

Improving Participation of Underrepresented Group: Projecting the Image of the Nigerian Female Surveyor.

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Summary

The issue of image, image enhancement, and all the associated derivatives or adjectives as could be applied to any group of persons, society, or profession is often considered as a major component vital to the survival of such bodies all over the world (Okokon, U. Essien 2004). . The importance of this concept, if we could so classify it, is underscored by the fact persons, groups, and governments to name a few, go to great lengths to launder their image, sometimes using second or third parties. This is principally because it pays for one to be perceived positively by other persons, groups, clientele, and custodians of other interests or stakeholders in whatever the subject – object is doing, or professes to be doing.

In professional studies, the issue of gender does not arise; people are selected according to their qualifications and performances. Once selected and admitted, both the male and female students attend some lectures, write the same exams, and at graduation, have the same qualification. This means that both the male and the female have equal opportunities for employment or they both could offer a good service to the nation in relation to their professional ethics.

In Nigeria this is not the case. Admissions are done according to merit into the Nigerian universities or polytechnics offering Surveying and recently named Surveying and Geoinformatics. In some years no female student will apply, in other cases you may have one or two female students who were admitted amidst 15, 20 or 30 male students as the case may be.

In the course of study, some of the male counterparts try as much as possible to discourage their female colleagues amongst them telling them that their place is in the kitchen and that they can not continue in the survey profession. Hence, after their first year in the university or polytechnic, they tend to change from surveying to other courses such as management, marketing etc. Only those who are determined, head strong and are encouraged by some of the lecturers or other mentors succeed in making it till the end, and graduate.

After graduation, the female surveyor is faced with the problem of employment, in most cases they are rejected thinking that she cannot do any hard work or meet the surveying demands. You now find that, most of the female surveyors after graduation venture into other fields. Some who graduated with a second class upper could not put what they study into use, they

had to go back to school to study marketing, accounting etc at the end they became bank workers. Those who remained headstrong remained unemployed for many years until luck or favour will shine on them.

This paper intends to discuss on ways to improve the participation of under-represented groups, projecting the image of the Nigerian female surveyor. It discusses the issues, the challenges and prospects of the female surveyor and try to proffer solutions to these problems.

INTRODUCTION

Every community of persons has a potential for conflict. Or to put it better, every community of persons suffers a capacity for conflict.

A beehive is a community of bees consisting of a queen bee, some drones and a swarm of worker bees. The queen “reigns” in a “royal cell”, the worker bees do all the work there – building the cells, gathering all the food and “guarding” the community. When a given worker becomes aged and tired it flies away to die outside the nest so that it does not constitute a burden for the rest of the community. If the worker bees ever begin to agitate for equal rights, then the entire hive as we know it will cease to exist.

The question is, among human beings who of the sexes can be as totally and disinterestedly selfless as the worker bees?”

Hardly any. Instead, we find domination, intimidation, competition, frustration, retaliation etc. as the trademark of inter-sex relations, and the cause of much unhappiness and dissatisfaction. And by and large “woman” has been the worse for it. Even though mention can be made of quite a number of women who have made it in human history, yet the vast majority of women have been at the receiving end, less pay for equal work, denial of inheritance and education, limited opportunities for decision – making etc.

Mutual antagonism and suspicion can only dissipate energies and frustrate growth. Rather, individual talent and hard work should be recognized without reference to sex. And allowance should be made for those factors of gender which impact negatively on an individual’s ability or performance.

What a shame that community of bees has a better grasp of living than man, God’s choicest creature. The building of a house requires a mason, fitter, carpenter, plumber, electrician, and painter... each contributing his own art or talent. It is co-operation between these different artisans that produces a beautiful and serviceable house.

The male and the female have unique gifts to contribute to human society just like the parts of the human body, each must try to understand the strength and accommodate the weaknesses of the other. This has to be so since the all knowing God has His purpose for creating them male and female. It is only in this mutual cooperation that they can fulfill the will of God and inherit His blessings to “Fill the earth and conquer it (Emeasoba, E. A, 2005).

It could be inferred from the above that God did not make a mistake in creating them male and female; this is for a special purpose to create an efficient team to make the world a better place for human co-existence.

