed by legal framework of a particular country. According to Akpala (1982), the exact definition of trade union may vary from one situation to another depending on the economic and political situation encompassing the worker management relations. Yusuf (2009) citing Nigerian Labour Law, contained in Fajana (1995) defines the concept as,

any combination whether or permanent, the principal objectives of which under its constitution are the regulation of the relations between workmen and workmen or between masters and masters or the imposing of restrictive condition on the conduct of any trade or business and the provision of benefit to members.

This definition according to him will be seen to incorporate a large variety of organizations and groups under trade union. According to Banks (1974), Unions are organized on the principle that all those employed in an enterprise, whether as managerial, technical clerical or manual workers are eligible for membership of simple trade union which is responsible for the workers in the industry of which the enterprise is part. Another definition of this concept regards it as an association of wage or salary earners formed with the object of safeguarding and improving the wage and employment conditions of its members and to raise members' social status and standard of living in the community (Fajana, 2006).

The preceding definition emphasizes on the purchase of labour power as a factor of production. Trade union is here differentiated from other organization or association by the emphasis on the pursuit of better condition of service for members.

Sidney and Beatrice (1920) offer the following definitions of trade union:

A continuous association of wage earners for purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their working lives. This definition emphasizes the dynamic essence of trade union being a continuous association of wage earners. However, it may be seen as too narrow since trade unions are not merely concerned with the improvement of working condition.

Bean (1985) maintains that trade union is best described as institutional representation of workers interest both within the labour movement in wider society and they accentuate the collective rather than the individual power resources of employers. The radical school of thought gives a contrasting definition of the concept. Trade union is defined as.

The conveyor belt of the workers desires to put an end to wage slavery and radically transform the society (Hyman, 1971).

This definition conceives trade union as representing the means of actualizing the impeding working class revolution which in the Marxian thought is inevitable in every capitalist society.

The above definitions suggest that an association may be a short-lived, single project association, or may grow into a permanent organization. The life span of an organization is immaterial for its identity as a trade union. Also the fact that a combination of workers has little strength organizationally or has weak financial background for the exercise of its part in the regulation or the determination of the said regulations does not prejudice its identity and status as a trade union. The qualifying factor is the objective, not the organization strength or power.

An organization is a trade union by its principal purpose or objectives. Akpala (1982), defines objectives as intended goals which spell out the scope and suggest the direction of effort of an organization. They prescribe the boundary of a given organization and the result to be sort for segregating these from other possible goals. He further stated that objectives are the identifying factors that differentiate one organization from another.

According to Akpala (1982), profit objectives is what marks out a business organization from other types, such as schools, university, hospitals and others that may be out to fulfill primary social services. Trade union, however, are economic and social organization and there identity relates to their principal purpose which is to establish a relationship with the employer, management for regulating employment question in wages, salaries, working condition, free benefits and all other matters pertinent in increasing conditions of services. This, trade unions are viewed to be organization striving to extract more and more from the employers and as such are organization with consumptions objectives.

Stated more specifically, consumptions objectives are said to include the recruitment of employment, improvement of physical environment at work, security of employment and income and improvement of social security. Yusuf (1984) shares the above view when he restated that in term of trade union objectives and functions, that a trade union may be seen as an association of employees for the promotion and defence of the

term and conditions of employment of their members including the standard of living. Furthermore wage and condition are paramount, but again as Carrol (1969) posits, to discharge our obligations to members in the matter of wage rates and employment condition, we have to undertake responsibility and commitment which are becoming more closely and interwoven with social, political and Economic affair generally. Within the general context of its objectives as implied in the definition above, a trade union perform a number of specific functions which will be discussed below.

The functions performed by trade unions and the methods used depend on the unions environment which may include the economic, political and social systems, and the kind of social legislation applying in the environment. For example, the functions performed by trade unions that have the freedom to engage in political activities “in the sense of engaging frequently in political battles having little to do with immediate protection of workers’ job interests” may be wider in scope than the functions of unions that are barred (Akpala, 1982). Nkumah regime in Ghana banned trade unions from political activities and Nigeria’s trade union Decree of 1973 also did the same. This means that any trade union in Nigeria that had political activities in their programmes and methods would have to make some changes in their rules in order not to find their operations in conflict with the law of the land. In this way, the functions and methods of unions in Nigeria are more circumscribed than those of unions with freedom to engage in politics (Akpala, 1982).

Although trade union functions vary widely, the following outline is what would seem fairly representative, or better say, meaningfully significant to unions in Nigeria (Noah, 2010).

