

EMERGENCE OF CONSULTING ENGINEERING IN NIGERIA AND CURRENT DEVELOPMENT.

i. Consulting Engineering Practice in Nigeria Earlier Perspective.

Professional Consulting Engineering started in earnest in the late fifties to early Sixties with the importation of finished product into Nigeria by the foreign colonial masters. Hitherto, they were coming to Nigeria with the blue prints which were designed in their home country to be constructed in Nigeria.

Some of the earlier set of Indigenous Consultants started off as Engineers in the home offices of their principals before being transferred back into the country to work in the Country Offices set up to supervise the projects that were earlier designed in Europe or America. Some others were breakaway from the Government Ministries many of which were also earlier headed by foreigners.

Some of the first generation of Indigenous Consultants, were, Obi Obembe and Associates, 1958., Aderenle Adejunmo, 1978., F. A. O Phillips, 1978., Amana Consulting Engineers, 1971., and a host of others.

Messrs Etteh Aro & Partners were Offshoot of Ove Arup & Partners, where I also had my Pupilage before I travelled to Canada for my Post graduate in the early 70's and infact joined the group of Experts imported into Nigeria in the Late 70's. This is because I was transferred back home into the Nigeria office of a Canadian Company Maclaren International, that got a Contract to design the University of Lagos Science Complex, It will interest you to know that I came back to Nigeria with the Dollar Salary I was earning in Canada.

The foreign companies that were well established there in Nigeria include, Ove Arup & Partners, Scott Wilson Kirpatric & Partners both British and Louis Berger International. (American),

I went down the memory lane to demonstrate among many things how free and safe it was to practice Engineering in the early days. A country where not only Nigerians were free to practice but foreign companies as well.

Indeed, our Company Yolas Consultants established in 1980, falls into the category of 2nd generation of indigenous Consultants. As you can see we too have had our own share of proper tutelage and mentorship before establishing our own practice.

ii. Factors affecting practice in the Early years

a) Social Factors.

Nigeria was one indivisible Country. There was no problem for a Consultant based in Enugu, Port Harcourt or Benin to secure a job in Lagos, Ilorin, Ibadan, Kano or Kaduna. Indeed, there was absolute freedom of movement and any firm could establish an office in any part of Nigeria and practice freely there. For example, Yolas Consultants had a full fledged office in Benin with projects secured in Government, University of Benin and University of Benin Teaching Hospital.

b) Job Acquisition

Indeed, that time you did not have to know anybody to be commissioned for a job, you are assessed purely by your competence after responding to Request for Proposal.

c) Payment for Services.

Payment for services were prompt, in fact after job was delivered, you will be notified by letter or phone call that your work had been vetted and certified for payment or otherwise, indeed your cheque could be sent to you by post, if you could not come for collection.

Indeed, above was our experience in Consulting Engineering in those days up to late 80's and early 90's when things started changing. until now when situation has changed for the worst.

iii. Current Development and Emergence of Association of Consulting Engineering in Nigeria. (ACEN)

Our founding fathers in the practice, started by under studying the foreign masters, initially by collaborating with them in the form of Association and Joint Venture.

Our objective that time was to take over from them, because we know that there is nothing they could offer that was beyond our capacity. Indeed, many of us had been in the same class with them in their home country and we have performed good if not better than them.

Association of Consulting Engineers was set up some 50years by the following: Our Referred Pa F.O Phillips our founding father who retired as the first Indigenous General Manager (G.M) of Nigeria Railways, he mentored us and registered us in Federation International of Consulting (FIDIC), until he passed on at the age of 90 a few years ago., Engr. Obi Obembe took over from him in 1982 - 1984 followed by Engr. Chief Dr. A. A Adejunmo in 1985 – 1988, Engr. Dr. J O Sonuga 1989 – 1991, Engr. Chief V. O. Oyefofodunrin 1992 – 1993, Engr. Dr. J. I. Folayan 1994 – 1996, Engr. I. A. A Okunoren 1997 – 1999, HRH Engr. M. O. Adesina 2000 – 2001.

I took over for Engr. Adesina in January 2002, All of us including Engr. Dr. Sir E. J. Amana, Engr. Mayen Adetiba, Engr. Engr. K. A. Adeola and Engr. I. S. Ogunbayo, did our best during our time to move the business of ACEN forward. Membership in the early 2000 was around 30 to 35.

Thank God with systematic and strategic leadership from President to President we all nurtured ACEN till today when membership grew to close to 400 member firms. To God be the Glory.

My Vision and Mission during my Presidency was to make it difficult for foreigners to get jobs before Nigeria firms. My slogan then, was that Nigerians firms are the best firms to handle Nigerian projects, because they will live and die with the projects in Nigeria. We know the environment and the terrain better. Engaging foreign firms amount to Capital flight, as those firms would repatriate their fees to their home Country, and little or no knowledge will be shared or transferred to Nigerians.

I achieved a reasonable level of success during that time, because I had people in Government who shared my vision and therefore supported me to actualise this.

I succeeded in promoting ACEN, in such a way that no firms could get a job in the Ministries without ACEN registration, hence ACEN membership began to grow.

However, thereafter things started degenerating, that Consulting became an all-comers environment. Anybody was more qualified to get Consulting jobs as long as they are well connected. Indeed, many Consulting jobs were being shared by our colleagues in Government. They engage some of us to execute the projects on **fee sharing basis**.

Very Unfortunate indeed!!! This is where we lost it and therefore found ourselves in dileman we are in today.

I am not going to go further 'so as not to pre' empt the presentation of other speakers who are going to do justice to the sub theme of this gathering. But before I end my Keynote speech, I'll like to appreciate and commend the efforts of our 18th President, my brother and "neighbour" Engr. George C. Okoroma. He stepped into the mantle of power during a very difficult and challenging period. He has been giving a good account of himself. Despite the adverse effect of Covid, and indeed the very challenging security situation, in our land, he has been making efforts to sustain the practice of Engineering. in Nigeria, by sensitizing us, and educating us on how to overcome the challenges by his visibility and organisation of meaningful program, in the form of lectures and workshops.

Example indeed, is the choice of today's topic of discussion which for sure the two speakers, most especially my brother and mentor, Past President Engr. Dr. Edet Amana will do justice to.

I thank you all and wish you a very fruitful deliberation.

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