The Nigerian Society of Engineers

PORT HARCOURT BRANCH

Newsletter

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INTERVIEW WITH ENGR. TITI OMO-ETTU, VICE PRESIDENT COREN ON SUSTAINABILITY OF ENGINEERING EDUCATION AND TRAINING

***E-Newsletter**: Thank you sir for giving us this opportunity to discuss with you on this important topic, sustainability of engineering education and training. Our reading audience would appreciate if you share your experience with us, before we start the discussion.*

Vice President, COREN: I want to confess that I don't always like talking about myself, but I can say what I have done for Nigerian Society of Engineers (NSE). I think that would be enough. I became a member of the Nigerian Society of Engineers in 1979 with the Port Harcourt Branch. In 1995 I became the Chairman of Electrical Division. I was also the Vice President of NSE at the National level. I became COREN member from Port Harcourt, Rivers State. I was the technical Secretary of NSE after I left Port Harcourt. Now I am the Vice President, COREN. Looking at the topic of today, I am connected with engineering education within the telecom industry in Nigeria. I retrain engineers for the industry, but in recent years we have expanded that to retraining everybody for the industry. Then of course I was the chairman of education committee of NSE.

***E-Newsletter**: Thank you very much. We will like to know where you have gained your experiences before you decided to be involved in the training of engineers.*

Vice President, COREN: I built up a career in NITEL. I retired from NITEL 1990 and went into private practice. I am a consultant.

***E-Newsletter**: From your experiences in engineering education, comparing years in the 1970s and 1980s before you retired and now, how do you rate the training of engineers, the training of personnel for the industry?*

Vice President, COREN: I left the university in 1973; I know I developed from the basic knowledge of engineering, from hands on exposure to laboratory trainings. I know then that we were very few, in my class we were only fourteen but when I went to assist my faculty in 1990 when I retired, I found out that a class where we were fourteen was housing about ninety-eight final year students. I went to talk to the final year students, to prepare their minds for the industry. I was thinking I was going to talk to about forty to fifty people. I did some notes and made photocopies, I thought that by the time they would take the ones that they wanted, I would have the remaining, but to my surprise I saw people just trooping in, at a stage they didn't have anywhere to sit. They started sitting on windows. At that stage I knew that something have gone wrong. So in terms of infrastructure obviously its poor. The equipment and facilities that we used when we were in school were functional at that time. Not only have they not been increased now, they don't even function. So to that extent things have decayed. But let me tell you, the training of engineers have changed from the engineering that was involving moving things/goods, mechanical motion particularly in electrical components. Everything now is in solid state. In our days we considered telecommunication switch to see if actually those switches that supposed to make contacts were doing so. If they were not making contact, immediately something had gone wrong and we would start to identify the error. But today there is no contact to look at. The information that you have to know is in your brain. Virtually everything about engineering now is happening in the brain. The village I come from is Ijebu Ode in Ogun state. Rail does not pass through the place but I knew rail, I knew a train. If I saw a train I would recognise it. This is because I had seen it in the picture. There are many things you train people on television now they have never seen but they can know and do very well. We should not make the mistake of comparing infrastructure of today against infrastructure during our time and condemn the situation that the product can never be good. I want to dissociate myself from those who said that the products we are producing now are washout. I don't believe so. The people we are training now, many of them are very brilliant. They have the mind that can produce for us in the industry. What is lacking is that industry for them to go into and produce. The industry for them to work in is not there. Their preparation is not under question. I will give you an example; I was in Belgium for training in 1977. I was a graduate engineer then. They asked the Secretary of Education of the United States on television, "Mr. Secretary, the standard of Education is going down, what are you doing about it?'' He replied I'm not an educationist. I'm a politician but an educationist told me that the standard of education is not dropping that it is only the emphasis of education that has been shifted and those who acquired the older ones are thinking that it should not have shifted. It should have waited for them but in any case, the standard is falling and we are going to the moon. The standard is falling and we are building computers. The standard is falling and we are building skyscrapers. I think the standard should continue falling". That was what that secretary said in 1977. I share that view even today. My son is also an engineer. Put me down, put my son down, i think that guy is better than me, if I want to be honest with myself. He studied this engineering in the University of Lagos, the same school I attended before he migrated to the United States. My son has more opportunities now than if he had been in Nigeria. He is a different person now. I can begin to criticise him now if I want to. There are so many things I can do out of experience that he cannot do but there are so many things that guy is learning now that we were taught, so many information, equipment, machines etc at his disposal. Giving him the number of experience I have, he will do exploit. I am not saying that things are perfect; of course not, but the amount of education that is provided by the internet today was not there in our own time. That makes a lot of difference. You don't even need to be an engineer before you can draw a building. If you are ready to learn with your computer there are many things you can do. The only thing is that there is a level of understanding the engineer needs more than the other. One of the ways I identify an engineer is, the way he introduces engineering drawings, thermodynamics, the strength of materials, does he know anything about circuit theory? If he has not done these that means he has not made engineering. The engineering of today is learning those things. And those who are training them have opportunities to use these resources of today. I agree that infrastructure of that opportunity is not even buoyant enough in our universities. I have trained these people whom they said are not employable. Just for two-three days and I send them back to the industry and they come back asking, "What have you done to them?" What I did to them was just to tell them those things the industries have not been able to tell them. I am telling them from hands on, not from books. Those in the universities know those things that they need and they have taught them. When they come to the industry, there is another training that should be given to them. That is what is lacking. We should prepare for that.

