

Surveyors' Participation in Active Politics in Africa: Bridging the Disconnect

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Introduction

A surveyor is an individual who is educated in the science, act, art, and technology of measurement in order to determine the relative positions of features on the earth's surface and represents them to scale on a plan, chart, section, map or a geographic information system. According to FIG (2004).

- To determine, measure and represent land, three dimensional objects, point fields and trajectories;
- To assemble and interpret land and geographically related information;
- To use that information for the planning and efficient administration of land, the sea and any structures thereon; and
- To conduct research into the above practices and to develop them.

The roles of surveyors in the economic development of their country are indispensable, these roles can majorly be classified into two, and the first is that you serve the client as much as necessary; but much more than that, his main role is to serve his society. Surveyors are familiar with land issues. And they have the responsibility to advise the politicians on developing the right policies and taking right decisions on dealing with land issues. (Enemark, 2009).

Politics

The Word English Dictionary defines politics (among other definitions as)

- a. the policy-formulating aspects of government as distinguished from the administrative.
- b. the civil functions of government as distinguished from the military”

Politics is a process by which groups of people make collective decisions. It consists of “social relations” involving authority or power and refers to the regulation of a political unit and to the methods and tactics used to formulate and apply policy. Policy can also be typically described as a deliberate plan of action to guide decisions and achieve rational outcomes.

In many African countries today, the type of politics employed in government is democracy and is strongly based on the democratic principle, which one of America’s greatest Presidents, Abraham Lincoln, defined as “the government of the people, by the people and for the people”. This form of government provides opportunity for people to put into government offices those who will best represent them.

This therefore makes the twenty first century political realm the warfare for technocrats to solve problems in their society using professionally acquired skills and at the same time promotes their personal values and professional ethics.

Surveying and the Economy

Globally today, one of the commonest words used by economists is ‘sustainable development’. As defined by Akindoyeni (2011), sustainable development is a pattern of resource use that aims at meeting human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for generations to come. It defines development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

For this purpose, adequate Geospatial Information (GI) is needed on the location and quality of the existing infrastructural network as a starting point for initiating improvements (Atilola, 2003). To this fit, Magel (2001) pinpointed that it is very clear from all indications that sustainable land development and management are not possible without the fundamental contributions of Surveyors. As indicated for the Oil/Gas Industry, surveying and mapping constitutes the bedrock of all socio-economic development and national security (Fubara, 2011). Surveying and mapping precede every human/societal developmental activity. Then there are hydrographic and hydrodynamic surveys for flood and erosion control, land reclamation, dredging of waterways and harbour maintenance, all of which depend on geodesy (Fubara, 2011).

Impact of Non-Participation to the Profession

- The major problem the Surveying profession is facing in Africa today is the problem of funding. Considering the fact that a greater percentage specializes in Cadastral Surveying, where the surveyor relates directly with the end users of land resources, it can be asserted that the other branches whose major clientele is the governments have been left unpractised (or poorly practiced).
- As seen above, a politician does not only represent his constituency, he also protects his profession as well as its ethical values. This can completely be achieved through active participation.
- Another problem that stares the profession in the face especially in West Africa is the problem of professional de-marketing; people do not have adequate knowledge about the relevance of the profession. The average land user feels more comfortable paying the lawyer than the surveyor.
- Another area is the idea of not giving the survey content of developmental projects to surveyors. The government award contracts on projects such as road constructions, bridges and dam constructions to engineering firms without separating the survey content from the engineering content
- There is, therefore, a big disconnect between the survey practitioners in Africa and the government, who is supposed to be the major clientele for surveying and mapping, and also between the practitioners and the direct land users.

Comparative Analysis between the Surveying Profession and Politics/Leadership

The major objective of most survey processes is to determine relative positions on, above or below the earth's surface and to use such information to make valid decisions on issues related to developmental activities on the earth's surface. The question is 'what is the relationship between surveying and politics and what edge is a surveyor supposed to have over other professionals when it comes to leadership, politics and decision making'?