The functions include:

1. Trade union organization and government
2. Collective bargaining or collective relations
3. Use of sanctions
4. Services for members
5. Joint consultation
6. Influencing government
7. In permissible cases, political activities
8. International activities (Akpala, 1982).

Within the general context of trade union objectives as implied by the definition by Yesufu (1984) above, a trade union performs a number of specific functions which are broadly categorized as economic, political, educational and social different from Akpala’s checklist.

Wages

In the contemporary world it is precisely difficulty to discuss wages without salary. Both of them go hand-in-hand. In line with the above, Akinwale (1999), describes wages and salary as “the outcome of symbiotic relationship that exist between the employer and the employee”. He further explained that employers provide work for the employees just as the employees contributions enable the organization and the nation to produce goods and services for the ultimate benefits of mankind. When goods are provided and services rendered, economic benefits also come to play.

Wages and salaries are very important to the employees because they are the most significant rewards that will enable them to have good living standards. Wages and salaries administration is used as a motivational strategy.

From the author’s viewpoint, wages and salaries are not charitable grants by the organization but a significant aspect of workers right in the productive process. Payment of wages and salaries must be made promptly for the job done to avoid a situation where employers of labour make super-profits for growth and development of their firms, while the workers are left to languish in poverty and penury (subjecting the workers to suffer economically, physically and mentally for no fault of their).

Ezigbo (2007), sees wages as a reward which a worker receives for the services rendered to an employer in the short periods. Wages are paid daily or weekly while salary is paid monthly. According to Ezigbo (2007), wages are variable costs which vary with output while salaries in the short period are a fixed cost since they do not vary with output.

Ezigbo (2007) differentiates between two forms of wages namely, Real and Nominal wages. Nominal wages are wages in terms of money: it is measured in terms of physical money which a worker receives at the end of the month, week or day. Real wages are wages in terms of the goods and services that can be bought with them. Real wage is measured in terms of the quantity and quality of goods and services it can purchase.

Wages and salary structures in Nigeria take the following forms:

1. **Incremental salary scale:** In this process, salaries are laid down for various groups but provision is made for increments, which technically should be related to merit (employee’s performance during the year).

For generality of Nigerian workers, this system has come to stay. These increments are related to the years of service on a particular grade, which is simply called “service increments”. More prominence and attention have been given to this scheme since the elongated salary scale of 1988.

2. **Salary grade structure:** A good salary must take account of individual efforts. Salary changes should be related to merit of employees (those who contribute more should benefit more). Depending on the organization’s structure, the overlaying scales are decided on (which will not stay too long) and then a scale is arrived at.
3. **Individual rate change:** This is very sophisticated types of wage rating, which is based on job evaluation. Only firms with qualified compensation officers are able to operate this system. It requires jobs to have been previously evaluated and analyzed and surveys of other jobs made with their pay. A mind point salary is then set with adequate spread based on the analysis and evaluations made.
4. **Employees on the maximum:** This is a situation where employees reach their maximum without prospects of promotion or further promotions. Especially for the elder people, it is a problem to keep such groups, movable up. The most common motivation for this group is to give them continued good service bonus (CGSB) (a set of increment granted workers outside their normal scale, with an interval period spaced in).

II. Methodology

The descriptive survey method of research was used for this study to generate the data. Primary data was obtained through survey using oral interview and questionnaire. The area of this study consists of the headquarters of the three Senatorial Local Governments in Enugu State. They are Nsukka, Enugu and Oji River Local Governments. From the questionnaire a sample size of three hundred and fifty-one (351) was used for the study. The study’s main construct was to find out the roles of Nigerian Union of Local Government Employees and identify the source of conflict between the Union and the State. The Chi-square non parametric statistic was used to test the hypotheses.

III. Discussion Of Results

Test of Hypothesis One

Step One: Restatement of the hypothesis in both null and alternative forms:

Ho₁: The Nigerian Union of local government employees does not influences policy decisions on wage control in Enugu State.

Ha₁: The Nigerian Union of local government employees influences policy decisions on wage control in Enugu State.

Table1: NULGE and Policy decision on Wage Control in Enugu state

Extent	Top Mgt	Middle Mgt	Lower Mgt	Total	(%)
Very High	11	19	4	34	11
High	15	15	7	37	12
Very low	57	46	71	174	54
Low	12	18	23	53	17
Moderate	12	9	2	23	7
Total	107	107	107	321	100

Source: Field Survey, 2012

Step Two: Analyses of SPSS Results of the hypothesis tested

Table 2:SPSS Results of Hypothesis One

	The Nigerian Union of local government does not influences policy decisions on wage control in Enugu State.	The Nigerian Union of local government does not influences policy decisions on wage control in Enugu State.
Chi-Square(a,b)	19.835	18.929
Df	4	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000
Monte Carlo Sig. Sig.	.000(c)	.000(c)
95% Confidence Interval	.000	.000
Lower Bound		
Upper Bound	.000	.000

Source: SPSS Result

From table 2, the result reveals from the ($X_c^2 = 19.84 < X_t^2 = 19.95$ at 4 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance). This was further supported by $p = 0.00 < 0.05$.

