



Hindrances to Sustainability of Professional Ethics in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Following a conscientious fight against corruption and perception that the built environment and its professional are vulnerable to unethical practices, and the need for robust empirical study, there is need to sample the opinions of the professionals in the industry. This study therefore elicits the views of Nigerian Architects, Quantity Surveyors, Builders, Engineers, Town Planners, Estate Surveyors and Valuers and Land Surveyors as key players in land use, development, management of shelter, rural and urbanized environments on their acceptability of established global ethical standards. Examined and evaluated the likely causes of unethical behavioral contagion pattern among professionals and proffered reliable recommendations for curbing these social menace that undermines applicability and sustainability of ethical standards among professionals in the built environment during services delivery and interpersonal relationship. Structured Questionnaire was distributed to 350 professionals and only 247 were retrieved and used for the analysis. The results of the survey indicated that all the professionals are in agreement with the concept of global ethical standards which stipulate that all professionals must; act with responsibility, always provide a high standard of service, act in a way that promotes trust in the profession, treat others with respect and take responsibility. Professional negligence and fraud ranked 1st, followed by refusal to pay for services rendered by other professional colleagues and being bias ranked 4th. The study recommends that to sustain professional ethics in Nigeria, All professional must; be trust worthy at all time, not give and take bribe, open and transparent in their dealings, treat others the way they like to be treated, be polite, act with care, at all times uphold ethics of their profession and act within the scope of their professionalism.

Key Words: Ethical Standards; Global; Hindrances; Nigeria; Professionals; Sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

Unethical behavior affects corporate credibility, social, environmental and economic sustainability as well as personal security of a country. There is a growing consensus within and outside the construction industry that corruption and other unethical practices are endemic in the construction industry. Nigeria's relative poor performance in the Transparency International Rankings of Corrupt Nations, indicate the extent in which unethical practices as eating deep into the fabric of the nation so to speak. Transparency International Corruption Perception Index CPI 2007 ranked Nigeria as the second, third, sixth, 18th, and 37th most corrupt nation in the world in 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007, respectively. CPI uses acceptance of bribes and misuse of post by elite politicians and government officials to gain personal benefits as a yardstick to determine the rank of a country. Transparency International CPI (2015) using scale of 100 (very clean) to zero (highly corrupt) nation ranked Nigeria as 26 out of 100. CPI (2015) posited that no country in the world is corruption free and that any country below 50 on the scale has a serious corruption problem. In 2001, CPI submitted that construction projects are prominently known to be prone to bribery and corruption. Since built environments professionals are pivotal stakeholders in the industry, they cannot be exonerated from the unhealthy practices in the sector. Records of misdeeds in the industry show that the professionals are culpable for unethical practices leading to persistent building collapse and skyrocketing cost of



building projects. In their submission, Fagbenro and Oluwumi (2010) attributed building collapse in Nigeria to lack of integrity on the part of some design teams leading to the untimely death of many Nigerians. Ede (2010) reported that in Abuja, Lagos and Port Harcourt death toll between years 2000 to 2010 amounted to 300 persons. The resultant effects of unethical practices are better heard than felt. It is therefore the concern of all Nigerian construction professionals to act within the ambit of best professional practice and thereby contributing to nation's building. Acting ethically and doing business professionally increase business dealings. Clients are more comfortable in having business dealings with individual or firms that upheld professional ethics. Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, RICS, (2012) reported that clients are more likely to promote the services or refer friends to patronize upright consultants whose services are guided by professional ethics. Professional ethics is the personal and established standards of behavior required of members of a particular profession (AAT, 2014). From the background, it is obvious that acting unethically is a clog in the wheel of economic growth and professionalism. To achieve the aim of this study, which is to proffer remedies to curb hindrance of sustainability of professional ethics among Nigerian construction professionals, the following objective were formulated which are:

1. To evaluate the perspectives of Nigerian construction professionals on global ethics;
2. To ascertain and assess hindrances to sustaining ethics by Nigerian construction professionals and
3. To proffer remedy to curb hindrances to sustainability of ethics by Nigerian construction professionals.

