



ASSESSMENT OF PROFESSIONALISM AND ETHICAL STANDARDS ON PROJECT DELIVERY IN NIGERIAN BUILT ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

Adherence to ethical standards is evidence of professionalism in any organization or society. The construction industry can only deliver projects successfully when the professionals comply with the already ethical standards. However, the bone of contention is that projects are often not delivered on time and are hardly within required specifications and budgetary provision as well as quality requirements. Therefore, this study aimed at assessing professionalism and ethical standards on project delivery as a threat to the built environment. This was achieved by identifying the ethical standards and ascertained the impact of professionalism on project delivery in the built environment. The strata for the research are the professionals (Architects, Builders, Engineers, Quantity Surveyors and Town Planners) in the built environment. The paper adopted questionnaire survey on the population of construction professionals. Stratified random sampling was used to select 341 samples from the study population based on formula; and one-way ANOVA was used to analyze the data at 95% level of significance. The study concluded that lack of developing skills for enhanced professionalism dwindle the socio-economic growth as well as sustainable development in the built environment. It is recommended that mandatory professional development should be enhanced and monitoring and supervision mechanisms should be enforced for best practices in the built environment. The findings also revealed that ethical standard was compromised and as such projects were carried out without strict compliance to specifications and which accounts for poor quality of work and delay in project delivery. The study recommended total adherence to professionalism and ethical standards to sustain project delivery in the built environment.

Keywords: Built environment, construction industry, ethical standards, professionalism, project delivery.



INTRODUCTION

Adherence to ethical standards are evidence of professionalism in any organization or society. The construction industry can deliver projects successfully when professionals complied with professionalism and ethical standards. The professionals in the built environment are saddled with the management of construction projects with diverse interests, talents and backgrounds (Usman, 2015; Ofori, 2014; Bennett, 2003). Construction professionals and their clients collaborate with the project team in the construction industry to ensure standards and professionalism, thus, ensuring successful project delivery (Bennett, 2003; Usman, Inuwa, Iro and Dantong, 2012). According to Ogunsemi and Saka (2006), construction projects like roads, schools, health services, ports, dams and bridges are part of the critical elements on which human development is based. Less developed nations like Nigeria face tremendous challenges in their quest for providing infrastructural development to its citizens (Ogunsemi and Saka, 2006). The construction sector is particularly important in Nigeria (Dahiru and Mohammed, 2012), a country which has embark in the process of providing adequate social amenities such as educational and health care facilities as well as decent housing for its teeming populace. The construction sector accounts for almost seventy percent of the nation's fixed capital formation (Federal Office of Statistics, 1998). This high percentage indicates the significance of the sector to the Nigerian economy (Dahiru and Mohammed, 2012).

In spite of the achievements recorded in the construction industry, the Nigerian economy according to Dahiru and Mohammed (2012) has grossly underperformed relative to her enormous resource endowment and her peer nations. Nigeria is endowed with both gas and crude oil. Her rating globally stands as the sixth largest gas reserve and the 8th largest crude oil reserve (Central Bank Governor, 2010). In addition, Nigeria is endowed in commercial quantities with about thirty-seven different solid minerals. Above all, the country has a population of over 150 million (NPC, 2008). Yet, economic performance has been rather weak relative to its endowments and in comparison to her Asian economic peers in the 1970s (Dahiru and Mohammed, 2012). Comparable Asiatic countries, notably, Thailand, Malaysia, China, India, and Indonesia have transformed their economies to a position of becoming major players in the global economic arena. The major factors accounting for the relative decline of the Nigeria's economic fortunes are conspicuously ascribed to political instability, lack of focused and visionary leadership, economic mismanagement, and corruption (Dahiru and Mohammed, 2012). These have prompted discourse on business and ethics in Nigeria than many other countries as a result of unethical practices (Iro, 2006; Usman *et al.* 2012). The government in its efforts established the Economic and Financial Crime Corruption Commission (EFCC). In government, the demand for ten percent kick back of the contract sum is a bone of contention. Construction professionals are not left out in this ugly unethical practices. Executives are known to have made some decision in order to benefit them rather than to optimize government or enterprise interest (Idoro, 2014). These level of deterioration compelled the Ministry of Information and National Orientation of Nigeria (2000) to assert that "corrupt practices became common place on our streets and highways; border posts and port of entry; educational and health establishments; government Ministries and Parastatals; banks and other financial institutions; markets and religious houses; such that no sector or institution was spared or protected from its corrosive effects."



