



# The Nigerian Society of Engineers

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## An interview with Engr. Anthony Abolarin on Engineering Perspective in the Sustainable Niger Delta Development

*Engr. Anthony Abolarin is the General Manager for NDDC Affairs in Total Exploration and Production, which is the extreme sector of Total. Equally, he represents the company in Niger Delta Development Commission. Currently, he is the special adviser to the Managing Director. By virtue of Engr. Abolaein being the chairman of the Nigerian Council of the Society of Petroleum Engineers, he also has the privilege of being the chairman of the Petroleum Division in the Nigerian Society of Engineers. We spoke with him on Engineering Perspective in the Sustainable Niger Delta Development*

**E-Newsletter:** Can you tell us what the specific challenges of the Niger Delta region is? We have been having this issue of Niger Delta resource control and all that. What are the specific challenges of the Niger Delta region?

**Engr. Abolarin:** I guess we can try to simplify. It looks so much complex when we look at the environment today. But I think it is a lot simpler than what it is. The problems we are facing perhaps, just an exaggeration of works from a few people. But the deeper agitation below is more fundamental and basically it can be summarized in the yielding for development. You can interpret it in many ways, but the summary is that the people would want to enjoy the benefit of the resources coming out of the region; coming out of the country as members and citizens. To that, development gets to them as well. You can today put that in concert format by saying how does the master plan which has been proposed for the Niger Delta region get implemented? In summary, we want to look at what is the challenge of Niger Delta. That is it.

**E-Newsletter:** Thank you very much Sir. What are the engineering perspectives in Sustainable Niger Delta Development?

**Engr. Abolarin:** Ok. From an engineering point of view, maybe I can also try to make it clearer. If you take the Niger Delta as an engineering problem, if you are asking what engineering solution can we apply to solve the Niger Delta problems? So if you look at it as I mentioned the challenge or the problem to solve is that of developing the Niger Delta. So from this angle, what are the engineering challenges? There are specifically, a few problems that are basically engineering but some others are social problems which is part of what I will like to emphasize. Engineering have gone beyond iron and electrons, we have emerged also to have solutions, engineering solutions to social problems that is why we have social engineering. So from all the angles it is something we can actually deal with from my engineering perspective. So let's talk about core engineering problems. As at today, we do have the terrain to battle with. It's not a simple lean road like you have on relatively consolidated soil in most part of the Niger Delta. So you do have to design according to the terrain. All that you need to do in terms of construction. Besides that, you are talking about relatively good amount of funding. Funding from my own point of view is not the problem because

all it takes is that, whatever fund is available, you utilize it in the most optimum way to solve the problems that it covers and as funds comes in, and you keep solving them progressively. When I say progressively, I mean progressively, not repetitively. Where you solve a problem, it comes



Engr. Anthony Abolarin

back on you, you go back to solve it, that's not the solution. Progressively, is you solve it once and for all in a systematic manner and it allows you build on what you have already solved to move further until the entire problem is resolved. Of course, in the human environment, it is never totally resolved but at least you can put a few things behind so that you can spend and act more. So we do have that aspect and that financing to my knowledge is not much of a problem. If you look at the amount of money available in the region, either directly or so, funding from external agent or donor or whoever, we do not have so much problems of finances as far as I'm concern. So I don't see that as an engineering problem as far as I'm concerned. I'm also looking at the engineering problems; that of raw materials. The raw materials are not developed sufficiently to make it comfortable for the Nigerian engineers to design according to the terrain. That is probably a pre-engineering problem which is that of research into these areas of development but thereafter, I think we then have the major social problem, people are not taking the education especially in the sciences seriously enough and the educational standards that are supposed to be growing with time are stagnating and it is curious that a lot of children are not too interested in their academia that would have been the background for approaching all the problems in the scientific engineering way. So we do have the challenge that we do not have a lot of successor behind who are ready to move forward in solving these prob-

lems. The reason perhaps is also linked to the ease with which money is received by some rather front liners. So I think basically we will be looking at the capacity development as problem. We are looking at the number of engineers available to resolve the problems, that's another challenge and then we are looking at the terrain, that's another problem and then of course the local solutions which are not being developed because it is not easy to always bring foreign materials, foreign experts, foreign everything to come and solve the Niger Delta problems. So we have to do our best to move and solve it. So that's what I will say is my own view about engineering challenges. They are not many.

