

Town Planning Consultancy Trend in Nigeria: (The Private Sector Experiences)

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ABSTRACT

The professional Urban and Regional Planner is identified as a person who has gained mastery or proficiency in planning skills, and is guided by a set of codes and ethical standards under the regulatory framework of a professional body. Professional Urban and Regional Planning consultancy in Nigeria as an outburst of The Town Planners Registration Council of Nigeria (TOPREC) established in 1988 like other professions is occasioned by socio-economic, political, administrative issues in its growth and survival. This was informed by its activities in 33 years of formal practice. This paper views the trend of the Urban and Regional Planning private practice in Nigeria with the aim of analyzing the trend in practice. The objectives are to determine the number of professional town planners, assess the town planning practice environment and to ascertain the principles of town planning practice in Nigeria. The methodology applied is qualitative in-depth review approach. It was found that Town Planning consultancy in the country is growing but has not met the desired inputs in practice over time because of economic, political and technical challenges among others. To this end, it was recommended that Consulting Town Planners should be interesting in the politics of the day in the country, there should be consistency in policy and programmes of city management by government, quick resolution of internal conflicts in the practice regulatory body (TOPREC) whenever issues arise, development of regular professional training in related technologies and involvement of financial institution in project execution in order to sustain the growing trend of practice.

Key words: Consultancy, Town, Planning.

INTRODUCTION

The profession Town planning in practice is an occupation that has assumed a dominant position in a division of labour so as to gain control over the substance of its own work. It is an exclusive occupational group possessing specialized skills based on esoteric knowledge (Abbott, 1983). On this background society grants the profession exclusive rights and monopoly to perform certain tasks backed by law. In turn the profession is expected to act in the best interests of the general public (Mautz, 1988 and Greenwood, 1957). The measures of achieving this distinction in our society are in the abilities of the Town Planner (consultant) who is a professional problem solver; whose expert knowledge may cover a number of traditional professional fields and who is particularly qualified to undertake an independent and unbiased study of a given problem and reach a rational solution'.... on commission (United Nation, 1977). Relatively, consultancy in Town planning started and progressed in different stint globally. For example at a time in 1914, the British planners resolved to find a way of professionalizing the profession with an interest to create an institute as to provide consultancy practice. In Canada, Thomas Adams and a like-minded group of individuals founded the Town Planning Institute of Canada in 1919 as to mark the official beginning of consultancy practice. Meanwhile, Town planning as an activity long predated this event. According to Adams (2007), there were two stands to these pre-professional times: the active, represented in settlement history; and the reactive was urban reform movements which ultimately led to the establishment of the Town Planning Institute of Canada.

Years after however, consultancy practice in the profession started in Nigeria and was in the formative stage during the 1960s and 1970s (Obialo, 2000). On arrival, Town Planning consultancies were influenced by Government, level of development and culture. Therefore, Town Planning consultancy practice is distinct from the way it is done in other countries (Obialo, 2000). Olarenwaju (2004) averred that statutory Town Planning consultancy had two origins; one which was from reaction of rapidly expanding unplanned and unserviced towns of industrial revolution and second was the British Town Planning Act of 1909 and 1917. The Act was borrowed and used first in Lagos state and it formed the basis for the Lagos Town Planning Ordinance of 1928 which led to establishment of the Lagos Executive Development Board (LEDB). This was a crow for Town Planning Consultancy practice and control in Nigeria.

Aim: the aim was analyze the trend in practice of the Urban and Regional Planning profession in Nigeria. The objectives were to determine the number of professional town planners, assess the town planning practice environment and to ascertain the principles of town planning practice in Nigeria.

