

## The role of the client, contractor and consultant associations on the labour based road programmes in Zambia — 'Where do we go from here'?

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'FTJ Goes Bumping,' 'Potholes irk FTJ,' 'Chiluba Fumes,' read the headlines of the leading national dairies of Friday 21 February, 1997.

In its editorial, the Times of Zambia asked, '**where are the people trained and paid to carry out such tasks?** The Daily Mail's editorial comment stated; '**we need to know who are registered contractors for a start**'. **We need to know who inspects and certifies that the roads done by a contractor meet the required standard**'. The post was forthright; 'Those responsible for the programmes are no mystery they are known'.

The post concluded by stating that corruption is bad and must be dealt with, but first of all the roads must be attended to and the plan for that should now be announced.

This response is not meant to provide the plan to immediately address the road repairs but as a Registered Engineer, a member of the Engineers Registration Board, a consultant and more importantly a concerned citizen I feel duty bound to participate in the Roads Debate.

Professional Conduct and Ethics for engineers is, of course, only part of the whole spectrum of engineering practice. In discussing the subject 'where do we go from here' I can only do so by touching on the place of professional Conduct and Ethics or PCE, in the context of engineering practice as a whole and in particular road repairs in particular and indeed on the place of the **road practitioner** in society.

To have taken on the subject implied on assumed prescience on my part, so to begin, let me disabuse you of any great expectations and merely remind you that 'He who seeks wisdom's core is doomed to seek for ever more'.

There are no easy answers but there are some very distinct pointers, which we ignore at our peril.

I would like to define 'Professional Conduct and Ethics' as follows: **Earning a living by practising a particular skill with very good standards of behaviour.**

When our politicians or economists or the media talk about 'investment', they simply mean money. They use slogans such as

'lack of investment' as indicating short sightedness in not directing financial resources into new plants and machinery or new enterprises, workshops, buildings, roads and so on. While it may be true that investment in monetary terms has been less than adequate, and while our economists tend to ignore the benefits of long term investment anyway, real investment means **selecting, training, education, re-training and re-educating the people** who create the wealth of the country.

Nothing less than a revolution is needed in our general outlook on professional conduct and ethics as a whole in order to reap full advantage from the new investment in the road sector in our country.

This is the backdrop against which we have to look at the future of engineering practice on Labour-based road programmes with regard to professional service.

I personally believe there is hope.

There are two general principles of looking at professionalism or at the work you do to earn a living.

- a) One is to make your work interesting and rewarding. But there are also two ways of looking at the pursuit of happiness. One is to go straight for things you fancy without restraints, that is without considering anybody else besides yourself. The other is to recognise that no man is an island, that our lives are mixed up with those of our fellow human beings, and that there can be no real happiness in isolation.

We must therefore strive for quality in what we do, and never be satisfied with second rate. We must be lead to seek overall quality, fitness for purpose, as well as satisfying significant forms and economy of construction.

- b) The other general principal is the humanitarian attitude. The humanitarian attitude dictates that we should act honourable in our dealings with our own and other people. We should justify the trust of our clients by giving their interest first priority in the work we do for them. Internally we should avoid nepotism colour or sex, basing such discrimination as there must be an ability and character.

Humanitarianism also implies a social conscience, a wish to do socially useful work and join hands with others fighting for the same values.

We cannot live life entirely without principles. But they have in some way to be flexible to be adaptable to changing circumstances. What professional conduct should define is an attitude. To be truthful always, wherever it does no harm to other ideals more important in the context, to respect of human life and not to destroy life wantonly. But where to draw the line in border cases depends on who you are, what life has taught you and how strong you are.

In the following points on the topic of professional conduct and ethics, I am grappling with this question; perhaps not very successfully. I give them to you now.

## **PRINCIPLES**

- Some people have moral principles
- The essence of moral principles is that they should be 'lived'
- But only saints and fanatics follow moral principles always.
- Which is fortunate
- Are then moral principles no good?
- It appears we can't do without them
- It also appears we can't live up to them
- So what?
- A practical solution is what I call the ideal system
- The ideal system indicates the course. You sail round obstacles but one gets back on course after the deviation.
- The system is adopted by the Catholic Church. Sins can be forgiven if repented.
- But this system can obviously degenerate into permanent deviation
- One needs a sense of proportion.

Incidentally, this should not be taken as an encouragement to join the Catholic Church.

### **1.0 Client institutions (Labour-based road programmes)**

- The National Roads Board
- Ministry of Works and Supply (Road Department)
- Ministry of Local Government & Housing
- City/District/Rural Councils
- Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries
- Donor Agencies EU/EEOA etc
- PUSH
- Other (State House, etc)

Client Institutions are not organised, no one speaks for them, and you can easily see the difficulties of achieving such an obligation if indeed it would be useful. And the user perhaps the most important people are not necessarily the clients (But this is being addressed on some donor funded projects).

In Zambia, the Government is thus the major client and spokes person on road matters.

## **2.0 Contractor associations**

- National Council for Construction Contractors/Consultants/GRZ etc.
- Association of Building and Civil Engineering Contractors
- Others

## **3.0 Consultant Associations**

- Association of Consulting Engineers of Zambia (ACEZ) which exists under the EIZ 1992 Act.
- The Engineering Institution of Zambia (EIZ) umbrella body for General Engineering.
- The Engineers' Registration Board (ERB).

## **THE NEED FOR URGENT ACTION**

### **Lack of Accountability**

- Road safety - deterioration of the road network.
- Force Accounts etc.