It is in the light of the above that I x-ray the defects of the unhealthy complex that exists amongst the male and female surveyors in Nigeria. This situation certainly will not augur well for a healthy and better human co-existence as the creator intended in His master plan.

ISSUES

SURVEYORS EDUCATION / TRAINING

No doubt as professional surveyors, we all know what surveying training entails I stand to be informed of a survey institution that is made up of one sex only. They are always co-educational institutions that have as students both male and female. No preferential treatment is giving to one as against the other. All are made to pass through the actual rigours of the training. In fact the female who is not used to trekking carrying the usually in most cases heavy survey equipment is most hit. If she must succeed she had to get used to it for the period she had to spend in school, usually five years in the polytechnics and the universities (full time Programme). Having acquainted herself with the training and equipped with the requisite knowledge she bounce unto the market overt ready to deliver, but unfortunately her dreams are shattered by the reality in the profession were the men have carved out for themselves an empire that will not accommodate a female which they always regard as a weak and are perpetually so.

The male chauvinism is so extreme in Nigeria that one wonders if actually women were ever admitted to read the surveying course. Or if our male counterparts had ever had anything to do with a female let alone a female surveyor.

It is quite disheartening that having gone through the thick and thin of the course, one is so deprived to actualize her aspirations and dreams. It is frustrating, that the level playing ground in school had been turned into something else in the real world due to reasons that are unforeseen.

However some glimpse of hope is gradually coming in. Thanks to the likes of late Surv. Mrs. Olayinka Omolabake Adekoya, who despite the rough terrain prevalent in the country, rose to the enviable height of the Surveyor -General of the Federation of Nigeria. She is really an icon from whom the Nigerian female Surveyors draw her steam.

Another that is worthy of note is Surv. (Dr.) Prince Terry Lucky Noah FNIS Who despite the common practice of not engaging female surveyors staked his neck to engaging me in his team (Terino Surveys Ltd). This was my first employment in 1995 after series of rejections.

Space will not permit to list these rejections vis-avis their irrelevant reasons. This spans from private to governmental establishments.

However, I cannot but include a peculiar encounter by a female surveyor when she went for an interview for employment in a survey firm. This establishment had heither to published for the post of a surveyor, the panelist were predominantly men and she was asked if she was representing anyone? When she said no, that she is a surveyor, they simply told her that there is no vacancy for women. What a dilemma she had to put up with. The list is endless of what so many female surveyors had encountered in the past and in recent times.

WOMEN – IN - SURVEYING

Surveying has always been seen and perceived by many as an exclusive preserve for men from time. This may not be for long. There are indeed women in surveying who are accomplished and distinguished in every sense. The women in surveying in the present dispensation had decided to drop their background toga and become more visible and proactive in the affairs of the Nigerian Institution of Surveyors, in the profession and in the country at large.

It is against this backdrop and to sustain the above tempo that the women in Nigeria had resorted to establishing an umbrella and complementing association that will champion their course. It is tagged “Women – In – Surveying”. The mission is that “women shall form at least 30% of the total membership” of the Nigerian Institution of Surveyors and actively participate in all NIS Programmes.

Before now, female surveyors constitute about 3% of the total membership of the Nigerian Institution of Surveyors, and they are hardly seen to participate in the affairs of the Institution. With the establishment of Women – In – Surveying, the percentage of women has increased from 3% to 8%. This figure though still poor, the Women – In – Surveying still have a lot of work to do to achieve their vision.

The following however, are the proposed media by which the organization hopes to achieve its target:

Amongst others it intends to

- Organize workshops / seminars to create interest in the profession by young ladies at every Annual General Meeting (AGM) of NIS in the hosting region and zones.
- Massively mobilize women graduating from higher institutions as surveyors to register as members of NIS and WIS
- Encourage more women to attempt the Surveyors Council of Nigeria (SURCON) Examinations and aspire to get registered.
- Encourage more women to venture into private practice.

- Formulate and cause to be implemented ideas and policies that will improve the image of the female surveyor.
- Cause to be established a special scholarship fund for young girls who are reading Surveying and Geomatics in our institution of higher learning.