BEHAVIOURAL PATTERN OF NIGERIAN CONSTRUCTION PROFESSIONALS

A predominant unethical issue in the Nigerian construction industry is bias in tendering or unethical tendering practices (Doran 2004). Ameh and Odusami (2005) pinpointed misrepresentation of completed work or work value, poor quality control or quality of work and technical incompetence as unethical behaviours. According to Kolawole (2001), unethical practices among Nigerian construction experts can be classified into "professional misconduct" and "professional negligence." Kolawole (2001) further stated that, professional ethical lapses often lead to abandonment and skyrocketed completion cost of construction projects which measure up to between 40 and 60% of awarded contract sum. Another dimension to ethical issue is observed by Alutu (2007) and asserted that bribing, collusion, having personal interest against that of the client are the most prevalent unethical conducts among Nigerian Construction experts. Alutu (2007) referred to unethical behaviour as any corrupt or any illegal activities that if left unchecked can hinder technological development in Nigeria. Alutu (2007) further explained corruption as a departure from acceptable conduct by either external influence or inducement or internal derailment of moral values and that corrupt practices have become so deep-rooted in Nigerian political and social systems that they are perceived to be normal and appropriate part of life.



Research reports indicate that 50% of building collapse incidents in Nigeria attributed to design faults carelessness and negligence 40% to construction faults, professional incompetence and fraudulent practices and 10% to product failures (Ameh & Odusami, 2010., Oyewande, 1992). Among other factors, buildings collapse can be traceable to mainly ignorance, negligence and greed (Bolaji, 2002. Chinwokwu, 2000 & Windapo, 2006). Vee and Skitmore (2003) identified unfairness and dishonesty as unethical conducts. Dishonesty, according to Vee and Skitmore (2003) constitutes illegal behavior and is thus more appropriately linked to fraud. Instances of such relate to willful non-payment of professional fees of consultants by clients and developers after engaging their services. The latter types of complaint is easier to prevent if consultants employ defensive contractual strategies, thereby helping to distinguish between business practices that are 'unfair' and those that are illegal. Another yet constituent of unethical practice is conflict of interest.

A conflict of interest may be described as a conflict of duties or a conflict between interests or as a conflict between interest and duty in other to achieve personal gain (Virginia, 2006). Conflict of interest arises if your own interest is involved, for example where you act in a transaction in which you or a company in which you or an associate is involved or has an interest; or where for some other reason your own interests or an associate's may conflict with your client's, such as where you may be a material witness in your client's matter. Weitzenböck (2012) opined that misrepresentation is an untrue statement of fact manifest among some construction professional in Nigeria. A long tradition in philosophy has understood lying as saying something one believes to be false with the intent to deceive one's listener (Adler, 1997). Closely related to Misrepresentation is fraud. McGraw (2001) submitted that fraud involves untrue assertion of fact or assertion made with knowledge of falsity and intent to deceive and reliance of which can result to loss to the client. Gilbert (2011) opined that bias is another causative factor that constitute professional misconduct and explained being bias may as a strong inclination of the mind; a preconceived opinion or irrational preference or prejudice; an inclination, especially one that prevents an unprejudiced consideration of a question. Every profession has clearly defined services. Claiming to have the professional mandate to carry out services outside ones professional calling is equivalent to unethical behavior.