The consequences of corruption abound in all spheres of the Nigerian economy and its manifestation in the form of un-ethical practices affect the general well-being of the nation. It translates to total loss of values, norms and morals that form the foundations of a society. Even the professionals in the built environment are trained and expected to exhibit a high level of professionalism are not exempted from corrupt practices (Iro, 2006). In light of the above, this study aimed at identifying and assessing unethical professional practices in the built environment in Nigeria.

The Significance of the Built Environment on the Economy

Professionalism is a very important activity in the built environment of any economy globally (Ashworth, 2010). According to Shaik, *et al* (2010), the built environment contributes to the economy of any nation through the various resources, infrastructure and facilities it produces. It produces and maintains infrastructures and facilities required for various social, economic and industrial functions such as buildings, highways, dams, ports, industries and power stations (Achuenu, *et al.*, 2000, Usman, 2015). These infrastructural facilities are basically construction end products, which are required for transportation, housing, communications, water and power supply, manufacturing and waste disposals (Achuenu, *et al.*, 2000).

According to Freeman (2011) the built environment accounts for about 10% of the global economy and as such accounts for a sizeable proportion of nations' economic activities globally (Adindu, 2012). Approximately 7% of construction investment is accounted for in the USA, Western Europe, and Japan. The continent of Africa accounts for about 1% Per-capita investment in construction. In the developed world is approximately \$2500 per annum as against \$46 per annum in Africa (Freeman, 2011). The level of construction investments portrays the level of economic development, because the built environment determines the nature and pace of national development, and the quality of life of the people (Dahiru and Mohammed, 2012).

The built environment makes significant changes to the economic output of most countries. It generates employment and income for the people (Ibrahim, 2008). The industry is very important in the socio economic development of developing economies because of its unique ability to facilitate and stimulate investment and to generate employment (Hamilton, 2006). In Nigeria, the industry is responsible for 16% of the GDP (Mailafiya, 2015), employs approximately eight million people, and represents approximately 25% of Nigeria's workforce and the largest in Africa (Ibrahim and Musa-Haddary, 2010).

Incidentally, the Nigerian built environment is accused of being wasteful, inefficient, unsafe, falling short of quality and quantity targets, and being late in delivery (Omole, 2000a). Professionals in the built environment have severally been credited with the inability to deliver services effectively and efficiently, with the current estimated population of over 170 million and an annual growth rate of 24%, Nigeria faces colossal deficit of basic amenities required by its citizens (Ibrahim and Musa-Haddary, 2011; Usman *et al.*, 2014).

According to Ofori (2014), in most developing countries, the professionals in the built environment have failed to play its expected role of providing the basis for socio-economic development. Thus Ofori (2012) observed that backlogs of construction need continue to build up. The industry has not been "the engine of growth" that it is widely considered to be by stimulating activities in other sectors of the economy. Studies show that the industry continue to face problems including poor cost, time and quality performance; lack of work opportunities;



poor level of professionalism and entrepreneurship; obsolescence of some statutes and codes; ineffectiveness of implementation of existing statutes and codes relating to project planning and administration. Whereas the built environment in most countries face problems and challenges, those in the developing nations face the additional general difficulties of economic stress, resource shortages, and institutional and legal weaknesses (Ofori, 2014).

