

Zeitschrift: IABSE reports of the working commissions = Rapports des commissions de travail AIPC = IVBH Berichte der Arbeitskommissionen

Band: 26 (1977)

Artikel: Construction and project management in developing countries

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-21530>

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Construction and Project Management in Developing Countries

Bauausführung und Projekt-Management in Entwicklungsländern

Exécution des travaux et management du projet dans les régions en développement

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Developing countries could be grouped under two heads. The first group consists of those countries which have the necessary technical infrastructure but do not have funds for research and development and are therefore called upon to take foreign technical assistance to carry out the projects. The second group consists of the oil rich countries, who have sufficient funds but neither have personnel to carry out the projects nor any technical infrastructure to take up research and development. These countries therefore go in for project assistance on a turnkey basis. We shall analyse the reasons for delay in execution of projects for the two groups of countries separately.

In case of the first group of countries the foreign assistance consists of highly sophisticated machinery, conceptual planning of the project, high level technical consultancy and supervision. The receiving country provides for construction of civil works, erection of machinery, supply of part of the machinery, structural works and in certain cases detailing of drawings and designs based on the requirements of the foreign consultants. It has been found that the foreign companies are very reluctant to give due weightage to the technical capabilities of the local experts. This delays the approval of drawings prepared by the local consultants. The foreign companies do not employ their real experts in the developing countries and even minor changes are referred to the head office, often involving inordinate delays. The only way to reduce this factor of delay is to call for a change in the attitude of the foreign consultants towards the local skills and request them to have faith in their counterparts in the developing countries.

In case of the second group of the countries, the foreign assistance is almost cent per cent. The whole responsibility lies with the foreign company. The contracts in these countries include almost everything like transport of the clients engineer houses, furniture, stationary, site offices etc. apart from turnkey assignment. The receiving country only provides the funds and supervises the work. The supervision is generally by an expert brought from a third country on contract basis. The main problem faced by the foreign company under such circumstances is non-availability of skilled labour and construction materials like cement and steel. Sometimes the work also suffers because of shortage of funds. Often the foreign companies send



out personnel and give the designations like engineer, chief engineer etc. These persons are actually skilled and experienced workers in their countries and have no technical or managerial background. They are not able to manage large projects economically. On the other hand the experts from the third countries are selected after rigorous interviews and careful scrutiny of their technical qualifications and experience. These persons are drawn from those best available in the country. This results in a situation where the controlling authority is highly qualified and skilled but cannot plan the work as there is no cooperation from the so called chief engineers of the foreign companies. The instructions given by the experts are totally disregarded by the companies and the result is bad workmanship as well as delay. The remedy again is to call for some faith in the technical capabilities of the experts from the developing countries.

It is further suggested that as far as possible the foreign companies should import the materials and complete manpower. The developing countries of the first group could be of great help in providing highly skilled labour force and also the supervising personnel. If the foreign companies try to make use of these available services, most of the projects in the developing countries of the second group could be completed in scheduled time.