

# **Surveyors' Participation in Active Politics in Africa: Bridging the Disconnect.**

**Chukwubueze ONWUZULIGBO, Joseph EJIKEME and Victor NNAM, Nigeria.**

**Key words:** Surveyor, Politics, Professional Marketing, Representation, Sustainable Development.

## **SUMMARY**

This paper is a wake-up call as well as a pointer to one of the reasons the surveying profession has not fully occupied its deserved place in the African continent. The paper identifies who a surveyor is, analyses what politics is and its attendant benefits to the profession. It also indicated the problems the profession is facing owing to the poor (non in some quarters) participation and suggests some ways through which the disconnections caused by poor participation in politics can be solved.

# **Surveyors' Participation in Active Politics in Africa: Bridging the Disconnect.**

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## **1. Introduction**

A surveyor is an individual who is educated in the science, 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), a surveyor is a person with the academic qualifications and technical expertise to conduct one, or more, of the following:

1. To determine, measure and represent land, three dimensional objects, point fields and trajectories;
2. To assemble and interpret land and geographically related information;
3. To use that information for the planning and efficient administration of land, the sea and any structures thereon; and
4. 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. And the more we demonstrate our commitment in these areas in politics, the higher the standing we have (Enemark, 2009).

The surveyor is needed on every sector of the economy of any nation and research has shown that the reason the most developed nations in the world are the best mapped is because in those advanced countries, surveying is part of their culture and they cannot move an inch without having the data (Olekanma, 2011). As a matter of fact, the sustainable development of any nation is dependent on adequate geospatial information. And this information can only be

provided precisely by the surveyors.

These professional are unfortunately not occupying the supposed frontline position in the politics of many African countries. This is the major reason for the under-funding (lack of funding in some places) of the profession. Most of these countries are poorly mapped and as a result the rate of development is very slow. It makes more sense to a politician to construct a road, bridge or even a structure without adequate survey input than to commission a mapping project. And the seeming absence of the surveyors in the helm of affairs has not helped in any way.

## **2. Politics**

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

- a. the policy-formulating aspects of government as distinguished from the administrative, or legal
- 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. It guides actions towards those that are most likely to achieve a desired outcome. Politics can be seen, therefore, as an instrument for the governance of a people. It can also be seen as the livewire of the society since there must be a unit that takes decision, formulate and implement policies in every society and whoever is not part or represented in that unit does as good as not exist in that society or can better be seen as a passer-by.

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. These representatives of the people then protect

the interest of their people who, elected them and attract developmental project of the government to their constituencies.

Owing to the complex nature of the human mind, these elected representatives, irrespective of the arm of government they occupy, don't just protect the interest of their electorate; they defend also their cultural values, beliefs, philosophies and even their professions. They try to convince others in government on the importance of their professions and why they should be considered as more important, why some laws that affect their professions should be amended or possibly repealed, why their professions should be given a greater consideration in developmental issues and how their professions benefit the economy of the nation.

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.

### **3. 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. Atilola (2003), analyzing the importance of sustainable development to the environment, indicated that the areas of urbanization, infrastructure and utilities, solid waste and health facilities, land degradation, coastal degradation require serious attention. This concurs totally with the important sectors listed out by Magel (2001) as secure tenure, access to land, land administration and land management including land use, land registration, cadastre and many uses. Most rural and urban areas of many developing countries are currently not being developed and managed in a sustainable manner.

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. There cannot be any meaningful development without the invaluable 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. They precede all land acquisition for all industrial and commercial ventures, agriculture, dams, construction industries, roads and highways, pipelines and power lines, political/administrative boundary to maintain peace, transporting, military logistics, etc. Other areas of involvement include population census, location of voter's registration centers, voting units and attendant material distribution logistics. 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).

This is enough to place the surveyors in the fore front of every national economic planning. Considering the amount of input the surveying profession delivers to the economy, it is only amazing that its practitioners are not seen to be very active in the political realm.

#### **4. Impact of Non-Participation to the Profession**

The major problem the Surveying profession is facing in Africa today is the problem of funding. This is indicated by the percentage of the surveyors specializing in the different branches of surveying. 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). This is not to say that the different Surveying Organisations and offices have not been active. These organisations have performed creditably, especially in their role as advisory bodies to the government, but this is not enough.

A surveyor is under the obligation to promote and propagate the professional practice of

surveying. 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. This call for active participation in politics does not mean that there is no participation at all, but it is a call for a greater response in that direction in order to improve professional marketing. A surveyor (or two) being present in the executive or parliamentary position will better propose and defend policies that affect the profession than just a proposal submitted by a surveying organisation to the government. This is evident in the nature and quality of practice in some states where surveyors have been actively involved in politics. One vivid example is the practice in Ogun State, Nigeria.

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. One vivid example is the value placed on a survey plan as against the legal agreement. A legal document on a landed property refers to the survey plan. As a matter of fact, a it is not valid enough if it does not depict the accurate location of the landed property. This location can only be provided by the geospatial information delivered by the surveyor. This, therefore, means that the survey plan (which is a legal document in itself) should precede the legal agreement. But 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. The engineering firms then execute these contracts without regards to the professional input of the surveyors, giving rise to a non-sustainable development. The projects end up not outlasting the tenure of the very government that commissioned it, not to mention the future generations.

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. This disconnect has robbed the surveyor of

his important position in the economic planning of states. The surveying organisations and researchers lack a strong medium to approach government. The ones closer to governments are actually members of the government staff and cannot openly challenge or confront the government squarely. The survey practitioners, on their part, try their best to market the profession, but their effort is not just enough as there is still a very poor awareness amongst the populace on the importance of the geospatial information.

## **5. 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; Politics on the other hand is involved in every human day-to-day activity; at home, in school, at work, and at different levels of leadership in the society. 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'? The points below try to liken survey processes with leadership virtues;

- a. 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.
- b. 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.
- c. 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.

- d. 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.
- e. 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.
- f. 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.
- g. 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.

## **6. 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. In some developed countries, campaign funds are raised by friends and supporters, not just a single person termed 'a god-father', this can also be done. 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. If this is done, it awakens his consciousness and arms him better for the battle that lies ahead, when he graduates. 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. It will also bridge the 'disconnect' between the surveyor and the masses and further improve the integrity of profession, hence boosting the chances of winning the elective positions we may decide to vie for.

## **7. 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.

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