Issues: Ideally, Town Planning Practice is very profitable and with it many cities in history have emerged, evolved and transformed to famous contemporary cities to some countries in the world. It is a gratifying profession and countries which acknowledged the values have fused the principles at the foundations of their systems of development. However, Town planning practice started more than 33 years ago in Nigeria and has not found a place in the schemes of developments in the country. Very little is known about the profession and practice especially in north, east and south of the country and in the west where it has gained minute recognitions the state government is shying away from implementing its own plans (Adelu, 2023). Steps taking to change the narratives in practice are unsuccessful because of complex interests in government at all levels, the private sector and individuals as well as members of the profession and allied professionals in the built environment. Interests in town planning practice have depleted the walls of the profession with value depositing effects in Nigeria. A major example is Obio/Akpor Local Government Area in Rivers State where every political ward has an illegitimate group of people for development control.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Practice in History:

Only very few documents exist on history of Town Planning Consultancy practice in Nigeria and this made it necessary to rely on information gathered from the pioneers of Town Planning in Nigeria. A Town Planner (Tpl.), Ayo Ojebode harangued that Town Planning Consultancy Services in Nigeria went through four evolutionary stages. These were pure indigenous, mixed/indigenous, politicians/foreign partnership and foreign dominance. The pure indigenous stage, he maintained involved the foremost professional planners in the country notably: Onafowokan M. O., Tokun S. O., Adediran and Onaofe under the firm called Urban Design Consultants (UDC).

Although, there was formal private planning practice before this group in the 1960s and the practice came with the colonial masters from 1860 – 1960 (Kadiri 1998, Olujimi 1999) by the enactment of the Town Improvement Ordinance. Subsequently, the union of the indigenous group led to the establishment of the Nigerian Institute of Town Planners (NITP) which was formally inaugurated in April, 1966 with 35 members in attendance (Obialo, 1999). However, (NITP) was a mere association after inauguration and later had a statutory backing under the land perpetual succession Act on 8th September 1974 (Olujimi, 1999). This became the formal institute responsible for the regulations of the training of professional planners. The landmark achievement among others accorded to the early indigenous Town Planners in Nigeria was the design and development of the “Bodija” Government Residential Estate in 1968 covering about 161.87 hectares of land in Ibadan, Oyo State.

The foreign consultants came in 1970s on invitation by the indigenous planners and collaborated with the indigenous consulting firms. This led to the creation of the second stage “mixed/indigenous” planning firms. The reason was that the early professionals trained abroad were few in number compared with the available Planning Projects to be handled in the country. However, the setback according to Onibokun (1979) was that the indigenous trained planners were imbued with different planning traditions which cannot be entirely applied in Nigeria without adaptations. Secondly, they were all civil servants and by the civil servant ethics were not expected to engage in private practice. Hence, the firms were indigenous but were managed by the foreign partners.

The “Amma Consults” was one of such firms fronted by Israelis consultants to prepare the master plan for the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The firm was equally engaged in the construction works. It constructed the Premier Hotel Ibadan and Presidential Hotel Port Harcourt. The CSF – BAUGMIBH of Cologne” managed by West Germans, prepared the master plan for Ajoda New Town Development in 1978. “This was a well-balanced design, suited to the needs of the present and the foreseeable future. It was comprehensive, flexible, imaginative, pragmatic and economically feasible”. The only setback in the new Town plan reflected the adoption of the “Garden City” concept developed by Ebenezer in 1902 rather than indigenous concept.

Professional planners in local politics emerged with third stage referred to as “Politician/Foreign” consultants in Town Planning. “This group came to stay due to the level of prosperity and advancements by the former two groups in the Town Planning Profession”. The politicians having observed this development invited some foreign firms for planning jobs on terms of agreement. This trend started in the 1980s. The foreign partners systematically took over and stood out as the fourth stage referred to as the “foreign dominance”. It was observed that the ascendancy of these foreign firms was reflected in the adoption of foreign concepts in the preparation of the master plans. Few of these are Sokoto master plan (1985 – 2005) whose concept was based on three alternatives: radial, concentric and incremental models and Abuja master plan (1978). In consideration of qualities and acceptability of master plans produced for Nigerian towns and urban areas, University and Colleges etc by indigenous consultants, it can be deduced that the indigenous consultants had been adequately crossed fertilized professionally by the foreign firms for being partners. This was reflected in Warri – Effurun and Environs master plan (1999 – 2019) and Akure master plan (1980 2000) among others. The major issue still remained the adaptation of foreign concept in these plans.