The women under the above aegis have been recording successes in their quest for due recognition. They are currently represented on the Council of the Institution and have advanced one step further in the direction of showcasing their contributions and relevance to Surveying and National Development. So far two regional workshops have been held. The first was at the Sheraton Hotel & Towers, Ikeja, Lagos on 23rd March 2005, with the theme “{Information Technology and Professional Practice” with the sub – theme “GIS as a Supporting Tool for Decision Makers”. It was well attended by both male and female Surveyors and the core of the society. The second regional workshop was held at the Hotel Presidential, Port-Harcourt, Rivers State on 28th March 2006, with the theme “Surveying: Professionalism and Gender Input in Conflict Management and Resolution in the Niger Delta. The third regional workshop will be holding at the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja March 2007. by the grace of God we will try and make sure it is well attended by female Surveyors: workers and students alike.

The dividend of the above efforts could be seen in the increase of the female Surveyors (eight in number) in private practice in the whole Federation of Nigeria and of which I am one.

THE PROBLEMS / CHALLENGES OF THE NIGERIAN FEMALE SURVEYOR

Over the past thirteen years, I have been able to collect many insights from men and women who have consistently expressed a gender gap in their experiences of the challenges they face in the day – to – day business. The female Surveying students are not left out. In 2005, in a bid to reach out to all the female surveyors in Edo and Delta States, so as to create awareness that there is a body Known as Women – In – Surveying and to invite them for the First Regional Workshop, I traveled to the Federal Polytechnic, Auchi. In Edo State. After a brief discussion with the Head of Department, Surveying and Geoinformatics, a meeting was arranged to meet with the entire female surveying students. This meeting turned out to be an interesting one and eye opener. At the meeting, the female surveying students expressed themselves. The first was that they had never seen a female surveyor in private practice before, and my coming to them and sharing my experiences with them was a great encouragement. Secondly, so many of them had been finding it difficult to find a survey firm that will accept them for industrial training. They complained of the outright rejection by survey firms just because they are females. They had never been giving the chance to practice what they study in school. The few that had the opportunity were kept in the office and were not giving the opportunity for any practical experience. Some of the graduating students confessed to me that they were thinking of leaving the profession as soon as they leave school and my coming to address them has changed a lot of things. They even told me that there are two female lecturers who were best graduating students from the department and these have never attended any of the Nigerian Institution of Surveyors Meeting, so are not aware of the

group called Women – in – Surveying. They pleaded with me that from time – to – time I should be coming over to the school to give them words of encouragement, this I promised I would do.

From time to time female surveyors come to my office for advice especially when they had just been rejected by some male surveyors. There was another case where a female surveyor came to me that a company advertises that they needed surveyors, and she applied, on the day of interview she was asked if she was representing somebody and she answered that she is a surveyor and the interviewer simply told her that there is no vacancy for females, she was so depressed that she ran to me and told me that she was going to look for a teaching job. I gave her words of encouragement and told her that if her husband will permit her, she can come and work with me, she was very excited and told me that she had to learn as training since she had forgotten the entire practical she had been taught since she graduated six years ago and had never been employed.

Nevertheless, it has been sadly observed that the attitudes of some women in recent times had undermined the struggle for gender equality. The greatest source of this problem is what has been called the “feminine and dependency mentality” while on the other hand some women had advocated and fight for gender equality and the elimination of all forces of discrimination, on the other hand. Such had argued and insisted that, as “a weaker sex”, they should be dependent on men. Hence from findings, the following were noted as being the barriers to women’s participation in the survey profession.

- a) Lack of knowledge about what surveying is, how it operates and what it has to offer.

Many Nigerian Female Surveyors did not have prior knowledge of what Surveying was. Some were having admission problems with the course of their choice and so in order to leave their homes opted for any available option (course) offered to them.

Others thought Surveying was all about Quantity. They mistook Survey for Quantity Survey or Estate Survey because these are the only Survey Profession, popular to the vast majority of people. This is an unpardonable error. So when they find themselves in school deviating from what they thought of, the first instinct is to run away from the course by changing department. They do not mind losing a full academic session for this. But when these females are encouraged and the profession is properly explained to them, they are determined to face the challenge, you now see them turning a new leaf and meeting up with the expectations.