CONCEPT OF GLOBAL PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

RICS (2012) affirm five globally applicable and widely acceptable professional ethical standards which are: *Act with integrity; Always provide a high standard of service; Act in a way that promotes trust in the profession; Treat others with respect and Take responsibility.* RICS further stated that these standards were developed after considerable consultation and discussion globally. The new standards cover everything that the previous 12 values covered, but do so in a much clearer way and they have been designed to be applicable globally. Meeting those standards and enforcing those standards is the professions promise of trust to the public. In conformity with RICS (2012) assertion, AAT (2014) also pinpoint that *Integrity* (To be straightforward and honest in all professional and business relationships), *Objectivity* (Not allow bias, conflict of interest or undue influence



of others to override professional or business judgments), *Professional competence and due care* (To maintain professional knowledge and skill at the level required to ensure that a client or employer receives competent professional service based on current developments in practice, legislation and techniques. A member shall act diligently and in accordance with applicable technical and professional standards when providing professional services), *Confidentiality* (To, in accordance with the law, respect the confidentiality of information acquired as a result of professional and business relationships and not disclose any such information to third parties without proper and specific authority unless there is a legal or professional right or duty to disclose. Confidential information acquired as a result of professional and business relationships shall not be used for the personal advantage of the member or third parties) and *Adopt professional behavior* (To comply with relevant laws and regulations and avoid any action that brings our profession into disrepute) as fundamental principles that all members must comply with. Figure 1 shows the conceptual frame work of global ethics.

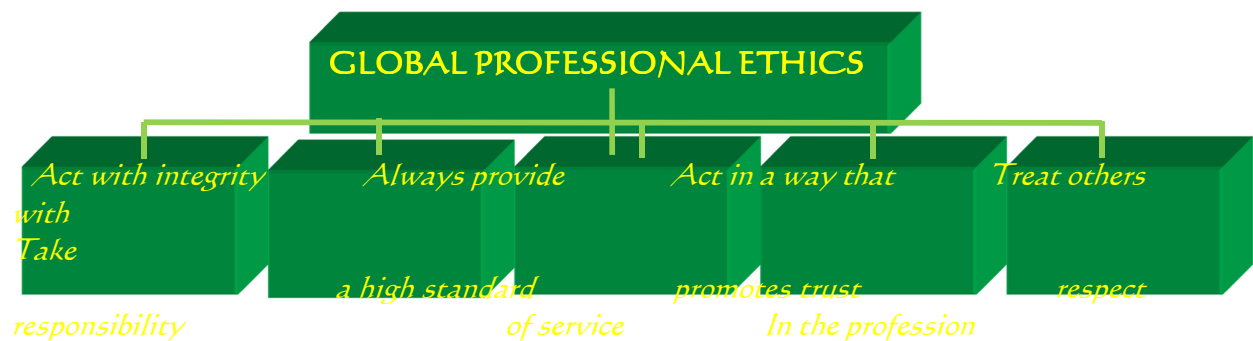


Figure 1: Conceptual Frame Work of Global Professional Ethics.

Source: Author.

RESEARCH METHOD

Nigerian Construction professionals were considered as the target population for this work. To obtain a robust reliable data, all the relevant construction professionals were considered which include; Architects, Quantity Surveyors, Survey and Geo-informatics, Builders, Engineers, Estate Valuers and Urban and Regional Planners. Lack of sufficient data base made it impossible to ascertain the total number of construction professionals in Nigeria. A purposive and random sampling technique was adopted for the work. For data collection, structured questionnaire was administered to 350 professionals in the built environment. A total of 247 questionnaires were returned and analyzed which represent (Approximately 71%). Respondents were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement with global ethics and factors that hinder sustainability of professional ethics in Nigeria. The questionnaire also elicited the degree of their agreement with remedies to curb unethical practices. The rating was based on five-point adopted from Likert's scale. These scales are: Strongly agree (5), Agree (4), Uncertain (3), Disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1). The data obtained were analyzed using Relative Importance Index (RII). The five-point Likert Scale was transformed to Relative Importance Index for each determinant using numerical score.



These were then ranked based on the calculated Relative Importance Index (RII). The Relative Importance Index (RII) was calculated using the mathematical expression below.

$$\text{Relative Importance Index (RII)} = \frac{\text{Sum of weights } (w_1 + w_2 + w_3 + w_4 + w_5)}{(A \times N)}$$

Where w is the weighting given to each variable by the respondents, ranging from 1 to 5
 A is the highest weight (i.e 5) in the study; and N is the total number of samples

The result from relative importance index were analyzed using Microsoft excel package to obtain the ranking of each factor and perception of each professional. The results obtained were presented descriptively in tables.