Step Three: Decision

This implies that the null hypothesis is accepted while the alternate hypothesis rejected indicating that the Nigerian Union of local government does not influences policy decisions on wage control in Enugu State

Test of Hypothesis Two

Step One: Restatement of the hypothesis in both null and alternative forms:

Ho₁: Inability of Enugu State government to pay the wages of its local government employees is not a significant source of conflict between the state and the Nigerian Union of Local government employees

Ha₁: Inability of Enugu State government to pay the wages of its local government employees is a significant source of conflict between the state and the Nigerian Union of Local government employees

Table 3: Inability of State government to pay wages and conflict between the State and NULGE

Extent	Top Mgt	Middle Mgt	Lower Mgt	Total	(%)
Very High	47	55	81	183	57
High	33	42	12	87	27
Very low	8	1	2	11	3
Low	7	2	3	12	4
Moderate	12	7	9	28	9
Total	107	107	107	321	100

Source: Field Survey, 2012

Table 4: SPSS Chi-Square Result of Hypothesis Two

	Inability of Enugu State government to pay the wages of its local government employees is not a significant source of conflict between the state and the Nigerian Union of Local government employees	Inability of Enugu State government to pay the wages of its local government employees is a significant source of conflict between the state and the Nigerian Union of Local government employees
Chi-Square(a,b)	20.130	18.879
Df	4	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000
Monte Carlo Sig. Sig.	.000(c)	.000(c)
95% Confidence Interval	Lower Bound .000 Upper Bound .000	Lower Bound .000 Upper Bound .000

Source: SPSS Result

From table 4, it reveals that ($X_c^2 = 20.13 > X_t^2 = 19.95$ at 4 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance). This was further supported by $p = 0.00 < 0.05$.

Step Three: Decision

The result thus implies the rejection of the null hypothesis and the acceptance of the alternate hypothesis which says that inability of Enugu State government to pay the wages of its local government employees is a significant source of conflict between the state and the Nigerian Union of Local government employees

Test of Hypothesis Three

Step One: Restatement of the hypothesis in both null and alternative forms:

Ho₁: Corruption is not a significant contributory factor to the inability of the Enugu State government to pay the wages of local government employees.

Ha₁: Corruption is a significant contributory factor to the inability of the Enugu State government to pay the wages of local government employees.

Table 5: Corruption and fat allowances and Wages of Local government employees

Extent	Top Mgt	Middle Mgt	Lower Mgt	Total	(%)
Very High	75	33	64	172	54
High	15	49	22	86	27
Very low	1	2	3	6	2
Low	1	13	7	21	7
Moderate	15	10	11	36	11
Total	107	107	107	321	100

Source: Field Survey, 2012

Table 6:SPSS Chi-Square Result of Hypothesis Three

	Corruption and high cost of running government is not a significant contributory factor to the inability of the Enugu State government to pay the wages of local government employees	Corruption and high cost of running government is not a significant contributory factor to the inability of the Enugu State government to pay the wages of local government employees
Chi-Square(a,b)	22.670	19.350
Df	4	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000
Monte Carlo Sig. Sig.	.000(c)	.000(c)
95% Confidence Interval	Lower Bound Upper Bound	.000 .000

Source: SPSS Result

From table 6, it reveals that ($X_c^2 = 22.67 > X_t^2 = 19.35$ at 4 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance). This was further supported by $p = 0.00 < 0.05$.

Step Three: Decision

The result thus implies the rejection of the null hypothesis and the acceptance of the alternate hypothesis which says that corruption is a significant contributory factor to the inability of the Enugu State government to pay the wages of local government employees.

Test of Hypothesis Four

Step One: Restatement of the hypothesis in both null and alternative forms:

Ho₁: High cost of running government is not a significant contributory factor to the inability of the Enugu State government to pay the wages of local government employees.

Ha₁: High cost of running government is a significant contributory factor to the inability of the Enugu State government to pay the wages of local government employees.