PROFESSIONALISM AND ETHICS IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

A professional is an individual who has been educated and trained to apply a specific body of established knowledge and techniques to practice in the built environment (Idoro, 2014). A professional should not have conflict of interest, perform his duties with honesty and integrity, work competently and diligently, adopt personal and professional standard to enhance his professional practice (Ofori, 2014; RICS, 2000 and PMI, 2006). To practice as a professional, one has to be registered and abide by the code of ethics of the profession (Emily, 1986 cited in Muazu, 2002). Greenwood (1984) cited in Reynolds (2004) offers five succinct characteristics of what a profession possesses: a systematic body of theory, authority, community sanctions, ethical codes, and a culture.

The act of exhibiting the qualities and features of a profession by a professional in the discharge of his/her duty is referred to as professionalism. Muazu (2002) defines professionalism as a set of behaviours, and for the construction professional these include competence, delivery of valuable services, consultancy, honesty and fairness. Ibrahim (2011) admitted that the main aspects of professionalism include: independence of judgement, dedication to the public interest, conformance to a code of ethics and the acquisition of a high standard of expertise. These feat can only be attained by a professional through the understanding of where to draw a line between wrong and right as it applies to his/her profession; in essence s/he has to understand the ethics guiding the profession.

Many scholars have defined ethics as it applies to their professional practice. Ethics to Fabarebo (2004) is the science of moral values and duties. In the opinion of Inuwa *et al* (2015), ethics are guides of human conduct in directing what should be done and what should be avoided. In the words of Usman *et al.*, (2016) and Inuwa *et al* (2015) every society and professions determines its own codes of conduct based on its own unique experience and peculiarity. In this light Usman *et al.* (2016) observed that ethical behavior in business is a legal behavior and a collection of moral principles or set of values dealing with what is right or wrong, good or bad. The importance of ethics in business, they emphasize,, cannot be under estimated for the consequences of corporate activity have a great impact on live (Usman *et al.*, 2016). Apart from skills, experience and standards (Inuwa *et al.*, 2015), service quality and ethics are the true hallmark of any profession.

These professional codes of ethics may be seen to serve as checks on the activities of the individual members of a profession. However, they also serve in protecting the members from liability for negligence, and the interest of the clients/public at large. Iro (2006) admits that, the liability for professional negligence is on the increase both in number and magnitude of assertions. According to Inuwa *et al.*, (2015) ethical conviction gives professional practice meaning and direction.



The enforcement of codes of ethics by professional bodies has to go a long way in reducing undesirable practices in Nigeria. According to RICS (2000), business practices have changed due to corrupt practices, so also have clients' expectations. As a result, ethical issues have been pushed to the front of political and business thinking. The built environment is also finding that public opinion is much better informed and that problems faced by business today cannot always be resolved by legislation and experience. Therefore, many professional institutions are providing guidance on ethics for their members. Businesses are also more willing now to set out publicly their ethical standards. In Nigeria, the Independent Policy Group Report (2003) revealed that all professionals have their codes to guide the practice and integrity of the profession. All professionals Architects, Builders, Engineers, Quantity Surveyors, Estate Valuers, Urban and Regional Planners according to (Usman, 2015) have a moral duty dealing with clients and their affairs to commit to honesty and integrity in all their dealings. Nonetheless, the built environment in Nigeria, is adjudged to co-ordinate various endeavours of Professionals on the bases of teamwork, trust, commitment, and competence for the successful accomplishments of its responsibilities, but is entangled in a web of unethical professional practices fueled by corruption.

Professionalism and Ethical Standards

The built environment is big business and at the heart of project execution (Bennett, 2003; Roper and McLin, 2005). The client initiates the procedures and activities for project execution in the built environment. The client determines, through professional advice, how the project is to be procured by adopting a procurement method suitable to the existing circumstance. The adopted procurement method spells out the duties and roles of all parties involved in the delivery of the project. In Nigeria, the Government is the major client of the industry with a construction share of almost eighty percent (Omole, 2000b), and is mainly engaged in providing capital goods in order to enhance economic development (Arah, 2000). Capital goods account for thirty to sixty percent of national expenditures in Nigeria (Mailafiya, 2015).

