

Interaction between developing and developed countries for project implementation

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4. Interaction between Developing and Developed Countries for Project Implementation

This first big international structural engineering congress held in a so called developing country was a prime opportunity for interaction between structural engineers worldwide, i.e. from North to South, West to East. At a panel discussion organised under the chairmanship of Mr. T.N. Subba Rao, India, experts from the developed and developing countries got together to deliberate on the problems and possibilities of interaction and cooperation on international construction contracts. The aim of the panel discussion was to generate understanding between various sections of the construction industry. Panelists were from developed and developing countries representing owners, consultants, builders, equipment manufacturers and financiers. Mr. Roger Lacroix, France, introduced the panelists and chaired the discussion. It took about one hour and 45 minutes for the panelists to introduce or develop the papers which had just been made available to the participants. And there remained only 30 minutes for discussion!

Messrs T.N. Subba Rao, Bombay, and Z. George, Madras, concluded their theme paper with five leading questions:

- 1) What kind of environment, free of unproductive constraint, can be offered by the owners for international participation in construction projects? What kind of environment do the other participants viz. Consultants, Contractors, Equipment Suppliers and Financial Institutions expect in international participation?
- 2) What kind of working relationships should be established between international consultants and consultants in developing countries in project implementation in that country, taking into account the level of technical capability and the transmission of technology, and without having the developing country to depend repeatedly on the foreign consultants for similar services?
- 3) In International projects a responsibility is thrown on the foreign contractors to join hands with a local partner in order to maximise usage of local skills and local materials so that a competitive offer is made. Is such a co-operation, from conceptual stage to completion, realistic and practical if one takes into account the need to conserve hard currency and the need to maximise the use of local resources?
- 4) One of the objectives of financing institutions, in providing loans, is to eventually make the receiving country self-reliant in product use and technology wherever such technology is not available or is inadequate. Even so, financial packages available from international agencies for the owners and consultants do not always prescribe involvement of local consultants and contractors, as a pre-requisite in a joint venture with a foreign contractor. This objective of

assistance in technology development has not been an explicit feature so far. In what manner can effective interaction be brought about to ensure development of indigenous consultancy and contracting capability?

- 5) In transferring sophisticated machine-oriented technology to developing countries, whose emphasis is on harnessing and upgrading local manpower and minimising hard currency demands, what are the problems being faced today? Would not this call for in-depth investigation at pre-tendering stage and at all intermediate stages in every sector of the construction industry? If developing countries' required import of machinery – to achieve quality output and speed – is not adequate, should not machinery sophistication be matched with a funding programme and time available for completion? Would machinery suppliers be prepared to design specific equipment to meet the demand based on different man-machine relation for such situations?

The large number of participants (about 600), the timing of the session – in the evening, whereby participants could opt to participate in a social programme rather than in such a discussion – the quite high additional fee for participating in this programme, proved that such a topic was perfectly chosen and was of actuality at such a gathering. That many, if not all participants, came out of the meeting somewhat frustrated by the results of the discussion, is understandable. One should not believe that in one meeting, the problems of development in the world will be solved by structural engineers. Discussion seemed to show that the financing of a project was the main concern in many developing countries: the technical know-how would already be available, but the financing of a project was the big question. Most if not all of the construction companies and design offices in developed countries were severely restricted by the economy. In being involved in a project, any company should make a profit to be able to develop its activity. And this would be too expensive for developing countries.

It may well be that these financial problems will not be solved by international engineering associations. One positive point in the discussions seemed to be that such organizations could help in developing international codes of practice and in providing training for local consultants and contractors.

No conclusions were reached on to this so very useful panel discussion. It seems that this problem should be discussed further on other occasions, and also within IABSE.

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