The Nigerian Society of Engineers

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An Interview with Engr. Mbanefo, *FNSE* on the Impact of Transport System in the Actualization of Vision 2020

E-Newsletter: *Before we continue we will appreciate if you tell our reading audience about yourself your contributions to the engineering profession and as a mentor to other young engineers.*

Engr. Mbanefo *FNSE*

Engr. Mbanefo: My name is Engr. Charles Mbanefo. I am a civil engineer by profession, and obtained my training in the United Kingdom and Canada and coming back to Nigeria in 1980 I practice engineering in Abuja on structural steel before I retired as a Deputy Director. When we talk about the transport system, it is obvious that transportation is the life line of any society; everybody needs transportation, either by the two legs or mechanical form of moving around. Now in the country it's so difficult to really understand why the transport system has gone the way it did. As a student, a young boy growing up in Nigeria, some years ago I observed that the railway system was working efficiently. The roads I remembered we travelled from Onitsha to Enugu through the 'milky hill' though some of you have not heard that name were very good but today the roads are no longer there. The new ones that are built are not maintained. The areas you think have the basic infrastructures have none in place. All the basic means of transportation (rail, road, water and air) have very poor facilities /infrastructures and even road markings, are so difficult to understand. When we were young, we used to have 'steamers' sailing all the way from Warri through Onitsha, up to Yola. Today where are our water ways? I'm privileged my father worked with UAC and this was their major means of transportation and then from Onitsha you can go by boat or the steamer as they use to call it in those days up to Ilaro near Bida. What happened to all these things? Now we are having today every state government wants to build an air port, for what? When you look at the transport system, we should consider it as a means of alleviating physical constraint. That is what it's all about.

E-Newsletter: *Thank you very much. This is a problem every engineer has to look at. In your opinion what will you say is the cause or causes of this problem? Because the steamers you mentioned were functioning during the colonial administration in Nigeria and immediately after and even after that period, it was still in existence, I witnessed that in the 1960s before the Nigerian civil war.*

Engr. Mbanefo: We've said all that transport systems have problems and we are to address the solution of those problems. Let's look at the River Niger and River Benue as a starting point. These areas we deliberately ignored by the authorities because we still have the Inland waterways authority; the question now is what are they doing? I remember almost ten years ago during the Abacha regime, I was a member of the committee to look at the dredging of the Niger River. We were then to look at the possibilities of recovering the water ways. It is only in this country that we have river like Niger and Benue and we are not making use of them and yet we will be talking about what is happening in other countries. When the dredging projects came up, certain parameters were put in place. But somewhere along the line the Obasanjo's administration came in and they cancelled the contract and we are back to square one.

E-Newsletter*: In that case this problem of continuity in administration has to come in because when one thing is set in place, the succeeding administrator comes in with another vision. That is not helping us at all.*

Engr. Mbanefo: It's unfortunate in Nigeria. I describe the situation in Nigeria as a nation of foundation builders. Everybody sets up a pace but the continuity to build and complete is not there. Why I can not answer because now we are going into the social issues and since I am not talking about the moral values of the society, I am talking about the professional issues. This is a problem that we have and we will find a way to address. We can not make progress if we don't live such that; our fathers started something, we should continue from where they left. We can not keep going back to the starting point, we will be stocked there. That's the basic issue. May be the houses our fathers built were made of mud but it served a purpose at that time. So now, the fact that we have a better materials does not mean we are going to condemn what they did because if we are intelligent as we think we are, our parents built with mud and the structure they built is such that energy consumption to live in those houses was minimal because those mud houses are much more cooler and comfortable. What we are building is such that if you don't have energy, electricity you cannot live in some of those houses and there cannot be any progress because the engineer would integrate electricity.

E-Newsletter: *Coming back to road which is one of our transport systems infrastructures, over the years we have seen our roads going bad, what grade of road do we need in this country? Our roads allow all kinds of vehicles. In other parts of the world there are special road designs for specific traffic flows. Is there any technical or legal framework for such systems here?*

Engr. Mbanefo: We have a problem and when I say we have a problem I mean the problem of commitment. One of the things I noticed having worked in government talking about in area of buildings, hardly will you find a place where government builds a structure and then use that structure for that purpose. I'll give you some examples. I was in Abuja; the first clinic we used in Abuja is a part of a shopping place. Some of the places we were using as offices are residential houses. So you build an office or a structure with specifications, at the end of the day the use is changed that is the problem. The roads you are talking about as part of the problem is that at least the ones I've seen and have talked about, you have a situation where the government provides NX (x naira) for 10km of road, the engineer is pushed to the point that the NX will now do 10+ km of road, so you end up having them reducing the quality in the design. Where you now need y cm as thickness of the road as standard and you reduce it to y-(0.5y) cm, of course in no time you are going to have failure. Then you have a situation, every body thinks when you have a tar then it is the best road, we are also caught in our own ignorance. Where we can even use earth road and use condemned engine oil on it and make it motorable because the issue is to make sure you get a smooth ride as much as possible and because of the rain those things cannot resist extraneous effects.

