

SURVEY PROFESSIONAL ETHICS IN NIGERIA - ON A DOWNWARD SPIN?

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Summary

Among other duties, a surveyor is obligated to promote the highest level of professional practice to the end of delivering high quality and efficient service to their clients.

In recent times, however, the character and status of the modern Nigerian surveyor is being questioned, especially in areas of cadastral concerns.

The paper discusses a number of malpractices and ethical misconduct marring the image of the Nigerian Surveyor. It also outlines the roles shouldered on the surveyor, both individually and as a body, in order to redeem their image.

Surveying in the Early Nigeria

- The professional practice of surveying in Nigeria is as old as the country itself. Its pioneer organizing body was instituted in 1934 as the “Licensed Surveyors Association” and was headed by the iconic leader and nationalist, Herbert Macaulay.
- Its organizing body is currently known as the “Nigerian Institution of Surveyors”, (NIS).
- Statutorily, the profession is governed by the “Surveyors Council of Nigeria” (SURCON).

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Surveying in the Early Nigeria (Contd.)

- The early surveyors in the country held high the torch of integrity in the discharge of their duties; difficult terrains and personal discomfort notwithstanding.
- Professional monuments of high significance and unfading relevance attest to this fact.
- Those monuments have since been used and are still in use extensively in land management, urban development, physical planning, mineral exploration, road and water transportation, etc.
- Many such monuments are located on hard-to-access hilltops or high grounds such that one could only wonder how those early surveyors accessed those locations; what with large instruments to carry along.

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Surveying in the Early Nigeria (Contd.)

- Impressive too is the accuracy and precision with which those early jobs are carried out as is evidence in their continued usage till date.
- Yet all they had were such crude equipment as Gunter chains, Invar tapes, and few precision equipment like geodetic theodolite. Also worthy of note is the volume of rigorous after-field processing involved in getting those jobs done.

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Surveying in the Early Nigeria (Contd.)

- The establishment of the first survey school around 1908 was a great image booster for the profession.
- Surveyors became probably the most well-read group in the Nigerian society in the early years of colonial administration, and the first set of professionals in the country.
- Little wonder that Herbert Macaulay, one of the veteran nationalists, was a



Herbert Macaulay, the first Indigenous Surveyor in Nigeria, appears on the N1 currency in tribute to his outstanding intelligence and nationalism.

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Surveying in the Early Nigeria (Contd.)

- With such rich background and professional history, one could expect the highest level of professional etiquette and strict adherence to ethics from the modern surveyor.
- However, this is hardly the case. In recent times, the character and status of the modern Nigerian surveyor is being questioned, especially in areas of cadastral concerns.
- Before discussing the menace, a question was raised;

What are the general ethical expectations of any profession?

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PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

- Professional ethics encompass the personal, organizational and corporate standards of behavior expected of professionals.
- Most professions have internally enforced codes of practice that members of the profession must follow to prevent exploitation of the client and to preserve the integrity of the profession.
- This is not only for the benefit of the client but also for the benefit of those belonging to the profession.

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- Disciplinary codes allow the profession to define a standard of conduct and ensure that individual practitioners meet this standard, by disciplining them from the professional body if they do not practice accordingly.
- It also maintains the public's trust in the profession, encouraging the public to continue seeking their services.
- Example: When a business approaches a professional engineer to certify the safety of a project which is not safe. Whilst one engineer may refuse to certify the project on moral grounds, the business may find a less scrupulous engineer who will be prepared to certify the project for a bribe, thus saving the business the expense of redesigning.
- Such is an issue for moral and ethical considerations. Hence, the need for professional organizations to establish and uphold code of practice.

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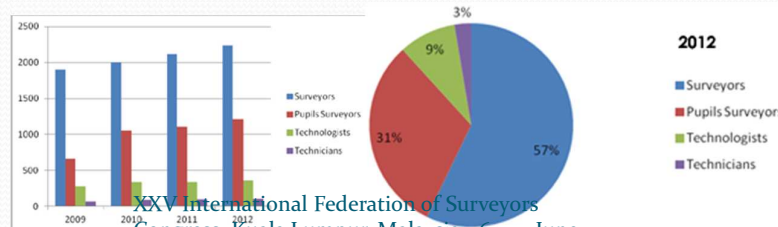
In the surveying parlance in Nigeria, both the professional ethics and the code of practice governing the profession are laid down by the Nigerian Institution of Surveyors (NIS) and its supervisory body, the Surveyors Council of Nigeria (SURCON).

How well, though, has the country's surveying profession been faring when adjudged by the current trend vis-à-vis the profession's code of ethics?

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Cadastral Surveying in Nigeria

- Cadastral surveying constitute about 70% of discrete survey activities in Nigeria. It is the only aspect of survey profession that has legal status as the practice is regulated by the laws of the country.
- However, the total number of surveyors eligible to practice and registered in the council's register are less than 3000.
- Needless to say, this quantity is grossly insufficient to cater for Nigeria's huge market for surveying services.