Project procurement follows a total projects developmental cycle which normally consists of several interested phase requiring a diverse range of specialized inputs (Andawei and Nyenka, 2001) and this calls for the overall planning, coordinating and monitoring of construction projects from inception to completion (Stoner *et al*, 1986; Eigegi, 2005). In the built environment, each process of project delivery is managed by professionals. Each professional disciplines operates under an existing ethical code and they operate based on their own professional ethical codes (UFF, 2003).

Unfortunately, there is non-adherence to processes and procedures in the procurement system in Nigeria (Mshelbwala, 2005). In the area of procurements, research has shown that the greatest culprit of procurement perversion in Nigeria is the built environment (Tite, 2002). The Nigerian elite has found in the built environment a convenient conduit for capital flight. This is because professional ethics have not been observed as expected (IPG, 2003). According to Adetola (2001) corruption has become the most traded and lucrative commodity in Nigeria and has given the nation a negative impact both at home and abroad.

According to Adeyemo (1990), corruption is a major problem of national development in Nigeria and has eventually slowed the rate of development as resources are diverted to private, personal pockets (Arah, 2000; Okpala, 2002). Other consequences of corruption in the built environment



perpetuated due to lack of adherence to professional practices such as contract malpractices; abandonment of projects; collapse of structures; high costs of projects; and sub-standard products (Jambol and Yusufu, 2004; Mshelbwala, 2005).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Abuja where professionals from across the country engage in construction activities. The study employs both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Proportional stratified sampling and purposive sampling techniques were used to select the sample, while stratified sampling technique was used to select the responses from the strata for the data analysis. A total of 2310 population were targeted. Samples of 341 respondents were selected for the survey. Yamane formula was used to calculate the sample size from the population which agrees with the guideline in Table 1. The various strata were multiplied by the sample and divided by the population to obtain the ratio for each stratum. The sample size was 15% of the population.

Table 1: Guidelines for Sample Size Selection

Population	Sample Size
Small Population	Survey the entire population
500	50%
1500	20%
2000 – 3000	15%
3000 - < 5000	10%
About 5000 or more	400 sample size should be adequate

Source: Adapted from Leedy and Ormrod, 2005; Olatunji, 2010, Usman, 2015

Olatunji (2010) opined that the major characteristic of the simple stratified random sampling is that all the strata of the population are equally important in size. Proportional stratified sampling is characterized by a population that contains definite strata that appear in different proportion within the population. Olatunji added that a sampling option once chosen, it will not disadvantage any strata for the selection of sample sizes. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) and Usman (2014) affirmed that each member of each stratum has an equal opportunity of being selected. This means that the selection of sample size is done proportionally.

The target population is not uniform because the various categories of professionals may not necessarily be having the same characteristics. This shows individuals within the same profession may not always think the same over a given issue. The strata used were the Architects, Builders, Contractors, Engineers, Quantity Surveyors and Urban and Regional Planners (Table 2). Stratified sampling technique was therefore used to ensure that the target population was divided into different strata, and that each stratum was represented in the sample population equivalent to its size in the population. This ensured representation of each stratum in



the sample thus raising the external validity of the study. ANOVA was used for the analysis of data at 95% level of significance. A questionnaire was designed using likert five-point rating to obtain data for this study. The Cronbach's alpha values for factor category were > 0.70 , which means its adequate proof for consistency.

A test for hypothesis on whether there is a significant relationship between professionalism and ethical standards in Nigeria. This was based on the research question does ethical standards affects professionalism within the built environment in Nigeria?