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Background Information

Table 1: Distribution Pattern of the Survey

Professionals	Distributed	Received
Architects	50	48
Quantity Surveyors	50	40
Builders	50	20
Engineers	50	50
Estate Valuers	50	30
Urban and Regional Planners	50	15
Surveyors and Geo-informatics	50	44
<i>TOTAL RECEIVED</i>		<i>= 247</i>

Table 2: Years of Experiences of the Respondent

Professionals	1 – 10	11-20	21-30	30-40	41-50	TOTAL
Architects	28	20	-	-	-	48
Quantity Surveyors	20	20	-	-	-	40
Builders	10	10	-	-	-	20
Engineers	35	10	5	-	-	50
Estate Valuers	20	10	-	-	-	30
Urban and Regional Planners	10	5	-	-	-	15
Surveyors and Geo-informatics	20	12	12	-	-	44
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>143</i>	<i>87</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>247</i>

To maintain uniformity in the distribution of the questionnaire, 50 copies were administered to all categories of professionals considered. Table 1 indicates that 48 Architects, 40 Quantity Surveyors, 20 builders, 50 engineers, 30 Estate Surveyors, 15 Urban and Regional Planners and 44 Surveyors and Geo-Informatics filled the questionnaire totaling 247. Out of 247 respondents, a total of 143 professionals have between 1-10 years working experience, while 87 have between 11-20 years and 17 of them are in the range of 21-30 years. The distributions show varieties of experiences among the professionals and provide basic for reliable comparison. This is so because, a professional in the category of 1-10 years of experience will have a different perspective compared to the one in the categories of 11-20 years and 21-30 years.



NIGERIANS' BUILT ENVIRONMENT PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF GLOBAL ETHICS

Table 3: Professional must act with responsibility

Professionals Perspectives	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	NR
Architects	36	12	0	0	0	48
Quantity Surveyors	40	0	0	0	0	40
Builders	20	0	0	0	0	20
Engineers	50	0	0	0	0	50
Estate Valuers	30	0	0	0	0	30
Urban and Regional Planners	15	0	0	0	0	15
Surveyors and Geo-informatics	28	16	0	0	0	0 44
TOTAL	219	28	0	0	0	247

Keys: SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree U = Uncertain D = Disagree and SD = Strongly Disagree. NR = Number of Respondents.

Table 4: Always provide a high standard of service

Professionals Perspectives	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	NR
Architects	48	0	0	0	0	48
Quantity Surveyors	40	0	0	0	0	40
Builders	20	0	0	0	0	20
Engineers	50	0	0	0	0	50
Estate Valuers	20	10	0	0	0	30
Urban and Regional Planners	15	0	0	0	0	15
Surveyors and Geo-informatics	40	4	0	0	0	44
TOTAL	233	14	0	0	0	247

Keys: SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree U = Uncertain D = Disagree and SD = Strongly Disagree. NR = Number of Respondents

Table 5: Act in a way that promotes trust in the profession

Professionals Perspectives	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	NR
Architects	48	0	0	0	0	48
Quantity Surveyors	40	0	0	0	0	40
Builders	20	0	0	0	0	20
Engineers	50	0	0	0	0	50
Estate Valuers	15	15	0	0	0	30
Urban and Regional Planners	15	0	0	0	0	15
Surveyors and Geo-informatics	44	0	0	0	0	44
TOTAL	232	15	0	0	0	247

Keys: SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree U = Uncertain D = Disagree and SD = Strongly Disagree
 NR = Number of Respondents



