

TRANSFORMING THE NIGERIA CONSTRUCTION MARKET FOR ECONOMIC PROGRESS AND DELIVERING PROSPERITY

BEING THE TEXT OF THE OPENING REMARKS DELIVERED BY QS OBAFEMI OLUWOLE ONASHILE FRICS, FNIQS, AT THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY CONSULTATIVE LUNCHEON, ORGANIZED BY THE QUANTITY SURVEYORS' REGISTRATION BOARD OF NIGERIA (QSRBN) HELD AT THE NAF CONFERENCE CENTRE, ABUJA ON MONDAY 12TH MAY, 2025.

All glory and adoration to The Almighty God who has made it possible for this day to occur and for all of us here to be a part of this ceremony.

The Honorable Minister of Housing and Urban Development, Arc. Ahmed Musa Dangiwa,

The Honorable Minister of State for Housing and Urban Development, RT. Hon. Abdullahi Yusuf Atah,

The Permanent Secretary Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, Dr. Shuaib Belgore,

The Presidents of the Built Environment professional Institutes,

The Presidents of the Built Environment professional Regulatory Bodies,

I would like to specially acknowledge and recognize QS. Kene Nzekwe, The President of The Nigeria Institute of Quantity Surveyors for his ever-ready support and full collaboration with the QSRBN, and which has made the works of our Board much easier and better impactful for the benefit of the QS profession, the QS practitioners, and our industry in general.

The Distinguished Vice President of the QSRBN, QS. Abubakar Garba Gengle and all other Distinguished Board Members of the Quantity Surveyors Registration Board of Nigeria (QSRBN)

The past Presidents of the Nigeria Institute of Quantity Surveyors here present,

The Guest Speaker for this event Mr. Joseph Olusegun Ajanlekoko FNIQS,

Gentlemen of the Press,

I welcome you all to this special event, which is an unusual gathering, of all the Presidents of the Professional institutions and the Presidents or Chairmen of all the Regulatory bodies in the built environment, with the Honorable Minister of the Federal Ministry Housing and Urban Development of Nigeria.

Every guest seated at this event has been specifically invited by virtue of the privilege position the Lord Almighty has placed us at, which is to look after His people and influence their lives.

His people in this context being the Nigeria citizens and specifically those that operate in the Construction related fields and markets.

It is a privilege and for a time. Posterity will hold us (and oftentimes our family/lineage) accountable forever, for how we have used the privilege and the time we had.

We are a crucial and substantial part of the current leadership of the construction market in Nigeria.

As we all know, the construction market is the widest market in any economy. It involves very wide spectrum of players from the lowly menial casual workers to the very highly specialized professionals and technocrats.

Construction market is fraught with grave dangers. Its processes, its tools, its products if not handled and monitored closely and carefully can cause serious fatalities.

The construction market interfaces extensively with other markets of the economy. In Nigeria for instance, the construction market interfaces with the Banking and capital market, the insurance market, the maritime market, logistics and transportation market, oil & Gas market, political market, etc. and many of these markets are well controlled and therefore they dictate their

own terms of interactions with our own construction market operators in Nigeria.

Unlike in the western world countries, the Nigeria Construction market is currently an all comers open market, with very free entry and exit. No real barriers or regulations. An individual or corporate entity may veer into construction activities with no qualifications, experience or even without the inclusion of construction in its Memorandum of Business operations. No one in Nigeria to challenge its incursion into construction market.

A company can follow a multinational investor into Nigeria, get incorporated and start construction related businesses with this multinational in the country without any fuss or even knowledge of the market players. No pre-requirements to entering the construction market in Nigeria.

As there is no challenge to entry, likewise some operators exit the Nigeria construction market with public and private developers' funds without any sanction or punishment. It is not uncommon to hear of contractors disappearing from site and winding up their companies after collecting huge advance payments or multiple payments from different clients and just disappear, sometimes out of Nigeria and go set up somewhere else. No one to challenge this or follow up on behalf of such clients and even the government.

So, who is protecting the construction market in Nigeria ?

Many of us leaders in the construction market are quick to say, but we have the "Government instituted and empowered Regulatory Bodies" to control the construction market. But in reality, do they really have such powers ?

Many of us may even be quick to chip in that the laws are there but it is the enforcement that is lacking. Enforcement of what spectrum of powers ?

What are these "existing powers" which we want enforced ? How far-reaching are they ? how crystal clear are they ? how independent and non-conflicting are they ? How compelling are these laws for implementation ? Who has the mandate to enforce the laws ?

Let us also not forget, that the construction market is fraught with grave dangers. Its processes, its tools, its products if not handled and monitored closely and carefully can cause serious fatalities.

Inadequate control of health, safety, and the environment (HSE) has become an albatross in the Nigeria construction market. Market operators are sometimes knowingly (due to price) and sometimes unknowingly (due to ready presence in the market) utilizing sub-standard products, or patronizing unqualified construction executors.