The hallmarks of Town Planning Consultancy practices were the significant roles played in the implementation of the various National Physical Development Plans especially after the Ten-year plan of development and welfare for Nigeria (1946 – 55). Also, Onibokun (1985) observed that not much was achieved by the planners at this time in terms of Urban and rural physical development. This he maintained as a result of limited funding and lack of town planning professionals as well as technical staff to prepare residential and industrial layouts. The only residential layouts in towns were the European Reservation Areas that were later designated Government Residential Areas (G R As). This was because the consultants lacked the expertise and staff to prepare the desired planning schemes all over the country. He confirmed that the only visible difference in the 1958-62 pre-independent development plan at the then national capital Lagos where the activities of the Lagos Executive Development Board cleared some pockets of slum areas and built shops and offices in their replacement. Others were the commencement and development of Apapa, Igamu and Ijora industrial estates, residential estates of South West Ikoyi, Apapa and Surulere as well as the reclamation of Victoria Island. Finally, the contour mapping of nearly all the parts of the country to the scale of 1:50,000.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF CONSULTANCY AND APPLICATION

Mabogunje (1978), in his paper presented at the annual conference of the (NITP) clearly explained the

principles of consultancy by highlighting four aspects of consultants' roles or functions. First, is the aspect of problem diagnosis: this means the ability to clearly articulate and diagnose the nature of the problem correctly and comprehensively. The second, is the role of flexibility: having "knowledge which may cover a number of traditional professional fields" in order to fully grasp the varied dimensions of particular problems and to have an idea of the range of professional skills which need to be brought to bear on the problems. Thirdly, objectivity: This involves the issue of unbiased evaluation of options to solving a problem. The dictum here is 'to let the problem suggest its own solution' and the fourth is realism: This entails identifying what the solution to the problem is. It is also evaluating which of the options in the circumstances of the client stands the best chance of being implemented. These principles are illustrated in simple systemic spaces (see fig. 1).

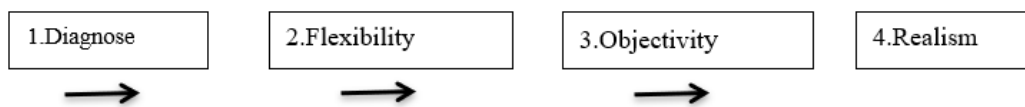


Fig. 1: Principles of Consultancy Conceptualized by Authors, 2023.

The principles in application are in linear direct from space 1 to 4 and technically in practice each space must be allocated a time to finish with which depends on the nature of job or project scope. As a matter of necessity issues related to each space must be exhaustively analyzed before the next space. This is to forestall unnecessary forward and backward movements within spaces which are costly and unprofessional in practice. These principles supported by technology in contemporary times define the quality in consultancy.

Also, Okedele and Faniran (1987) identified at least four areas where Town Planning jobs can emanate for the professional planners in private practice. These are in the local public functionaries, the State/Regional public organizations, the federal agencies and individual or private sectors. These areas of planning jobs in their opinion are initiation and implementation of planning scheme, exercising the power of development control in an area, preservation of places of national interest and historic importance (heritage sites), protection of existing services and securing of proper sanitary conditions in all settlements. Others are compulsory acquisition of land for public use within the jurisdiction of the local public functionaries, which include city; township and local government areas.

Adeniji (1983), as cited by Okedele, in Faniran (1987), pointed out areas such as formulation of policies on the overall urban development plans for the major urban centers in the state, preparation of regional development plan such as identifying certain rural settlements for development as growth points, preparation of planning brief for local and foreign planning consultants and building estates. He maintained that private consultancy firms could review plans, prepare layout report on scheme and schemes, co-ordinate activities of local planning authorities in their respective states as well as provide expert advice.