Table 6: Treat others with respect

Professionals Perspectives	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	NR
Architects	48	0	0	0	0	48
Quantity Surveyors	35	5	0	0	0	40
Builders	18	2	0	0	0	20
Engineers	50	0	0	0	0	50
Estate Valuers	10	20	0	0	0	30
Urban and Regional Planners	15	0	0	0	0	15
Surveyors and Geo-informatics	42	2	0	0	0	44
TOTAL	218	29	0	0	0	247

Keys: SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree U = Uncertain D = Disagree and SD = Strongly Disagree

NR = Number of Respondents

Table 7: Take responsibility

Professionals Perspectives	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	NR
Architects	36	12	0	0	0	48
Quantity Surveyors	28	10	2	0	0	40
Builders	20	0	0	0	0	20
Engineers	50	0	0	0	0	50
Estate Valuers	10	20	0	0	0	30
Urban and Regional Planners	5	10	0	0	0	15
Surveyors and Geo-informatics	43	1	0	0	0	44
TOTAL	192	53	2	0	0	247

Keys: SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree U = Uncertain D = Disagree and SD = Strongly Disagree

NR = Number of Respondents

The responses from all the categories of the professionals that filled the questionnaire as indicated in tables (1-5) show that Nigerian built environment professionals are to high extent in agreement with the concept of global professional ethics. On the average, 219 construction professionals in Nigeria are in support on global collaboration on ethics. Some internationally recognize professional organizations had already embraced global ethics. This position is in agreement with RICS (2012) and AAT (2014). Both submitted that professionals must recognized and upheld global professional ethical standard in rendering professional services. They both further stressed that this is necessary for improve business relationship between the professionals and their clients. Furthermore, for our environment, social and economical wellbeing to be sustained all professionals must: act with responsibility, always provide a high standard of service, act in a way that promotes trust in the profession, treat others with respect and take responsibility. The concept of global professional ethics also provides a platform or yardsticks for measuring the performance of professionals' worldwide when it comes to ethical issues. This is necessary, since the whole



world is rapidly turning into a global village. Widdows (n.d) asserted that global ethics is now a discipline gear towards solving dilemma associated with ethics globally and further stated that concept of global ethics is a welcome idea since the world is now a global village. Association for Childhood Education International (2017) submitted that global ethics is a welcome idea as indicated in many research works. In attempt to justify the move, ACEI (2017) is on the vantage of lunching international code of ethics for educators (ICCOEE). Since the golden rule “treat others the way you will like to be treated” is applicable globally the concept of global ethics is a welcome idea.

HINDRANCES TO SUSTAINABILITY OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS IN NIGERIA

Table 8: Respondents Ranking of Hindrances to Sustainability of Professional Ethics

Hindrances	RII	RANK
Professional Negligence	0.82	1 st
Fraud	0.82	1 st
Refusal to pay for services rendered by other colleagues	0.79	3 rd
Bias	0.78	4 th
Falsification of professional fees	0.78	4 th
Collusion	0.77	6 th
Misrepresentation	0.77	6 th
Nonperformance of agreed scope of services	0.76	8 th
Bribery	0.76	8 th
Offering services beyond ones professional boundary	0.76	8 th
Pride	0.72	11 th
Lying	0.71	12 th
Rudeness	0.68	13 th
Having personal interest against that of the client	0.67	15 th

Table 8 shows that foremost among the hindrances to sustaining professional ethical standards among the built environment professionals in Nigeria are professional negligence and fraud which both ranked 1st with index figure (0.82) each followed by Refusal to pay for services rendered by other colleagues ranking 3rd (0.79). Having personal interest against that of the client ranked 15th with index figure (0.67). Negligence in carrying out professional services by Nigerian construction professional being rated first could as well explain the major reason behind persistent building collapse in Nigeria. Chikezie (2016) investigated building collapse in Nigeria and submitted that between 1974 to 2016 more than 300 persons have lost their lives as a result of building collapse resulting from poor design. The deception inherent in the quality of workmanship indicates that most indigenous contractors are fraudulent during construction process. Concrete of mix ratio of (1:2:4 – 19mm aggregate) as indicated in the contract bills of quantities becomes (1:4:8-19mm aggregate) during construction. Obviously, the strength requirement of the previous specification cannot be attainable by the later adopted during construction, which contributes to building collapse. This menace is further fuel not only by the contractor organization desire to maximized



