



The Nigerian Society of Engineers

PORT HARCOURT BRANCH

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website: www.nseph.org

e-mail: info@nseph.org

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An Interview With Engr. Kashim Abdul Ali, FNSE, President, Nigeria Society of Engineers "On The Improvement and Professional Development of Engineering Personnel"

E-Newsletter: We want to know about your experience in the profession and especially now that you are the President of NSE, our audience out there would want to know more about you.

President: I am an engineer. I served NSE at different levels. I started as the Technical Secretary in the early 1990s. I served as the Chairman of my Branch, the Vice President for several years. I was the Director of the FCT Water Board, and my area of practice is water resources engineering but I have gained a lot of experience in highways too when I was in the Ministry of Works before I went to FCDA.

E-Newsletter: As an expert in water resources what do you advise on the attainment of 2020 vision of the present administration as it affects adequate provision of potable water for Nigerians?

President: Well as an engineer I believe nothing is impossible, if there is sufficient commitment everything is possible. Vision 2020 is very ambitious, its terms are achievable that is why we have been invited to be among the members of the implementation committee. I am a member of that committee. Water supply is not something that would be a huge challenge to the committee. As I have told your governor and other governors I have met the federal government has not got any piece of land apart from Abuja. There is no place that you can say this is federal territory in the whole of this country except in Abuja and some portion of lands within states. It is the responsibility of the state to get their people water. Let us take the example of Dubai, United Arab Emirate where many Nigerians know very well. It is a very small emirate on its own. The largest emirate within UAE is Abu Dhabi. Abu Dhabi has about 80% of the land mass and also has 86% of almost all the resources. So Abu Dhabi used to give money to other Emirates like Dubai. It was with such money Dubai had and their little internal revenue they chose to bring development and today everybody is migrating there. So, it means the state government can decide to turn around the economy of their own. To provide water is simple and affordable as most state capitals have very small population. It is shocking that they can not provide basic water. They have a small population, for a state capital they have a per capita demand of not more than 150 even at 100 per capital per day is sufficient for most of the state. And when you have small population may be about 200,000 or even less, then all you need is like an equipment storage capacity of about 10,000 m³ per day. It is not so expensive to run and there are a lot of water sources. So honestly to me the state governors are responsible for lack of water in their states. This is my position on that and I believe it is achievable. Globally looking at vision 2020, it is all encompassing. The expectation of the government is that the Local government will work, the state government will work and the federal government will complement it then we can have a goal, a developed infrastructure. If all these elements would work, definitely it is achievable but if it does not work, I can assure you, putting up of physical infrastructures, is not something the federal government can do easily. The responsibility of the federal government is to build roads, that is inter-state roads and to do develop Abuja and they would have to do what they need to do. But states do collect their money and use the money to develop their infrastructure. For instance now the states have been given the autonomy to invest in independent power projects. We are working towards a situation where there can even be the integration of the network and people can isolate themselves from the general network and decide to provide themselves with power. I am sure the government will accept that but nobody has been able to propose that to the government because maybe they do not have that kind of courage. For me I place the blame on the state government, they should take the bold steps if they want to do this. I don't think it will cost so much.

E-Newsletter: Thank you sir. What about the maintenance of the



Engr. K. A. Ali, FNSE

structure in place, how can it be handled bearing in mind our peculiar culture?

President: well it is not only maintenance. There is an unfortunate attitude we have in Nigeria. It starts from the traditional settings, if you grew up in a village and you have an uncle who knows you from birth, he knew you when you were running about naked, when you going to school, so by the time you become a professor, he still sees you in the image of that little boy that was running about

naked. He keeps on referring to you as small boy. This idea is carried to our national life. Initially, you have city, it starts with a small population and it keeps growing. Before in Kaduna, you could drive on a city to Malali and you pass through cities that are not developed. Development started taking place before the FESTAC, 1977. Usually planning to provide infrastructures, one should make provision of growth. So if you planned at the time Kaduna was may be say 50,000 and today, now that Kaduna is about 1.80 million or more, then you are still looking at that old population and feel that the water capacity then can be sufficient for them now. That is impossible. Even in Abuja we experience similar thing because at a point in Abuja any where you are, you had water, we had electricity, in fact you could depend on these infrastructure because the population was quite small. But immediately the federal government moved the seat of power here, population exploded. But we could handle it because there was an over estimation of the phenomenon, at least we are catching up. All the states should do same. You can not design a road today that will last for ever. There is nothing that last forever even the creatures of God. It is not only the problem of maintenance, but also the problem of maintaining what have been expanded when the needs arises. Both go together. We must be able to expand and if we don't it brings about crisis. We make projection for population that we know that will grow. Because when you provide water, people will migrate, when you provide power, people will migrate, if you construct a road through a place, houses will develop along that road. Government should know that infrastructure brings about human migration; therefore this must be taken care of.

E-Newsletter: Thank you very much sir for the explanation. At this point let us look at one of the challenges of NSE. It has been observed that some of the members obtain their certificates and disappear. What strategies does NSE have to check mate this trend?