We had this experience in 1986 in the Polytechnics (Federal Polytechnic Idah in Benue State), we were 25 students in class, of which 5 were females. We were all strange to the course and were contemplating on what to do. Thanks to the likes of Surv. M. Imoh who was the Head of Department, Surveying. He summoned the five of us and told us that we had the potential to do much better than the males. He encouraged us to study as a team and that what we do not understand, we should ask

questions. He went as far as leaving some survey equipment at our custody so as to be conversant with it and to carry out field practice with it. This was a great challenge and by Gods grace, we went for it headlong. Three of us had upper credit, and currently we are still in the profession and are excelling. This we owe to him.

While in the university the likes of Professor R. N. Aseogwu contributed immensely and they were ladders through whom we achieved our goals.

- b) Family barriers: it is difficult for some women to balance family responsibilities and their professional life and so it is difficult for them to participate in professional organizations.

Due to the peculiar nature of women and their duty as wives, some female surveyors find it difficult to balance family responsibility with their professional life. Both tasks are very demanding, it takes only an enlightened and understanding husband who is not a chauvinist to help the woman to make this balance.

In Nigeria the woman is always seen to be under the bark and call of the man. An average Nigerian thinks that the best profession for a woman is a teaching job where the woman returns from work 2 p.m. Nigerian time.(14:00 hrs). She is to take care of the children and household chores; any thing outside this is extra ordinary and not readily accepted.

Some feel threatened when the woman becomes more wealthier than they are, and so will not allow their wives to practice the profession of their study, hence I mentioned earlier that only the educated, enlightened and understanding husbands will allow this. Most of the female surveyors who are active in the affairs of the profession have the support of their husbands and so are doing very well. Some husbands even go as far as regular at Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Nigerian Institution Surveyors, and they are proposing to constitute a body called Surveyors Husbands Association of Nigeria (SHAN) just like we have the Surveyors Wives Association of Nigeria (SWAN)

Some of the male surveyors complained that, some of the female surveyors when employed can not just do any work (selective), in fact cannot do anything called work (i.e. they are good for nothing). They refused to go for field work, and are not prepared to learn. There was a particular case when a male surveyor complained to me that I am proponent for the employment of female surveyors, and also engage them on Industrial Attachment, that the lady in his firm refuses going the field, and cannot face the demand of the job. She was asked to do some manual drafting, she made a mistake and was corrected, and instead of learning, she was adamant. She was later dropped. Today she is a teacher. I had spoken to her on several occasion, she has promised to learn and be more receptive. This category of female surveyors is just 2% of the totality of Women in Surveying.

The few who had had encounter with some of the Female Surveyors, will acknowledge that we are very hard-working, energetic, innovative, and agile. In fact some of us go on field

work, with pregnancy out the early, middle and late trimester. I have six children, and while pregnant, I went to field with them all, including swamp jobs having done the statutory swimming test. Surv. (Dr) Prince T.L Noah can attest to this.

Another area of complain by the male surveyors is that women frequently go on maternity leave and as such are not always there when they are needed.

Some of the Usefulness of Female Surveyors

- a) They are very helpful in resolving disputes (Litigation Surveys)

There are places where a male surveyor cannot enter due to the volatile nature of the job. As a female surveyor in Nigeria, you can go in there and execute the job successfully with results. The reason had been that most of them had never seen a female surveyor, more so when they think that it is not a woman's profession. Also, most men abhor manhandling women or ruffle them, so in the midst of scuffle, they treat them with care.

- b) They are good conflict managers:

The nature of survey in Nigeria is such that any community you intend working, you have to pay homage to the community leader at the same time make some community development. Above all you must have a good rapour with them so that your work at the community will be hitch free.

The initial demands are always very outrageous; it now depends on your power of bargain. Women naturally are good bargainers and so can do the job better more so when most of the community representatives are male folks, they naturally have soft spots for women.

There was a particular case where a boundary re-opening was to cut across 15 communities. The male surveyor who went for the negotiation ended up with the sum of two million, five hundred thousand naira (N 2,500,000) only. When it was brought to the notice of the chief executive, he screamed that the rate was outrageous and that they had to renegotiate it. The male surveyor was not willing to go back there due to fear of the unknown, I volunteered to go. At the end, the company ended spending three hundred and fifty thousand naira (N 350,000) only as community development to these different communities.