profit but from the excessive and persistent demands from some employees in the client organization demanding for kick-back starting from the man at the gate to the management level. Another disturbing factor that is gaining prominence among consultants in the built environment in Nigeria is the fact that many consultants are in the habit of not wanting to pay for professional services rendered to them by other professionals in the same built environment. In most cases, Architects are not willing to pay Quantity Surveyors for services rendered. Land Surveyors may not get all of their services rendered paid for. This reflects unethical standard which when not address may leads to clashes among affected professionals or outright refusal to render any service for such who are in the habit of not paying for services enjoyed as provided by other colleagues.

REMEDIES TO HINDRANCES OF SUSTAINABILITY OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS IN NIGERIA

Table 9: Respondents' Views of Remedy to Hindrances to Professional Ethics

Remedies	SA	A	U	D	SD	NR		
	(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)			
Being trustworthy in all that we do			185	50	12	0	0	247
Being Open and transparent in the way you work			182	39	12	14	0	247
Respecting confidential information of your client and potential clients			200	37	10	0	0	247
Not offering or accepting bribe			203	40	0	2	2	247
Treat your client the way you will like to be treated			208	19	20	0	0	247
Not taking advantage of a client, a colleague, a third party or anyone to whom you owe a duty of care			202	32	3	0	0	247
Be clear about the services you provide			197	50	0	0	0	247
Act within the scope of your competency			195	42	10	0	0	247
Be truthful/transparent about professional fees			124	69	50	14	0	247
If you engage the services of other professional pay them accordingly			145	88	14	0	0	247
At all time be ready to uphold the ethical of standards of your profession			140	72	15	20	0	247
Always being courteous, polite and considerate to clients and others			155	78	4	10	0	247
Always act with skill, care and diligence			155	79	4	9	0	247

Keys: SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree U = Uncertain D = Disagree and SD = Strongly Disagree. NR = Number of Respondents

Table 9 discloses that the most important of the remedies to curbing unethical practices in Nigeria, is treating your client the way you will like to be treated. Among the respondents totaling 247, 208 professionals strongly recommend the aforementioned. The level of agreement of the professionals on being truthful/transparent about professional fees is relatively low. Only 124 of the professionals strongly agreed with this. This poses no surprise since most clients both informed, semi and non-informed are in the habit of not



paying the construction professionals fully for services rendered. To curb this problems, it is important for the professionals to be unanimous in terms of adopting uniform scale of fees as published by Bureau of Procurement Acts and ensures that a well documented letter of commissioning is issue by all the category of client in the event that some cannot write this letter because of their educational background, someone can do so on their behalf to legalize the arrangement. Another school of taught is that clients in the habit of not paying for professional services should not be consulted for, should be avoided completely.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The professionals in the built industry play important roles in the economic contribution for the development of the country and its sustainability. To obtain optimal benefits from the industry and ensure the smooth functioning of the industry itself, good ethical practices are vital. Despite the innovations and advancement in terms of technology that has taken place in the industry, unethical practices by the players in the industry hinder its growth as expected. It is not doubtful that the industry is prone to shoddy businesses and the professionals therein are susceptible to unethical practices. Professional institutions and government agencies play a crucial role in minimizing ethical lapses in the construction industry. The study recommends that, at all times professionals should strive to exhibit ethical standard that commensurate to the global ethical standards that will make them relevant internationally. As last resort, every professional body in Nigeria should set up disciplinary committee that will preside over alleged unethical practice of its members and ensure that appropriate disciplinary actions be taken against any of its members found culpable. This will serve as a deterrent to all other members. Moreso, the golden rule which upheld that all professional should treat others the way they want to be treated should be a watch word for each professional to guide them in carrying out their professionalism.

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