Table 7: High Cost of Governance and Workers' Pay

Extent	Top Mgt	Middle Mgt	Lower Mgt	Total	(%)
Very High	23	11	55	89	28
High	17	16	32	65	20
Very low	10	45	1	56	17
Low	34	15	5	54	17
Moderate	23	20	14	57	18
Total	107	107	107	321	100

Source: Field Survey, 2012

Table 8: SPSS Chi-Square Result of Hypothesis Four

	High cost of running government is not a significant contributory factor to the inability of the Enugu State government to pay the wages of local government employees	High cost of running government is a significant contributory factor to the inability of the Enugu State government to pay the wages of local government employees
Chi-Square(a,b)	24.760	19.350
Df	4	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000
Monte Carlo Sig. Sig.	.000(c)	.000(c)
95% Confidence Interval	Lower Bound Upper Bound	.000 .000

Source: SPSS Result

From table 8, it reveals that $(X_c^2 = 24.76 > X_t^2 = 19.35$ at 4 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance). This was further supported by $p = 0.00 < 0.05$.

Step Three: Decision

The result thus implies the rejection of the null hypothesis and the acceptance of the alternate hypothesis which says that high cost of running government is a significant contributory factor to the inability of the Enugu State government to pay the wages of local government employees.

RESULTS

As indicated from the copies of questionnaire distributed to respondents and responses received. It was revealed that Nigerian Union of Local Government Employees do not influences policy decision on wage control in Enugu state. A cursory look at the table reveals that most respondent were of the opinion that their official do not command much influence in wage negotiations. This was further strengthened by the results of the hypothesis tested which again rejects the alternate and the acceptance of the null which says that the Nigerian Union of Local Government Employees do not influences policy decision on wage control in Enugu state. It was further revealed from the copies of the questionnaire that respondents from top, middle and lower management staff of the three local government areas of Enugu State were of the opinion that inability of the state government to pay wages of local government employees is a source of conflict between the State and local government employees. More than seventy-five percent of respondents were of that opinion. The strength of their responses was observed in the result of the hypothesis tested which again revealed that inability of the state government to pay wages of local government employees is a source of conflict between the State and local government employees.

Also copies of questionnaire distributed to respondents from top, middle and lower management staff of the three local government areas of Enugu State indicates that they were of the view that corruption and fat allowances paid to government functionaries affect the ability of local government to pay wages of employees at a very high extent. The extent was further supported by the hypothesis tested which rejects the null and acceptance of the alternate.

Finally, copies of questionnaire distributed to respondents from top, middle and lower management staff of the three local government areas of Enugu State indicates that they were of the view that high cost of governance which is due to huge allowances paid to government functionaries affect the ability of local government to pay wages of employees at a very high extent. The extent was further supported by the hypothesis tested which rejects the null and acceptance of the alternate.

Summary Of Findings

1. Nigerian Union of local government does not influences policy decisions on wage control in Enugu State ($X_c^2 = 19.84 < X_t^2 = 19.95$ at 4 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance and $p = 0.00 < 0.05$).
2. Inability of Enugu State government to pay the wages of its local government employees is a significant source of conflict between the state and the Nigerian Union of Local government employees ($X_c^2 = 20.13 > X_t^2 = 19.95$ at 4 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance and $p = 0.00 < 0.05$).
3. Corruption and high cost of running government is a significant contributory factor to the inability of the Enugu State government to pay the wages of local government employees ($X_c^2 = 22.67 > X_t^2 = 19.35$ at 4 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance and $p = 0.00 < 0.05$).

4. High cost of running government is a significant contributory factor to the inability of the Enugu State government to pay the wages of local government employees ($X_c^2 = 24.76 > X_t^2 = 19.35$ at 4 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance and $p = 0.00 < 0.05$).

IV. Conclusion And Recommendation

Workers Union as representative's organizations owns as a duty to strive to improve the working conditions of its members. A genuine trade, Union is supposed to be above political or compromise betrayal of the workers interest while pursuing social justice and national progress. In order to carry out its responsibilities, trade union must reconstruct itself with a view to command respect, influence and resources, both human and material, without which these lofty aspirations would be a mere day-dreaming.

However, trade unionism in Nigeria has remained for the most part, ineffective, unrepresentative and sometimes badly led. It is clear that employers in Nigeria remain stronger than the unions. Many employers exercise their right not to treat or recognize a trade union, while a great number of wage-earning populations are still outside the system of joint consultation. Even where there are mutual recognition and machineries for joint consultation, and where collective bargaining have been established, it is hardly been successful. The tendency has always been to by-pass than and rely upon arbitration, tribunals, independent commission, or other processes for the settlement of disputes. To this end, this work suggest that both employers and representative of workers should at all times embrace the tenets of consultative collective bargaining and that salaries, wages should be paid as at when due.

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