Table 2: Target Population Strata and Sample Size for the Study

Professionals	Population based on registration	Sample Size
Architects	350	52
Builders	352	52
Engineers	354	52
Quantity Surveyors	354	52
Town Planners	350	52
Contractors	550	81
Total	2310	341

Source: Field Survey, 2013

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Test for Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant relationship between professionalism and ethical standards in the built environment

Chi – square results shows that $p\text{-value } 0.000 < 0.05$ meaning that there is statistical significance at 95% level of confidence. Since the $p\text{-value } 0.000$ is less than the chosen alpha value the Null Hypothesis is rejected. This means that there is significant relationship between professionalism and ethical standards in the built environment. It shows that the built environment can be improved by complying with ethical standards.

Results also indicate that there is a significant relationship between professionalism and ethical standards in the built environment ($F= 5.657$; $P<0.05$; $df = 4, 336$). The study therefore established that professionalism depends on compliance to ethical standards. It is clear that non adherence to ethical standards do affect project delivery in the built environment.

Results revealed major findings regarding the ethical standards and professionalism are compromised. Though there are ethical standards, yet there is minimum compliance. Procedural approvals of building plans, mobilization fee, mobilization to site, safety and health provisions, standardization and other ethical provisions as stipulated in the National Building Code (NBC) were rarely observed (FRN, 2006). This is because 60% were not constructed based on the National Building Code (Jambol, 2012, Usman, 2015).

Jambol (2012) advised that the NBC clearly spelt out contract documentation for building production as provided at section 2.3 to 13.5 (actual production, control of building works,



workmanship and supervision). While sections 6, 13.6 to 13.19 of NBC set up requirement for quality and tests of materials, building construction, post construction and components requirements as well as architectural, civil and engineering design requirements.

NBC also provides requirements for building condition survey report, and environmental and general building requirements. In addition, it provides for working drawings; general building limitations. Others include health and safety and quality management plans (FRN, 2006). Usman (2015) added that the building industry is guided by law throughout its operations from project start to finish.

The findings indicate that there are ethical standards for professionals but problem is poor or no implementation. This was due to non-compliance and bureaucratic hurdles, poor communication, lack of proper monitoring and supervision, the use of quacks in construction. These are serious challenges that lead to project failures, collapsed buildings and abandonment.

Discussion of Results

The study discovered that absence of punishment for corruption is the major cause of un-ethical practices with a percentage rank of eighty-nine per cent, followed by loss of contract money due to change in government with a percentage rank of sixty-four percent. The third being lack of continuity in government programmes with a percentage rank of fifty eight point two percent, then availability of loopholes in project monitoring , fifty five percent and collusion by contractors was ranked as one of the major problems facing the country. The sixth ranked is occupied by job insecurity thirty three point seven percent, the fear of losing a job and not getting another makes many to try to derive the maximum benefit out of their present jobs, whether legally or illegally. The eight on the rank table is lack of loyalty to government, which had a percentage rank of twelve point five percent, and the fear of status relegation after retirement ranked the least, which means it is an insignificant cause of un-ethical practice in construction project management.

CONCLUSION

The study establishes that ethical standards are useful as a guide to achieving effective built environment. However, professionals in the built environment do not adhere to these guidelines as stated in the National Building Code. To achieve better project performance, ethical standards must be strictly followed. The study also established that the built environment could not deliver projects efficiently and effectively. The study found that standards have been abused due to corruption and unskilled labour leading to unethical professional practices in the built environment.

Recommendations

The study has established that the built environment could not deliver projects efficiently and effectively. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to help in the improvement of the built environment.

- a. There is the need for Federal Government to review the implementation act for best practices in the built environment.



- b. Monitoring and supervision mechanisms need to be intensified by the 3-tiers of Government and the professional bodies
- c. Professional bodies and the Federal Government should ensure continuous capacity building in order to improve ethical compliance
- d. Professional bodies should put appropriate regulations and measures to punish erring professionals for any unethical practices in the building industry.

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