Chapter 2
Building Construction Practices in Developing Countries

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, an overview of construction practices in developing countries will be examined. Although, practices from developing countries will be covered, the focus will be on Cameroon. The chapter commences with an overall background where challenges facing construction practices are discussed. Then an overview of the geography of Cameroon is presented. The two main sectors, the formal and informal where construction flourishes are discussed. The major risk factors and challenges related to materials, man-power and site management are also examined. Towards the end of the chapter the growing recognition of the informal sector is acknowledged as the future trends in most developing countries.

INTRODUCTION

The construction industry is one of the greatest contributors to the economy of most countries. Inspite of this importance, it has also been noted to be plagued by many challenges. These challenges often lead to the full benefits or potential of the industry not being reaped. Although the challenges are many and complex, their origin and impact are related to two major groups that dominate the industry-formal and informal sector. The aim of this chapter is to examine construction practices in developing countries with focus on Cameroon and vis-à-vis the formal and informal sectors.

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BACKGROUND

The construction industry has been identified as one of the sectors key to sustainable development (Melchert, 2007; Passer et al., 2015). In addition to its basic role of providing shelter, the sector contributes significantly to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of both developing and developed countries, and plays an equally important role in the creation of employment (Basheka & Tumutegyereize, 2012; Adeyemi et al., 2006; Muya et al., 2006). Its GDP contribution to the Ugandan economy in 2007/2008 stood at 6%, with previous as high as 14.3% (Basheka & Tumutegyereize, 2012). In Nigeria, the industry is responsible for about 70% of the fixed capital formation and contributes 3% GDP (Adeyemi et al., 2006). Lopes (1998) cited in Muya et al. (2006) reported the industry’s contribution to the GDP in Zambia between the period 1980-1992 averaged 4.1%. The recent contribution to the GDP by the construction industry in Zambia stood at 29% in 2013 (African Economic Outlook, 2015).

However, the sector has been noted for its multitude and frequent types of problems especially in developing countries. In fact, poor project management in developing countries has often led to the under-exploitation of the potential of these projects. Many factors have been reported to affect project performance in different developing countries. Some include inaccurate cost estimation techniques, high cost of construction materials, lack of equipment and un-skilled man-power contribute to the inefficient and poor management of building construction projects.

These problems compromise the achievement of specific objectives of the project especially with regards to technical performance, compliance with deadlines and cost optimization. These challenges have often led to quality of construction product falling short of client’s requirements (Oyewobi & Ogunsemi, 2010).

In addition to afore-mentioned factors, other two major problems often encountered in the process of construction in developing countries are discussed in the ensuing paragraph.

The first problem is the difficulty in having sufficient budget that can be used in managing in a continuous manner a construction project from the beginning to the end without any interruption. In fact, financial unavailability is still too common in developing countries and hinders the smooth running of almost every project. Although, traditional mechanisms of financing projects exist, they are not too attractive to clients or prospective building owners. This is because of such traditional mechanisms (e.g. loans) often have very high interest rates, too short durations of refunding and guarantees. In light of this established fact, property developers and self-constructors are constrained to adopt a strategy that consists of applying for small loans which can however allow only the financing of small parts (i.e. incrementally) of their project of construction. Then once the small part is completed and
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