Who sets and approves standards for what should be available in the market to the public so that they are protected ? Who oversees those who are to set and control standards in the market to ensure that the best is being done ?

Certainly a single profession within the built environment can not solely and effectively do this. All attempts at solo efforts, or on the intentions to dominate by any, will unfortunately be a myopic and inept approach as we all, will continue to lose the great opportunities that Nigeria provides and which foreigners are creeping in to tap wantonly. Regrettably, Nigeria and her citizens including our families are currently paying the heavy price for our lackadaisical situation in the construction market.

What is needed is the genuine and sincere willingness and determination of all the professions in the built environment to come together and collaborate not just for themselves but for the government and the people of Nigeria.

The truth is that the Nigeria construction market as currently exists, is faulty, very unproductive and dangerous and it has grown to the level that needs a better and more effective coordination. A more effective coordination for the benefit of all the players, the government and ultimately the public.

All the Acts, that have been used to set up the “Regulatory Bodies” in the construction market are structured to protect each profession in its own silo.

This was the original intention and emanated from our forebears in the professions who wanted to protect “their profession” from being pluralized by incompetent persons who could not pass the professional qualifying examinations they had passed while training abroad. This was about 50 - 60 years ago.

Perhaps, many may dare say, it is the government that is not doing what it ought to do or is not doing enough to protect the construction market. But who is the government ? It is we, the people, especially we, the elites.

Granted, Government is the custodian of all elements of power and control. But the same Government have on every occasion expressed their limitations in terms of manpower and also in terms of funding. Government is also challenged by the sheer size of its land spread and the overwhelming population that it needs to control.

So again, I ask who is protecting the Nigeria construction market ?

The environment has since changed. Our adversaries are no more our old incompetent classmates. After many years, most of them have since qualified and are now with us in our professions.

Our adversaries in the construction market are now multiplied and overly complex. The strategy that we must now use to confront and overcome them cannot be the same old strategy that our forebears put in place 50-60 years ago nor must we keep the strategy stagnant. I am referring to the evidently obsolete strategy of “looking up to” the Regulatory Bodies’ Acts to cure all the malaises in the construction market. No matter the number of tweaking and re-tweaking of these Acts they will not cure the loose nature of the market !

We that are all gathered here this afternoon, by His grace, are a crucial part of the leadership of the construction market as we are at the top echelon of the highly specialized construction professions.

At this stage of our careers, we have traversed the entire gamut of the market. It now behoves on us to think deeply on how we can use our knowledge through the years of operating in the market to transform the construction marketplace and leave this world in a better place than we met it, God helping us !

It is an obligation that we have towards God and His people in the Nigeria construction market.

There is therefore, an urgent Call for an independent and self funding Building and Construction Commission (or could be a Corporation) as a collaboration of all the major league players in the construction market and to be composed of corporate business minded / accomplished nominees from each of the Regulatory bodies in the Built environment as well as the nominees of the Federal Government through the Federal Ministry of Housing & Urban Development and the Federal Ministry of Works.

The Mission of the Commission (or Corporation) shall be to :-

1. Organize the construction market space.
2. Regulate the entry into the construction market - i.e ensure that every player in the market is licensed by the relevant Regulatory Board.
3. Evaluate and classify every market operator into appropriate levels of operations.
4. Ensure effective Integration of all relevant market players
5. Minimize risks in the market by monitoring performance of every licensed operator to ensure funds are judiciously utilized by the operators and also that well performed operators get their contracted dues and are not cheated
6. Promote transparency.
7. Promote market efficiency and market conduct by licensed operators such that poor construction or building collapse will be a thing of the past.
8. Set and control the terms of relationship with other sector markets. E.g terms of acceptance of legal services to the market, terms of banking relationships with the players in the market (i.e acceptable mortgage interest rates, Bank Guarantee rates, LC rates etc), terms of insurance for construction works and for existing properties etc.

As I close these remarks may I on behalf of the Board, express sincere gratitude to everyone of you Madame President and Mr Presidents that have responded to our humble invitation to come together to talk to each other about the happenings in our market. We are glad to have your presence here.

The Board is greatly indebted to our invited Guest Speaker QS Olusegun Ajanlekoko FNIQS. Thank you for accepting to share your wealth of knowledge and experience across the continents sir.

Finally, our gratitude knows no bounds in appreciating the Honorable Minister of the Federal Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, Arc. Ahmed Dangiwa FNIA, the Minister of State of the Federal Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, RT. Hon. Abdullahi Yusuf Atah, and the Permanent Secretary, Dr. Shuaib Belgore for finding time out their busy schedule to join this all-important industry conversation.

The Board is very grateful to you all.

Long Live the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Thank you