**E-Newsletter:** Thank you very much. Our very last question is what engineering advice do you have to give to the government and all stakeholders that will help for a sustainable Niger Delta Development.

**Engr. Abolarin:** When you say engineering advice, it's probably covered in what I have said. I know of countries of the world that isolate problems and isolate people to solve them. They are aware, a group of people have the capacity to solve them and then they give them all that are required. They give them access to information, they give them necessary funding and so on and so forth and of course, since they are also members of the society, they make them sufficiently comfortable to take care of their families, relatives and all that. They try to focus them on the problems, instead of a lot of distractions, including political distractions. I use that name NDDC as a point. There is such social political call on the leaders of the NDDC that they hardly have time for the core assignment of developing the Niger Delta; too many calls, such are political distractions. Then of course, we do have youth milling around in multiples. I call that the social distraction also. So I think the major thing that one should ask is: I think the government is cable of doing it. Giving some core experts the time to settle down, look at the problems, analysis them and find solution to them. That could be the responsibility of the government. For the stakeholders I think, they might imagine it that, they probably think it is not time to resolve the problems of Niger Delta. Maybe it is not biting enough; maybe solutions that are currently available maybe are satisfactory. So most of the time, when stakeholders gather, they do not think of solving a problem, they deliberate on past experiences and what they have seen and heard. They talk about the past but very little of the future. I think stakeholders within the Niger Delta should begin to sit down and think about solutions without having to deliberate too much on whose fault is worse, who have not done this, and who have not done that. The stakeholders themselves should as quickly as possible, sit down to look at solving the problems and they do have the master plan, as a focal document. Let's start by asking: how do we implement this document? Do we have the resources to do it?



Engr. Anthony Abolarin & Engr. Otuneh, Otuneh J.

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Are we ready to do it? Basically, when that question is answered, the stakeholder would begin to realize that the problems have not been solved. So, I like to simplify these things and not to make them look like gigantic problems. I don't think the Niger Delta problems are so many and I don't think they are deep enough. I think it just takes a whistling and then telling everybody to get set and let's go. You will see that Niger Delta will be another superlative region that attracts people from outside

Africa and the world such that it would be a reference point, whether in terms of social setting, peaceful environment or in terms of physical development or in fact, economic development. We have all the resources, we are very much blessed with all the varieties that we have in Niger Delta.

*E-Newsletter: Thank you very much Sir, we are very grateful for the little time you spared for us to have this interview with you. We are very grateful.*



Technical Presentation on Engineering Solutions to the Perennial Flooding of Port Harcourt & environs delivered by Dr. K. D. S. Abam of IGST, RSUST at the branch secretariat on 8/4/2010



NSE PH Branch EXCO members during April 2010 EXCO meeting at the branch secretariat on 8/4/2010



Some NSE PH Branch EXCO members during the burial ceremony of Prof. Bob-Manuel's mother. Sitting left is Prof. Bob-Manuel. Others are: Dr. Ephraim, Prof. Hart, Chief Oruye, Engr. Ikenyiri and Engr. Mrs. Ohagwa paying condolence to Prof. Bob-Manuel in his home.



Some NSE PH Branch EXCO members during the burial ceremony of Engr. (Chf) Derefaka's daughter on Saturday, 27/03/2010. L-R: Engr. Mrs. Ohagwa, Engr. Ikenyiri, (Secretary) Engr. (Chf) Derefaka, Engr. Denis Dania (Vice Chairman) and Engr. Minabo Jack. (Treasurer)



On Saturday April 3rd 2010, the Eze, chiefs & people of Rumuchorlu Community in Abio/Apko LGA in Rivers State organized a reception in honour of Engr. Chief Giandomenico Massari, FNSE as their own son.

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You can also call or e-mail; Tunde Salihu: 08033246068, tunde.s@ieee.org & Gloria Chukwudebe: 08033279081, gloriachukwudebe@yahoo.com

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