

PROFILE/INTERVIEW OF MR OBAFEMI OLUWOLE ONASHILE, FNIQS



Mr Obafemi Oluwole Onashile (FNIQS) is the Managing Partner at Consol Associates, an international Quantity Surveying, Project Management and Construction Cost Consultancy firm with Head office in Lekki, Lagos State and branches in Lagos Island, Kaduna , Abuja, Kigali (Rwanda) and Ghana.

He is a native of Ijebu-Igbo in Ogun state. He had his primary education at Ebenezer African Church Primary School, Oke Ado, Ibadan between 1970-75 and proceeded to Federal Government College, Odogbolu, Ogun State between 1975 – 80 where he finished his secondary school education with a Grade 1 in WASCE. He graduated from University of Ife, now Obafemi Awolowo University (February, 1986). He also possesses a Masters degree in Project Management from University of Lagos (2005 – 2007).

Mr Onashile is a Fellow of The Nigerian Institute of Quantity Surveyors (NIQS), Fellow of The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, United Kingdom (RICS); an Associate Member of The Chartered Institute of Building Services Engineering (CIBSE), and Fellow of The Quantity Surveyors Institute, United Kingdom (QSI).

He started his work experience with Lagos State Development and Property Corporation (LSDPC) and Adebayo Alatishe and Partners (both for Industrial Trainings). He did his National Youth Service Corp programme (NYSC) at Niger State Ministry of Education but seconded to Niger State Ministry of Works. He worked briefly in Kaduna (8 months) with Tillyards & Partners under training and came to Lagos to work with Group Q Associates (1988 – 1991). He left Group Q Associates in January, 1992 to set up the Lagos office of Consol Associates in February, 1992. Due to his restless nature and full of energy during his early stage of practice, he also set up a construction company (focused on small and medium sized commercial development) running parallel without overlapping with his consultancy business . The construction

company grew so much but had to be shut down after 10 years of operation when he had the urge to further his education.

Recently, the Editorial Board had a brief interview session with Mr Obafemi Onashile in his office at Lekki, Lagos. Below are his responses to questions asked:

Who inspired you to study Quantity Surveying (QS)?

No particular person inspired me to study Quantity Surveying, but, I will say I got into Quantity surveying by providence. I was admitted to study Civil Engineering at the University but after benchmarking my capacity in year 1 to the rigours associated with Civil Engineering, I opted for Quantity Surveying in year 2. Thereafter, few Quantity surveyors I met in my early learning stage (Mr Ayodele Akele at LSDPC and Mr Olusegun Ajanlekoko, PPNIQS at Group Q Associates) encouraged me and this made me to conclude that I am in a good family (quantity surveying family) that helps new entrants to grow.

During your tenure as Chairman of the NIQS Lagos Chapter, Business Luncheon was organized. Can you share your experience and impact of this activity on the QS profession in Lagos State in particular and Nigeria in general? Are you planning to extend this to the National after your inauguration as the President of NIQS?

Through the grace of God, I became the Chairman of NIQS Lagos Chapter. I never planned for it and never wanted it. I got into NIQS politics by accident. I keep telling people that I am not a politician. I never for once said I want to be this, I want to be that. I was made the NIQS Lagos Chapter Publicity Secretary during the first meeting I attended where I spoke on low awareness of the meeting by QS in Lagos. We did the Business Luncheon to create a platform for networking amongst the QS profession and other allied professions having observed similar trend at RICS. Through business luncheon an atmosphere for members to know each other was created. My research revealed to me that you cannot be a good professional without networking. Therefore, I strongly believe that this laudable programme should be sustained both at Chapters and National level.

Also, as the former Chairman of the Flagship Chapter (NIQS Lagos), you organized an International Conference on Contract Claims Management and Administration. Are we expecting more of this at the National?

There were two goals that we (the Senate of Lagos Chapter – as it wasn't a solo effort on my part) tried to achieve with the international conference on contract claims management. One, was to benchmark Nigeria quantity surveying practice with what obtains internationally. Two, was to create a forum for all professionals in the built industry to come together to discuss on issues of common interest such as effective contract management. This was why a subject matter that could bring Construction Industry players together was carefully selected as the theme of the international conference. To achieve this, a World Renowned International Expert in Claims, Mr Roger Knowles (a Chartered Quantity Surveyors and Chartered Arbitrator) was invited to share his wealth of experience on the topic. By the grace of God, we shall try to organize some Conferences of this nature at the National level. Organizing conferences like this will create more opportunities for QS outside the shore of the country especially in West Africa countries where there are vast opportunities yet to be explored.

Your passion for the upcoming QS is not in doubt. What are your plans for them after your inauguration as the President of NIQS?

Our education system in Nigeria does not equip the young ones for the job market. They come out of the school without knowing what to do. We hope, by the grace of God to look into personal development and life coaching. You cannot say you want to be a QS without networking. You must interact with people and also have a decorum in relating. Also, we hope to help the young ones by teaching them business development so that they will know some business strategies that they might not be easily exposed to after graduation. I believe this should surely help them to have confidence in starting up and sustaining big quantity surveying practices. I hope this may be achieved through mentorship programmes. As a Council,

We will try to encourage and guide the young ones on special skills acquisition and also create platform to achieve this.

There is a debate that there cannot be an effective project cost control in the construction industry without the involvement of a Quantity Surveyor. What is your opinion on this?