NIGERIAN TOWN PLANNING CONSULTANCY ENVIRONMENT

Town planning practices in Nigeria according to Nemeiye (1996) were dominated by foreign consultants before 1980s. Since there were hardly any indigenous physical planning consultants, the existing master plans then were all prepared by foreign firms. Nemeiye (1996), confirmed that the colonial period was characterized by urban centers of relatively large population such as Lagos, Ibadan, Benin, Calabar, Onitsha and Kano. However, the situation in post-independence was not different. Master plans were prepared by foreign firms for most of the Nigerian towns. The activities of these firms actually came to stay after the Nigerian Civil war. Town Planning Consultancy practices ranging from simple design of layouts to renewal of special districts down to comprehensive master plan were virtually prepared by foreign consultants. The

firm Max Lock and Partners produced the Kaduna master plan, American group ‘International Planning Association’ handled that for Abuja, ‘Special Consult’ a Swedish group prepared the Port Harcourt master plan; ‘Nickson and Boris’ a British group prepared master plans for some local government areas in Rivers State. Others were Greek group ‘Doxiadis’ was responsible for Jos master plan and Hungarian planning firm prepared the master plan for Calabar. Others were Swiss firm for Owerri master plan, ‘Accus Gibbs’ from South Africa prepared Greater Port Harcourt Master plan and the recent Niger Delta Regional Development Master plan was prepared by ‘South Sea Datcomm LTD’.

Town Planning Consultancy practices in Nigeria have been rosy ground for foreign firms’ overtime with little or no involvement of indigenous Town Planning consultants. Although in most cases bidding for the jobs, the indigenous firms were flawlessly outshined by their foreign counterparts as a result of ill-equipped and poorly staffed appearances. Also other factors that contribute to such defeats are linked to the complex frictions in the politics/economic interplay in the country that characterize modern practice environment. Most of these foreign firms are either a consortiums of a number of individual firms that specialized in different aspects of planning or firms whose members are drawn from various universities in their countries. The end result of such merger is successful delivery of jobs.

Another area of influence is in the capacity to deliver jobs or projects on schedule. In line with this, is a better quality jobs usually presentation by foreign firms. This to a large extent is a function of the technical back up facilities available to consulting firms of which foreign firms have the opportunity by having easy access to sophisticated printing and reproduction facilities as well as to drafting and cartographic skills. It was noted that some indigenous modern work equipment lacked maintenance of such equipment as a result of lack of technical staff. However, among other factors, there is a total distrust by our government on indigenous firms in all areas of executing Town planning projects. To cap it all, the Nigerian indigenous Town Planning consultancy firms are adulterated by perpetrators and professionals who do not belong to the Town planning profession.

TOWN PLANNERS PRACTICE STRUCTURE AND TREND

The statutory provision for registration of Town Planners in the country brings private practice to bear in the development of the nation. Also, the capacity in practice depends on those who are trained and licensed and this started in 1990 in Nigeria (see table 1). It showed that there was a sharp fall in membership in 1996 (0.1%) and 2017 the apex with (8.3%). Also, there were obvious 15years fluctuations or instabilities in registration of members perhaps as a result of managerial problems in direction of rigid policies constituting inaccessibility of potential member. Also noted were registrations between 1991 to 2006 and 2007 to 2014 presenting a steady increase. The present mean registration of TOPREC is 177 persons a year. However, the periods of decline in registration will have effects on private practice or consultancy in the profession. Worst still is the registration of short term trained persons with different professional backgrounds into practice few years ago by the regulatory body.

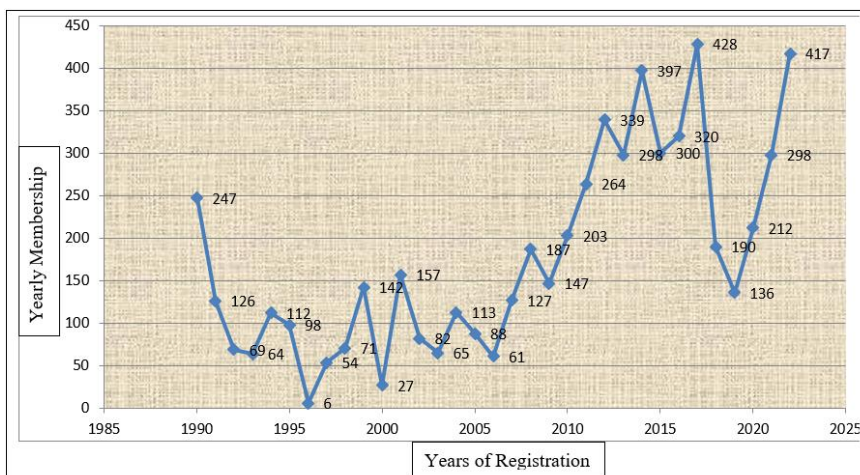
Table 1: Yearly Registered Members by Town Planners Registration Council of Nigeria (TOPREC) from inception of Town Planning Consultancy Practice