E-Newsletter*: The idea of engineers agreeing with administrators or government agencies who give out projects without accurate/ appropriate cost evaluations. Is it because his/her job is threatened if he/she over looks quality or what is responsible for that? If he makes complains of the non- professional manner of the evaluation what happens? You have worked with government, what is the cause?*

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Engr. Mbanefo: My experience is that not many of us have the guts to stand up and say to hell with you. Some people feel threatened if they lose their job. You have somebody who because he's well connected is promoted far above and beyond his capabilities and he is there in position. So we have it from all angles that is when we cannot just ignore the moral decadence aspect of the society from nation building. This cannot be engineering solution; the moral solution of the society is very critical and important. All of have roles to play in this direction. We should allow our conscience to speak to us as we perform our duties.

***E-Newsletter**: Ok. Let's look at the statistics of high way engineers. During the second republic, civil engineering, and I think architecture seem to be uppermost in term of admission of student into high institution. Now it seems high ways engineering student intake are always on the decline, especially at the Post Graduate levels. Is it true or false? If true what is responsible for the decline?*

Engr. Mbanefo: Highway or let's say engineering students of applied science are not on the decline. It's just that the orientation is changing. We come back to the same moral issues, somebody finishing from the university now is thinking about how he is earning, nobody is contributing to the society. So we got our value on working and making money. The other aspects which also affect the students, the university institutions are no longer what they ought to be. The universities built at and after independence, like Nsukka, Zaria, Ife and Lagos not to talk about the new ones have obsolete laboratories and workshop facilities. I believe that the infrastructures put in them, were set up with the university almost fifty years ago are the same lab equipments they are using today, how can we progress? I visited one university around Enugu two years ago, I wept because the labs I used in secondary school in the fifties were better equipped than the labs of the university. So you can see. This is the problem, how do you reconcile those things?

Engr. Dr. Ujile & Engr. Mbanefo

***E-Newsletter:** Thank you very much sir. Well, we have seen the problems but we will want engineers, experienced ones in the profession to still preach the gospel, sell the orientation out to the present generation if we want to attain vision 20/2020.*

Engr. Mbanefo: You are correct. Now let me ask you a question, we have the Ministry of Information and Orientation. What has Orientation done? Have you heard what they have achieved? Has the orientation campaign achieved any goal for Nigerians? The last time I heard of Ministry of Information and Orientation was doing Jerry Gana's regime and then people are collecting salary from there. At least Jerry Gana was telling us if you teach, teach well. If you work, work and then people started to joke about it but the message was going on. What are we doing today?

***E-Newsletter**: Thank you very much for the audience you have given us.*

APWEN: OHAGWA LEADS PORT HARCOURT CHAPTER

The Port Harcourt Chapter of the Association of Professional Women Engineers of Nigeria (APWEN), a division of the Nigerian Society of Engineers was inaugurated on Thursday 25th September 2008 at the Nigerian Society of Engineers Port Harcourt Branch Secretariat. The occasion which featured the inauguration of the Chapter executive committee was performed by the National President of APWEN Engr. Mrs. Ojukwu. The following new chapter executive members were sworn in at the ceremony:

Engr. Mrs. A.C. Ohagwa	-	Chapter Chairman
Engr. Mrs. A.C. Nwaigwe	-	Secretary
Engr. Mrs. A.P. Ubani	-	Financial Secretary
Engr. J.J.E. Idachaba	-	Treasurer
Engr. Ms. Ebele Oti	-	Publicity Secretary
Engr. Mrs. Joy K. Nwoko	-	Matron 1
Engr. Mrs. J. Okeyea	-	Matron 11
Engr. Mrs. R.V.C. Ezeoke	-	EXCO

The students chapters of the Association from the Rivers State University of Science and Technology (RSUST) Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt and the University of Port Harcourt were also inaugurated during the ceremony. In an acceptance speech at the occasion, the new chapter chairman, Engr. Mrs. Ohagwa extended gratitude to God and to all the members for their support for the successful inauguration of the chapter after years of unsuccessful attempts to carry out such event.

The newly inaugurated executive committee

National President of APWEN, Engr. Mrs. Ojukwu ,(left) & Engr. Mrs. Ohagwa

Engr. Mrs. Ohagwa, APWEN Port Harcourt Chapter Chairman

NIA INAUGURATES ARCON VOLUNTEER NETWORK(AVN)

The Nigerian Institute of Architects Rivers State Chapter on Friday night September 12, 2008 inaugurated what it termed The Arcon Volunteer Network (AVN) with the integration of some professional bodies including The Nigerian Society of Engineers as members. The AVN a is project monitoring committee which is mandated to undertake the investigation of any site under construction with a view to ascertaining the structural integrity and construction suitability of such projects. The ceremony which was held at the (NAFOWA HALL) of the Nigerian Airforce Base, Port Harcourt, was part of the 4th A.G. Spiff memorial lecture/award night dinner of the institute. Present at the ceremony were dignitaries from all works of life including Mr. Ben Murray Bruce, MD of Silver Bird Group, President of the Nigerian Institute of Architect, Arc. Eric Chukwuka, FNIA, and Arc. M. Jimoh Faworaja, FNIA, President of ARCON and many others. The Nigerian Society of Engineers Port Harcourt Branch was ably represented by Engr. Denis A.A. Dania the branch General Secretary.

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NOTICE! NOTICE!! NOTICE!!!

All members of **NSE PH** should pay their **annual branch dues** of **N4000** and **compulsory levy** of **N5000** towards the Engineer Resource Center to **UBA ACC. NO: 0802080000194 (Port Harcourt main Branch).** Also pay **National Annual Subscription** of **N5,500.00** directly to **AFRIBANK ACC No. 1420202215613** & forward all tellers to the secretariat for reconciliation. All payments should be made at the Bank