THE WAY FORWARD

EDUCATION

Education is the key that opens and liberates the mind, breaking down Institution barriers, removing ignorance and clearing the way for everyone, irrespective of gender, to move up to

the social ladder. This ultimately enhances the quality and standard of life of every citizen regardless of gender.

The full potentials of girls and women of all ages should be developed to ensure full and equal participation in the project of building a better nation and a better world.

CONTINUOUS ENLIGHTENMENT AND MOBILIZATION

I am in total support of the position that the on-going programme of enlightenment and mobilization of women – in - - Surveying, to create in them awareness of their rights and privileges should continue if gender bias in the traditional society, public service and political leadership is to be totally eradicated. The two regional workshops organized by the Women –In – Surveying have made tremendous impact in creating the right awareness in women, of their rights and potentials, while at the same time enhancing their participation in surveying activities. It is desirable that there should be concrete follow – up actions to all these workshops and conferences in order to actualize their laudable goals and make them have real impact on the lives of the female surveyor.

REMOVING SELF IMPOSED BARRIERS

The desire by women in general to be protected by some men and be dependent on them always, emanating from feminine dependency mentally, has created a barrier which undermines the fight for gender-equality, and eliminate all gender biases in offices, politics and the society. On this matter, women should be encouraged to seize every opportunity available now and take advantage of current programmes and the favourable environment created by the present administration, and try to put into practice the popular slogan that “what men can do, women can do better” as proven by the likes of

Late Surv. Mrs. Olayinka Omolabake Adekoya B.Sc., MSc.(Survey Engineering) FNIS. She was the first female Surveyor General of the Federation of Nigeria, the first female Commonwealth Surveyor, and the first Female President, Commission VI International Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing (ISPRS)

Currently a woman occupies the Office of the Surveyor General of Lagos State

IMAGE IMPROVEMENT

This would be achieved through the inevitability of change. Change is unavoidable as a normal feature of existence. With several pronouncements in keynote addresses, dinner, and welcome speeches in various NIS for a, our pronouncements should now be more assertive of our resolve to do what we know, and expect to be the best for the enhancement of the Image of our profession.

CONCLUSION

I have no doubt in my mind that the on going effort to redress the situation of gender inequality in our system is a positive development. The removal of gender discrimination in the rules and regulations and policies in the civil services in Nigeria will no doubt help develop the potentials of women to put in their best in their chosen field of human endeavour.

Surveying is an important aspect of human development. The Nigerian Institution of Surveyors has created an enabling environment for the participation of women – in – Surveying. This could be used in achieving the aim of the Nigerian Female Surveyors.

When you are a woman in a male-dominated industry, you have to carve a niche for yourself in order to succeed. You do not have to behave as if you are a man or try to imitate your male counterpart. You have to be yourself, and be the woman that you are, the sky will be your limit.

Thank you for Listening.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Mrs. Angela Kesiena Etuonovbe has a B.Sc.(Hons) degree in Surveying, Geodesy & Photogrammetry from the University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus. She is a Registered Surveyor and the first female Surveyor in Private Practice in Delta State. With over thirteen years of experience in the practice of Surveying, Engineering and Mapping. She has a Master in Business Administration (MBA).

She is a Federal surveyor, a consultant of no mean repute, a prolific writer, a Lady of the Knights of Saint Mulumba Nigeria, Member of the Nigerian Institution of Surveyors, the indefatigable Public Relations Officer of the Nigerian Institution of Surveyors - Delta State Branch, and the Coordinator, Women – In - Surveying for Edo and Delta States.

Over the period, she had successfully executed a research work on “**ROAD CONSTRUCTION IN NIGERIA – DEFECTS AND SOLUTIONS.**” And she is currently

on a research on lasting “**SOLUTIONS TO EROSION PROBLEMS IN DELTA STATE NIGERIA.**

From her school days, she has always been an icon to female Surveying Students and has been championing the course of Gender inequality in the Survey Profession in Nigeria.

She had authored eight informative, educative exciting and highly spiritual books currently on the Bookshelves. Over 5000 copies of **God the Father Loves You Personally** have been printed in the past two years and distributed freely to prisons, hospitals, communities, youths, schools and the needy.

She is excited at challenges the Survey challenges not an exception.

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