One word, collaboration. No man is an island. The industry needs QSs, the QS also in return needs the other stakeholders. It's all about collaboration. I will describe a QS as the Financial and Contractual Administrator of construction procurement. A QS is a financial, contractual and administrative expert. You cannot do anything cost control if you don't put design, contract and management into consideration. No singular profession can claim to have all these three characteristics. That is why collaboration is very key to controlling the cost of any project.

Some opined that disputes and settlements of contractual claims have great impact on project delivery. Do you agree with this? Could you please share your brief experience on how to avoid disputes during contract administration?

Of course, I agree with your first question that disputes and settlements of contractual claims have great impact on project delivery. Again, to explain this, emphasis should be on collaboration. If there is effective collaboration, there will be no dispute and no claim to settle. Collaboration is also about the relationship management. If you have good relationship with other stakeholders, claims might be overlooked. It is important that every QS establishes good relationships with his/her co-consultants especially through effective communication. Excellent and correct project documentation where errors are avoided also ensures the avoidance of claims. Where there is equity and fairness in dealing, you will avoid disputes and claims. Where you pay full attention to the project as it evolves, you will avoid disputes and claims. Also, if you imbibe quick turnaround time for issues, it easily quenches disputes and claims on a project.

What are your views about the clamouring for restructuring in Nigeria and how will it affect the Quantity Surveying Profession in particular and Construction Industry in general?

Well, this is politics and like I said earlier I am not a politician. Only one thing is constant in life and that is change. For me, it's an issue about some people clamouring for change. Change will always come with resistance and since change is constant, we should not be scared about it. So, if some people are clamouring for restructuring let's have an open mind, let's review what is the extent of restructuring being requested. What are the merits and the demerits of restructuring? Now, in looking at it, we must then be very open minded, we must do critical inward review of the existing structure based on equity and fairness. If truly, there are genuine grievances, then the restructuring can be done. Look at Britain, they voted to leave Brexit and they are still living. The restructuring must however be done to ensure that it does not kill what is on the ground. It must be a controlled restructuring to bring out the best. A win-win situation for everybody. By my little knowledge of politics, I will want to assume that the restructuring being clamoured for is to go back to regional government which I believe from experience of the past may augur well for the country. There is likely to be competitive developments among the regional governments and this should boost the economy. In return, competitive development will create more opportunities for QS. This will ultimately snowball into all states of the federation becoming viable. I will also want to look at restructuring as a sort of bringing liberalization into governance. When there is liberalization, it enhances development. Liberalization or restructuring should bring development and when there is push for development, QSs will be the most beneficial of it. So, restructuring may be good for us.

The recent statistics released by National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) indicates that Nigeria has come out of economic recession. What advice do you have for government to avoid future occurrence?

I will just go straight to the point. I will say, henceforth, the government should ensure massive and effective investment in infrastructure. There must be diversification of income base from mono commodity (Crude Oil) to poly commodities. There must be a responsible economic oversight from top down. All these can be achieved by building appropriate institutions or structures by the government to manage those three things I said earlier.

What might someone be surprised to know about you?

Surprise to know about me? My secrets? That, I will say is my level of trust in the Almighty God. It's God that does everything, no matter how you plan or strive or do, it is God. And when you know your God, things will be very easy for you.

What advice do you have for young and upcoming Quantity Surveyors?

Simple. Trust in the Almighty God and lean not on your own understanding.

If you were not practicing Quantity Surveying, what would you be doing instead, or what would your life be like?

May be if I did not have the opportunity to change my course in the University, I would have been a Civil Engineer. Yes, I might have been a very renowned and very successful engineering contractor or perhaps, by now, I might have been a Supreme Court Justice or even perhaps, be the CBN governor because I would have read Law or Accounting / Finance

What is your plan in training educational institutions in Nigeria?

For sure, we would try to carry all aspects of the profession up together. No stone will be left unturned. God will help us, the Council will be focused. Apart from helping the young entrants into the profession, also, we would try to assist the Institutions teaching QS in many ways. As you know, the Council is a collection of Officers, I will want to refrain from saying I will do this or that. I am aware the Institute (NIQS) is already doing so. For instance, sponsorship for post graduate degrees for lecturers which I think I would want to thank the Past Presidents that put this scheme in place. Yes, in Lagos, we had donated books in the past. I believe they are still doing this in Lagos chapter. We would explore organizing day courses or symposia to help the institutions. But, I do realize there is an officer in charge of education policies of the Institute and I would not want to dictate to him as I believe he will also have his own vision on this.

How will you help the QS to have a major breakthrough into Oil and Gas Sector?

It is preparing ourselves for those challenges. For instance, NLNG is already using Quantity Surveyors. Mobil and Shell also are using QSs. Perhaps, in the past, the challenges the QSs have been having, is finding it hard to work within their sector. The Oil & Gas Industry sector is very health and safety conscious. Unfortunately, our industry is not as focused on health and safety and therefore an average firm in the industry especially QS Firms may find it difficult to work in Oil and Gas Sector presently. We need to overhaul our Contract Conditions to take into account health and safety requirements.

What type of legacy do you want to leave after your tenure as the President of NIQS?

I like to leave that in the hands of the Almighty God, the Alpha and Omega who knows it all and can do all things. But I will be most grateful if God will grant me the opportunity to leave a legacy that will be inspirational not only to QSs but to every Nigerian, African and Human Being. By His grace, we will try our best to take the profession of QS to the next level. Thank you.