President: Well there is a continuous review of following the processes but we also do have what we call the Nigerian Society of Engineers' School of Engineering Practice. This is an opportunity for you to do training and re-training, seminars and workshops are organized from time to time and members are encouraged to participate. But beyond all this, you see the attitude as described of some of our colleagues. Well some of them have good reasons. There is a role of disillusionment because we are in a country where we don't have enough engineers. Can the numbers of engineers we have take care of the problems we have? There are still unemployed ones. It is enough to make people feel disillusioned and beginning to move out from engineering to other fields. The banking sector today is running because engineers have migrated there. So these are the problems we have. What are we doing? In the course of my moving around the branches and of course I visited institutions offering engineering courses, I tried to plead with them, things aren't working well definitely but if we are not patience and steady fast we will lose it all. We lost quite some grounds but we need steadfastness and perseverance to at least recover some of these things. What are we doing? We are aiding the government because the truth about engineering is that if you

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need to practice in the area of construction, the capital out lay is very huge. If you say people should come together to promote purpose, how many would have to come together to put up billions of naira, people that have no job where are they going to get the money from to put together the kind of capital out lay they required? So what can we do then? We need to develop policies that encourage indigenization. We are talking to government about that line. So far what's the success rate? Pretty low, but we are still talking. For the fact that they have invited us to vision 2020 is an indication that it could be listened to. Our engagement with several key officials of government is quite encouraging. But while we are at it, the expectation is that all of us have to do our best where ever we find ourselves, we have to clean our corners. If each and every one of us will clean his or her corner, then we have a bowl that is clean. Let us distinguish ourselves wherever we serve, so that people will know that we behave the way we do because we are engineers and this will help to change public perception about engineers. Because right now, why it is difficult to continue with this technique is that there is a huge negative perception by the public or orchestrated by those who don't mean well, those who believe that they must push out professional engineers for them to survive would go to all extent to do that. So in such situation we need to be completely patient and persevere. I know that it can only get better but if we just take our registration, take membership and go away, it will make the problem to be complex. Because when they need to see us, many of us will not be there to be utilized.

E-Newsletter: *The last issue for us to consider is the University Lecturers. Is there any plan or strategies because of the nonchalant attitude of our lecturers towards activities such as training and developing themselves? Do not forget that the university administration is not encouraging staff in this direction.*

President: For the universities that are doing their promotion without professional registration for engineering lecturers I just pity them because as you heard yesterday, the tribunal has been inaugurated, the official instrument has been issued by the Chief Justice of Nigeria. There are many offenses that are punishable by the tribunal. One is them is to promote somebody who is not qualified by virtue of not being registered but again I have my sympathy for the lecturers because they are working under poor conditions. The work is not being appreciated because for anybody to go back to the university after acquiring an engineering degree, it means he is patriotic that will be one of the driving forces. It is once again good to be consistent; if you are patriotic you should be ready to loose some of your rights and privileges in order to make other people happy. But the general situation makes everybody unhappy. I don't think that there is any engineer in Nigeria that is happy because there are jobs to be done but they are not given to them to do, yet they are being criticized. A road fails, nobody cares to know the history of that road, perhaps when the award for construction was given no Nigerian Engineer was involved. It was given to somebody who studied geology; the road is bound to fail. You can imagine unhappiness of the Nigerian Engineers; number one, you were not given the job to do, when it failed, you were the one to be blamed and when you try to explain, nobody wants to listen. I had a discussion with the national assembly sometime ago, I was quite angry with them. because you can't tell us that there is anybody in Nigeria who can do better than the Nigerian Engineers because we all went to school in this country and the people doing engineering were the brightest in their classes, so if they beat you in primary school, secondary school and they went to the universities for courses which you were scared to come closer to, why do you



Engr. Ali & Engr. Dr. Ujile

think you are better than them. In fact, I told them, why they think it is so easy to practice engineering and very difficult to study it? Something must be wrong. You find it easy doing something that you do not know, and then you are not doing the right thing definitely. Unfortunately when mediocre practice it, so many people are victims. However, we are becoming more and more effective in the control but it takes time. That is why we call on engineers to be patient. We've suffered for a very long time; we can not recover what we have lost fifty years ago in a few days or years. We have to be steadfast and raise our voices; it is not only for the president but the whole engineers in Nigeria. But today we have amongst us black sheep, who for their personal benefit would sell their birth right. You will see an engineer who will go and represent even an illiterate to bid for job. It is not that he is going to be involved in the project but the person will give him some small money so that he puts his name against the project while he is not there. We are having collapses today where engineers are involved in the design but they are not allowed to go to the site. They say no, you have finished your own and they go ahead to put something else on the site. Today if you want to build a house in FCT there must be full fledge professionals to do the designing and the supervision. And if there is any reason of disengaging any engineer from a site, it should be done in accordance with the ethics. In that way it will be easy to know who is responsible for any collapse. We don't need to go looking for the engineer physically, we will just go to his records, pick his identification and hand it over to COREN and he will be dragged to the tribunal. And I know no engineer will want to be dragged to tribunal.

E-Newsletter: *We want to thank you for the audience you granted us.*

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INVITATION LETTER TO NSE NATIONAL CONFERENCE AND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING "YANKARI 2008"

The National Engineering Conference and Annual General Meeting of the Nigerian Society of Engineers will hold from **24th – 28th November, 2008** at the **Multi-purpose Sports Complex, Bauchi**.

The **theme** of the conference is **"Strategies for the Attainment of Vision 20/2020"** The Conference registration fee which also covers the Conference materials is N20,000 for Members who register before 31st August, 2008, and N25,000 after August 31st, 2008.

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