S/No	Registration Year	Yearly Membership	Cumulative	Percentage (%)
1.	1990	247	247	4.2
2.	1991	126	373	2.2
3.	1992	69	442	1.2
4.	1993	64	506	1.1
5.	1994	112	618	1.9
6.	1995	98	716	1.7

7.	1996	6	722	0.1
8.	1997	54	776	0.9
9.	1998	71	847	1.2
10.	1999	142	989	2.4
11.	2000	27	1,016	0.5
12.	2001	157	1,173	2.7
13.	2002	82	1,255	1.4
14.	2003	65	1,320	1.1
15.	2004	113	1,433	1.9
16.	2005	88	1,521	1.5
17.	2006	61	1,582	1.0
18.	2007	127	1,709	2.2
19.	2008	187	1,896	3.2
20.	2009	147	2,043	2.5
21.	2010	203	2,246	3.5
22.	2011	264	2,510	4.5
23.	2012	339	2,849	5.8
24.	2013	298	3,147	5.1
25.	2014	397	3,544	6.8
26.	2015	300	3,844	5.1
27.	2016	320	4,164	5.5
28.	2017	428	4,592	7.3
29.	2018	190	4,782	3.3
30.	2019	136	4,918	2.3
31.	2020	212	5,130	3.6
32.	2021	298	5,428	5.1
33.	2022	417	5,845	7.1
Total		5,845		100

Source: TOPREC National Secretariat, Abuja, 2022

Fig. 2 Graphical Representation of Yearly Registered Town Planners in Nigeria (SPSS, Version 25)



Source: TOPREC National Secretariat, Abuja, 2023

CHALLENGES

Town Planning is complex and very dynamic profession where the consultant undertakes a lot of analyses as to provide the best habitable environment. In this circumstance, the consultants in practice face enormous challenges in Nigeria. Few of these are the influences in the practice environment where the planning jobs exist and can be identified. The environment is infested with powerful political and economic interests that bring non-town planners and firms to bid for planning jobs successfully. Samuel and Olujimi (2009) asserted that 13.8% of planning projects in Lagos state were contracted by government in in-house deals with foreign firms. However, in only three foreign planning firms were found registered with TOPREC. In this circumstance professionalism were jettisoned or not encouraged in the country. For instance, most firms that prepared the master plans in Niger Delta in general and Rivers State in particular were not town planning firms and in the preparation stage seemed to have ignored a lot of relevant technical local contents hence the current problems in implementation of these plans. Second, is an issue of inconsistency in governance and execution of development projects for the benefits of the masses. The effects of these lead to abandonments of projects and sometimes at the conceptualization stage even where implementation strategies are feasible. For instance none of the National Development Plans articulated and adopted for implementation was totally implemented. Third, challenges are periodic management issues by the regulating professional bodies of the town planning profession in the country. This can be seen reflected at the points of fluctuations in table 1 above which are one of the reasons for the low level of registration relatively. Also, strong regulative measures had not been put in place to check quackery by the regulating bodies in training and practice. A study showed that amidst inadequate town planning firms in Lagos state 14.47% of town planning firms were managed by non-town planners and quacks. Also, 56.52% of planning firms in the state have no development programmes for their staff (Samuel and Olujimi, 2009).