### **Lack of community participation**

Ultimately it is only people that matter; everything else flows from that. And here government can help. Politicians are listened to if not respected a little bit more if they emphasised some of these basic issues on roads and then lived up to doing something about them (not by setting up personal road construction companies).

Government must lead the way in developing a national vision and reverse the decay of the nation in relation the expectations and quality of facilities

### **Poor Training and Standards**

- There is urgent need for a fresh look at the education standards and facilities in the country.
- Contractor/Consultant Associations must insist on representation on the Curriculum Development Committee, University and Technical Institutions, School Boards etc.
- Competence, integrity and advise is the minimum demanded of contractors and Consultant Associations
- **Fostering the Entrepreneurial Spirit**

So, What view should we take of skills transfer in the case of an area or region that has received new roads? I believe that we

cannot meet the demands of the times by educating and training “mere engineers”. Rather, we should be trying to develop large numbers of skilled entrepreneurs who want to become managers with a grasp of road engineering.

For this reason, assistance to the areas and regions that have entered this new phase of development (new roads) should consist not merely of technical training but rather of education programs designed to foster the entrepreneurial spirit in conjunction with training in road management technologies. The key to the creation and expansion of our country’s road technology base is of course a burning desire to improve on the part of its entrepreneurs. It seems to me that we have now reached the stage at which, rather than trying to educate and train elite engineers in the country, we should be concentrating on developing large numbers of people who want to establish their own businesses and are prepared to take the road technology they acquire and raise its level through their own efforts and ingenuity, rather than on educating and training “mere engineers”.

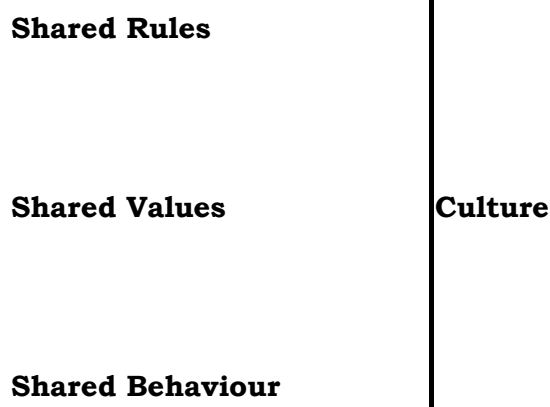
- **The Need to Support New-Business Start-ups**

In the past, one of the point mentioned in the debate about this subject (Labour-based contractors) was that, when given technical training, people also needed to be provided with appropriate work opportunities to practice their skills, or else they would gradually forget the skill they had mastered. In reality, however, there was never enough suitable work. Since the beginning of the 1990’s, though, sufficient appropriate work is clearly being generated in many of the areas in the country and as a result of the implementation of the internationally renowned ROADSIP PROGRAMME.

The success of the labour-based road rehabilitation programme will be led by individuals and small scale contractors fuelled by a keen entrepreneurial spirit trying their hardest to raise their technical standards and make a success of their businesses. We are at the point when the kind of technology transfer and road construction and manager training that takes account of these requirements are needed, together with support provided at the point when new businesses are started up. The EEOA’s programmes in the Eastern and Northern provinces deserve recognition.

### **Culture**

Government can help create a climate for gradual cultural change, for that is what is needed.



**In our case – No shared Rules and no one is prepared to enforce them.**

The severe threat posed to urban life by the accelerating uncontrolled growth of shanties, street vending, UTTA MAFIA, deteriorating water and sanitation services, poor national wide transport networks etc. Is a clear lack of shared rules.

If this change of emphasis in our culture means that we must fundamentally reappraise our training and educational establishments and this has financial implications; we simply cannot afford not to invest in some money.

### **Continuous Improvement**

In this country we start so many things which we do not finish or complete or if we do we never continue to maintain them. e.g. the newly constructed Lusaka/Kafue and Lusaka/Kabwe roads etc. Potholes have started developing and there's no maintenance yet till the roads completely breakdown?

- Road improvements lead to people to get used to the facility. Failure to maintain the facility is even more depressing (Livingstone/Sesheke Road).

### **CONCLUSION**

To sum up then in response to the question 'where do we go from here?' the answer is **nowhere** - unless we get our act together. I have course, been deliberately provocative and neglected to mention the many centres of excellence which exist, the many men and women who keep and maintain the roads under very difficult conditions and the current road rehabilitation programme which has received international recognition (otherwise we wouldn't be here).

But what I am talking about is the aggregate, the trends, and the overview - the comparison with other countries.

To assist and ultimately to reverse these trends, I believe that there is a role for the community, the government, the company or the corporate body for whom we work, and for each of us individually.

The government's long-term role is probably ultimately the most important, in that by word and deed it can bring about a cultural change. And for road repairs, at least, Government must be truthful and honest in its contractual obligations. Government must meet its financial obligations on road projects and stop blaming contractors and consultants for all roads related problems.

Individuals representing the Government, Contractors and Consultants must conduct their business dealings professionally with good ethics. The success of countries, which have done this, bears witness to the results which can be achieved by visibly investing in establishing moral standards for politicians and the community.

Finally, it is up to the individual and to each of us, not only to play our part in our country's and our company's affairs and hence to make our voice heard, but also essential for each and every one of us to be self motivated, to set ourselves goals, targets of achievement, improving our professional efficiency and conduct not only for our own good, but also to set an example to others.

By being seen to be good and useful to society we will perhaps inspire others, particularly the young, to do something creative and swell our ranks.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Sections of the paper are based on earlier work by Sir Ove Arup, 1988