Showing the number of surveyors in Nigeria in 2012

THE ETHICAL ISSUES

- Nigeria has a population of about 168.8 million as at 2012. It is the largest country in West Africa and has an area of about 923,768km². The country also has a coastal line of about 853km.
 - A comparison of these geographic facts against the number of certified surveyors available to cater for the country's enormous geographic needs betrays a large insufficiency in the profession.
 - How well though are these very few professionals being patronize?
- ✘ Sadly, the larger percentage of survey jobs is carried out by individuals locally known as 'quack surveyors'. Such individuals lack the proper and relevant training necessary to make them fit to practice professionally. As they do not qualify for membership of the supervisory bodies, their practice of the profession is criminal in nature

✘ These quacks and unregistered practitioners parade themselves as genuine surveyors to their prospective unwitting client and, more often than not, collude actively with land fraudsters to cause mayhem.

✘ They distort survey plans, forge signatures, steal (Free from Acquisition) stamps, fabricate size of properties, etc.

✘ An example of such frauds was as reported in one of the Nigerian newspapers, Daily Independent, on October 16, 2012. The paper reported that “a middle aged man has been sentenced to two years imprisonment with hard labor by a Magistrate Court in Osun state for forging the

signature of one surveyor in the state”.

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✘ *Using wrong tools for survey jobs.* Many cadastral survey practitioners have resorted to the use of consumer/recreational grade Global Positioning System (GPS) devices.

✘ Most of the time, the coordinates obtained with the use of such crude equipment do not “jive” and the practitioners have to make such coordinates to “cooperate”. This practice will lead to problems in future when such “forced coordinates” will be used to re-establish lost property beacons.

✗ *Laxity in the use of modern equipment.* Moreover, many cadastral survey practitioners no longer give attention to the common sources of errors in modern equipment, an inaction which generally would affect the end-product of survey jobs produced therefrom.

✗ Errors accruable from disregarding such seemingly trivial procedures have no known corrections, being gross errors, and would have been easily avoidable if the surveyor had been diligent in his observations.

SOLUTIONS

- ✓ The plague of *quacks* and fake surveyors could be ranked as foremost among the ethical concerns of this profession. In order to address this, survey departments in each states of the federation, should as a matter duty, take proactive steps to stem the tide of quackery in the profession by ensuring that survey plans are duly verified for their authenticity and correctness of what they claim to represent.
- ✓ The general public should also be sensitized to ensure that they hire the services of qualified and registered Surveyors for the survey of their lands. The departments should also make public a record of lands covered by government acquisitions or policies and should implore prospective land owners to investigate the status of the land in order to avoid being defrauded.
- ✓ Members of allied professions should also be alive to their professional, ethics and moral responsibilities by not making use of survey documents until the genuineness of such has been asserted.

SOLUTIONS

A Nigerian proverb, when transliterated, says that “*the holder of fake currency is a king until he comes across currency experts*”.

Similarly, holders of fake survey documents wouldn't know otherwise until the long hands of the law catches up with them.

- ✓Therefore, the general public should be made to realize the short and long term effects of fake survey documents and the criminality of having them in their possession.
- ✓Such individuals should be encouraged to approach a certified practitioner with such false documents in order to get rid of same and get them replaced with legitimate documents at subsidized costs.

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SOLUTION

✓To curb the growth of quacks in the profession, an *offer of amnesty* should be extended to such illegal practitioners. The process of amnesty should involve series of trainings, seminars and workshops organized by stakeholders and regulatory bodies of the profession focused on such individuals.

✓Given the fact that most of these quacks have served under many certified surveyors as labor hands and thus possess relevant experience to a certain degree, they should be encouraged to involve themselves in relevant qualifying procedures necessary to, at least, attain the level of a certified Technician.

✓This process will also help make more certified surveyors to cater to the huge surveying needs of the country and help to forestall the proliferation of the profession

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by fake practitioners.

SOLUTIONS

- ✓ Additionally, periodic trainings should be organized regularly to update the surveyors with the ever-improving technologies in the field. Such trainings should emphasize the need to marry the use of modern technology with classical approach as the use of modern equipment does not automatically translate to accepted precision/accuracy if they are not technically manipulated by trained hands.

- ✓ Effective policies and laws should be enforced by making scapegoats out of erring surveyors so as to serve as warning examples to other practitioners.

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CONCLUSIONS

As a man of high ethical integrity, the apostle Paul in the Christian holy book said of himself: “As a wise director of works I laid a foundation, but someone else is building on it. But let each one keep watching how he is building on it ... *for* each one’s work will become manifest, for the day will show it up, because it will be revealed by means of fire; and the fire itself will prove what sort of work each one’s is.” (1 Cor. 3:10-13)

In the same vein, the forerunners of the profession had laid a foundation of high integrity and ethical responsibility. The modern Nigerian surveyor should therefore endeavor to build on the laid foundation by strictly adhering to the rules and regulations guiding the profession.

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Nigeria as a country is growing and so is the surveying profession. If and when individual members of the profession uphold the ethical codes guiding the practice, it robs off on the image of the profession in general. In the meantime, one could only anticipate that the time comes when all members of the profession in the country will be qualified individuals who are committed to continued professional development and are obliged to adhere to strict codes of ethics and standards. May that time come now!

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Thank You All For Listening

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