

Editorial

Once again, this issue accommodates papers from different parts of the developing world. And just as before, they dwell with various issues, some perennial some new: the plight of small- and medium-sized contractors, competitiveness of construction consultants, effectiveness of sustainable rural development programmes, implementation of post-evaluation, under-representation of women in the industry and subsidised housing mortgages for low-income households. The under-lying theme of all these papers is that customisation is necessary to accommodate local culture, context and operating environment.

Small- and medium-sized (SME) contractors make up the majority of construction businesses, yet they have not received the scholastic attention they deserve. Using the case studies approach, Kamal and Flanagan identified the key characteristics of these contractors in rural Malaysia: survival as the greatest motivation, absence of policy for implementing new technologies and training, acceptance of all types of work, dominance of single owners, small pools of employees and heavily influenced by politics. Furthermore, there are different features between Bumiputera and Chinese companies, and between large and SME contractors. The findings can provide useful policy input for the betterment of the Malaysian construction industry.

The period 2006–2010 which included the Global Financial Crisis event was turbulent for the Malaysian construction industry. Focusing on behaviour and performance of Malaysian quantity surveying firms at that time, Abidin, Adros and Hassan found that size did not influence strategic directions. Overall, the sampled firms preferred differentiation strategies over growth strategies, specifically expansion of range of services, reputation enhancement and maintenance of existing clients.

India is one of the few developing countries that have come up with a piece of legislation specifically for sustainable rural development. Unfortunately, too few success stories can be narrated since 2005 when the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) came into force. Examining two areas and focusing just on water management, Chakraborty and Das found that cookie-cutter solutions which ignore local conditions are the main cause for this. They recommend that the provision of all rural assets should be customised to suit local requirements and conditions.

For donor-sponsored projects, post-evaluation is a requisite. From Gaza, Enshassi, Arain and El-Rayyes found that apart from time, cost and quality groups factors, there are other factors which should be included for evaluation. They include safety, environmental impact and risks. Obstacles to post-evaluation are project overloads and efficiency of evaluators. Post-evaluation should be done as soon possible. Other developing countries who depend on donors for infrastructure development can take stock of the Gaza experience.

After reviewing relevant literature, Sospeter et al. traced women's severe under-represented in the construction industry in developing countries to several factors: cultural background, choice of business and confidence level. Referring to Tanzania, ideally gender-sensitive empowerment programmes should be implemented to redress the imbalance. For effectiveness though, the authors recommend that they be customised in terms of motives, processes and challenges.

Nigeria, like some other developing countries, offer subsidised housing mortgage. From a survey in the city of Jos, Daniel found that low awareness and participation blight the country's system. He found that access to subsidised mortgage was influenced by gender and tier of government employment. To increase home ownership opportunities for low-income households, Daniel suggests that sensitisation and awareness campaigns be conducted. There should also be oversight to ensure that the allocation mechanism is equitable.

The editorial board appreciates the efforts of paper contributors, successful and not-so successful, as well as reviewers in ensuring that this issue is out in print.

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