Fourth is public awareness by dissemination of information on first what the planning profession is all about, second, on importance of the profession and the extent it can impact in the betterment of our human environment. Presently, town planning students find it difficult to secure industrial training positions in commercial and industrial sectors of the economy because of ignorance on the side of proprietors in what town planning students will learn or contribute to these sectors. This shows the low level of public awareness in the profession. Public participation in active policy formulation process is one of the ways of creating public awareness.

Fifth point has to do with government focus in Town Planning. No Nigerian city is consciously planned except Abuja hence they lack forms and direction of growth. Recently, it has been observed that more than 90% of households in our urban and rural areas are municipal government. This is because they provide for themselves water, electricity, roads, housing, security and all that it takes to survive. A city when planed eliminates vices and enhance city values because town planners will prepare, develop and maintain (manage) the city. Finally, there are lots of unethical (sharp) practices, sentiments and egotism within town planners in the country. This may be seen as a cold war but very destructive in practice especially where there are needs to share ideas and skills on critical issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Participation in Politics:

In Nigeria, town planners have not taken their rightful positions in politics of the day which are fundamentals in development and progress of practice. There are 774 local government areas, 36 states and capital and several cities, urban areas and communities in Nigeria that can be planned and regenerated. Frankly, each settlement type in Nigeria has several peculiar planning problems that can be solved technically planning wise. Town planning consultancy can be enhanced by the involvement of planners in

the policy making processes which are product of politics. For instance most town planning related ministries in the country are controlled by non-town planners. Right now the problem of the world is COVID-19 pandemic and town planners are looking at resilient cities against the problems of the pandemic turning out proposals in that direction for implementation. Town planning consultants can be at the apex of solutions to this problem by formulating principles for regeneration and reformation of our cities. Also, the Association of Town Planners Consultants of Nigeria (ATOPCON) has a role to play in this regard by sensitizing the public of effects of COVID-19 in our cities now and after.

Consistency in Policies and Programmes of City Management:

Although our political system allows for tenures at the three tiers of government in the country but developmental projects in the country do not follow this measure. On notice most projects handed over to new governments by the old governments are abandoned and planners who are involved in such projects are usually frustrated in the face of these abandonments. While in most cases contract terms are dismally reached and cannot be legitimized in any circumstances. **Quick Resolution of Conflicts by Regulatory Bodies**

Frequent management and administrative problems in TOPREC that lingers unduly bring a lasting damage to the profession and practice. This is because the practicing environment is competitive and will be less attractive if sister professions out play town planners in the scheme of things as a result of internal conflicts. A systemic problem can be observed in administration and regulation of the town planning profession if for 31 years of existence only 5,130 planners exist in the country and about half of this figure work in the governments.

Information and Communication Technology:

Planning firms should embrace the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) world as to assess information as at when due and format acceptable globally. Most planning consultants and staff lacked modern skills, engaged staff in little or no training programmes and ill equipped for practice.

Involvement of Other Statutory Professional Bodies:

The Town planning statutory bodies (TOPREC, NITP and ATOPCON) should have a means of involving other professional statutory bodies such as NIS (Nigerian Institution of Surveyors), NBA (Nigerian Bar Association), NSE (Nigerian Society of Engineers) etc and seek ways of reducing quackery. In this direction, there will be an exchange of ideas and materials such as the list of registered members, personal data and firms of the various professions in the built environment.

Involvement of Financial Institutions:

Town planning consultants should involve some reliable financial institutions such as the Urban Development Bank, Insurance and Mortgage banks to fund the execution of planning projects. This could be effectively done by firms carrying out feasibility study, proper quantification of projects and present them to these finance institutions. This will go a long way in ensuring effective execution of project, building confidence in the use of town planning consultants and increase the volume of planning jobs in the country.

CONCLUSION

Town planning consultancy practice in terms of training and registration of qualified people into practice is appreciating in an average of 177 professionals per year and within 33 years of existence, 5845 professionals were registered to practice the profession. It is observed that most of these professionals are either employed in the public sector or engaged in the informal sector that are not directly town planning

related. The tendency of increased yearly registration by the regulatory body of the profession within the economy and other challenges in the country depends on how the private practice thrives.

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