- In traditional surveying methods, field surveys are carried out in teams, and those teams are manned and managed by a surveyor; This makes him already a leader in his line of duty and the practice of his profession, therefore it is not far from a surveyor to make adequate decisions if found in leadership.
- The quality of any survey result is in similitude with the qualities of good leadership. Surveys are judged based on the accuracy of the measurement method, and the precision of the equipment used for the measurement while good leadership is measured based on transparency and accountability; therefore one who is accurate and precise can as well be seen to be transparent and accountable.
- A good leader is required to be able to see things afar, beyond the immediate. There is a part in most survey equipment called 'The Telescope', during measurement, this part of the equipment makes it possible for the surveyor to see clearly, observe and measure features that are far off. It is in the character of the surveyor to make use of telescopes, so he has the mentality of trying to know things ahead before decisions. This is a good leadership virtue.

Comparative Analysis between the Surveying Profession and Politics/Leadership Contd.

- The paradigm of geodesy tries to measure, determine or ascertain the shape and size of the earth's surface using gravimetry, satellites, ground survey methods etc. Surveyors, who practice geodesy, try to solve global problems so they see the world as one indivisible entity, this gives the surveyor the conditioned mind-set of leading at the international level and breaking the barriers of culture, racism, tribalism, and other ills that divide the world.
- The ancient sailors believe that a good captain (leader) should be able to chart the course. The charts are similar to maps and both are results of survey processes. This virtue gives the surveyor a sound mind when leadership involves blue prints implementation.
- The fourth dimension of spatial data is called time, surveyors measure it in epochs and periods through the process of chronometry. A good leader is also required to master the art and act of precise timing in order to be ahead and lead his people; this is the business of surveyors. Therefore, when leadership requires timing, a surveyor has an edge in candidacy.
- Remote Sensing is a survey method carries out observations on a feature of interest without making any direct contact with the feature but using sensors. A leader is required to affect or influence the lives of all the people without having contacts with all of them. The mind of a surveyor is conditioned to lead and reach out to the followers through different channels, as we know that the relevance of governance lies on its connection with the grassroots.

The Way Forward

In order to bridge this disconnect, surveyors must have to rise up and assume their supposed position in the decision making bodies of government. This is not necessarily waiting for political appointment, but aspiring and winning elective positions. Those who are not ready to participate actively should be ready to participate inactively by supporting those aspiring for the positions. The different surveying associations can also motivate their members by encouraging them both financially, psychologically and otherwise.

In the educational sector, a political science course (or two) can be added to the curriculum for undergraduate studies. This we believe will go a long way in pre-empting the mind of the surveying student on what lies ahead politically. On the other end, surveyors and surveying associations should endeavour to host enlightenment campaigns through the written and electronic media. This will go a long way in sensitizing the entire populace on the importance of their services. It will educate the audience on who a surveyor is and settle the problems of quackery.

CONCLUSION

- Africa is at the epoch of radical transformations, the rate of these profound changes in Africa has been accelerated with regards to Surveying, politics, economic and developmental activities; these changes are in similitude with such experienced by the western world with respect to technocracy in the eighteenth century. The transformation has resulted in series of economic, developmental and political reforms, specifically meant to address the mismanagement, waste and corruption that have for decades destroyed the economy and in so doing laying the foundation for sustainable growth thereby unleashing Africa's potential as a major growth driver in the world.
- In Conclusion, it is imperative to note that the practice of the survey profession cannot be relegated to the background in bid to salvage Africa from the shackles of mediocrity. Since we are now able to comprehend these profound roles that surveyors have in politics and leadership, the onus lays on us the professionals to come together in a unified front to project a brighter image of the surveying profession by actively supporting and involving in politics, leadership and decision making.

THANKS A MILLION!!

QUESTIONS??