Engr. Titi Omo-Ettu *FNSE*

***E-Newsletter**: You made mention of industries. If we look around our industrial areas like Port Harcourt, Lagos, Warri, Kano and the manufacturing sector, what is your perspective*

... contd. in page 2

INTERVIEW WITH ENGR. TITI OMO-ETTU, VP COREN ...contd. from pg 1

in this direction? Because after training these young engineers they need to be attached somewhere so that they can develop themselves.

Vice President, COREN: There are two things that count against us in industrial development; Energy and Corruption. I cannot imagine that an industry will exist where energy does not exist. It will only exist because they are ready to dump in too many other things to make sure they are running. I don't believe that we can do precision manufacturing in Nigeria. What I mean is that we are manufacturing toilet roll, plastic, wood but I am not aware that we can make Chinese hook and do things that involve high class precision because they are not things you manufacture with generators. Power must be available and constant. Presently, there is a setback in the manufacturing sector, where they are being folded up because of corruption and absence power. Those two things are cankerworms. When we correct these two things our country will be at peace. So don't let some people start telling us that our engineers are useless. No!

***E-Newsletter**: The last but not the least, you mention corruption and power as the two cankerworms eating up this nation. How best do you think these vital issues can be handled?*

Vice President, COREN: I want to start with power. First of all I belong to the telecommunication industry and I remember in 1994 NSE visited NEPA, Egbin. Some of our professional colleagues working there told us that there were six turbines. Three had packed up and two were as good as packed up and only one was running. They painted a very bad picture. Because of that NSE set up committee for power, telecom, aviation, we approached the industry squarely. I was in charge of telecommunication. We sat down and decided that they should liberalise the industry. We started pushing the objective for liberalization. At the same time, I also thought we should liberalize energy but our committee in charge of energy said no. That it wouldn't be that easy. We went on with telecommunication and everybody started playing role. By 1990, the role I was playing got to a point where i thought I should leave service. I left and joined them to face the industry and liberalize it. It was an objective of NSE. We started using all the influence we had. Luckily, one of us became the Minister of Information; we used him to achieve our objective, he asked me to choose who I wanted to work with and I chose Maduka. Then he was running for the Presidency of NSE. Eventually it was liberalized in 1998 and other things happened. We made an impact, I still believe we have a model there to study and the model we used is liberalization. I still believe that we should liberalize energy. What they did in power when some of use like me started saying "'if you don't liberalize power, forget it", they started changing names. Two things were our objectives. Liberalize industry and privatize NITEL that was what we said, it was only the privatization of NITEL we could achieve. Finally we liberalised in 1993, what did we do? We stopped government from throwing money and asked private people to bring their money and you know that they will want to recover their money. Forget about the fact that we are quarrelling with quality now. We are getting somewhere. This is my opinion. When we come to corruption, I don't think we were born corrupt. We need to build institution that will contain corruption. We built EFCC but it appears that the politicians are not interested in this structure but I think that's what we should do. Those of us in the profession, it is the structure we should be talking about. Though people will want to contest the structure, they will want to demolish it because those people who are corrupt now don't want it solved. If it is solved, they will not benefit because they are greedy, they want them alone to benefit. Let us build structure to carry out our profession very well. All that we talked about here is on building structure that can be sustained. Many people will not trace telecommunication to NSE but I tell you that NSE is the principal factor in telecom reform. It has come to stay. Government should liberalize power, it worked for NITEL, and it will work for power. They should stop changing names.

E-Newsletter: Thank you very much for the audience you have given us and we do hope when next we call, you will grant our request. Thank you.

The Nigerian Society of Engineers
Port Harcourt Branch
4th Annual Lecture & Awards 2009

THEME: The Challenges of Structural Engineering for Sustainable Infrastructural Development in the Niger Delta

Under the distinguish Chairmanship of
Engr. Kashim Abdul Ali, *FNSE*
President, Nigeria Society of Engineers

Eminent Lecturer
Engr. Chief (Dr) Maurice E. Ephraim, *MNSE, FNIStruct. E*

Date: Thursday 10th September, 2009

Time: 4:00 pm

Venue: Royal Banquet Hall, Hotel Presidential, Port Harcourt

Engr. Batein Max Harrison Ogariawo
Chairman

NSE PH VISITS BETA GLASS PLC, Delta State

NSE PH Annual General Meeting/ Election of new EXCO will come up on September 24, 2009 by 5:00pm at the NSE PH Secretariat.

FACE-OFF BETWEEN UNIVERSITY WORKERS IN FEDERAL & STATE UNIVERSITIES & FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

The effect of the face-off between ASUU, SSANU and NAAT (NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF TECHNOLOGISTS) is creating damages, losses and downtime to all spheres of the national economy. Man-hours lost within these months of strike are enormous if quantified. Students have started to react because their idleness is running out. The engineering infrastructure in the workshops and laboratories and facilities that require continuous operations may be forfeited because of idleness. We plead with all stakeholders, well meaning Nigerians, government and private sectors to intervene in this matter. Sincerity and truthfulness should be applied to resolve the matter with minimum delay. E-Newsletter wishes fruitful dialogue between Federal Government and various university unions.

NSE Professional Interview/Exam will come up on the 24th-26th September, 2009.

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 **N7,500.00** for **Members** & **N9,500** for **Fellows** directly to **AFRIBANK ACC No. 1420202215613** & forward all tellers to the secretariat for reconciliation. All payments should be made at the Bank