

## **The future of Engineering Associations in Africa is to run profitable businesses**

Uganda Association of consulting Engineers (UACE) was started by Engineers who owned companies that were involved in Engineering consultancy works in the year 1991. Formation of this association marked the beginning of bringing together the firms to articulate concerns that affect the Engineering consultancy industry with one common voice; and strengthen the nation's construction industry through contribution of their professional expertise. Developing countries such as our own Uganda need kind of professional bodies/ associations for guidance on technical policies.



The initial number of founders was eight firms and to date the number has grown towards fifty and some individual members. This means that there's some growth in terms of numbers at an average rate of point less than two members per year. Much as there's some growth it is abnormally low.

Africa as a continent has also formed a chapter that brings together these country associations. These associations have administrative units to run them; that comprise of two to five staff depending on the size. In case of Uganda Association consulting engineers, the size is small and is managed by three staff.

Sustenance of these administrative units in terms of salaries and allowances is through annual subscriptions fees by the member firms.

The challenge with dependence on annual subscription fees is that not all firms pay promptly or consistently; so, there's always a gap in terms of income. This implies that most of the associations are always short of funds. Largely therefore sustaining good staff also is questionable.

Another form of income is in form of carrying out training in fields that are beneficial to the firms. At times most of these training courses are run at a loss bearing in mind that their profitability depends on the number that attends. Advertisements are always encouraged but the rate of attraction of businesses to advertise leaving alone the member firms is not encouraging at all.

As earlier mentioned at Africa continent level these associations are brought together under a chapter under Federation of International Consulting engineers abbreviated as FIDIC called FIDIC AFRICA. FIDIC is internationally recognized and brings consulting member associations, more specifically consulting Engineering firms together when international conferences are held; currently there are over one hundred (100) member countries. FIDIC AFRICA has seventeen (17) member associations; this means the same number of countries represented since each member association represents a country.

Through these annual educational international conferences held at continental level by FIDIC AFRICA and global level organized by FIDIC; you have come to learn that most of the associations have almost the same financial challenges.

How then can these financial challenges be overcome?

Every challenge has a solution if sought; this financial challenge that does exist in associations, especially in Africa, should not be as if it is not one that can never be overcome; this is possible.

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Take an example of the Roman Catholic church; Anglican Church to mention; these sees have different businesses running right from owning hospitals, schools, universities, Conference Hall etc. these businesses not only help these organizations in financial sustenance, but they also help governments in terms of creating employment, income in form of taxes, supporting the vulnerable groups etc. These are not mean contributions to the governments and therefore they act as a relief to them. In relation to this, therefore the consulting associations on top of getting out of the financial challenges they are constantly facing should be seen as professional associations that are in existence to solve challenges that would have been a burden to governments. Currently they offer employment through memberships' employment only; but they should also create their own solutions to the challenges governments face.

The common challenges known include unemployment, housing, and lack of Continuous professional development (CPDs) programs to government citizens. These areas the associations should come in and contribute to the solutions.

One way to do this is to start profitable business like how these churches do it.

Uganda Association of consulting Engineers (UACE) has ably noticed this and has started a company by the name Providence Ltd. What the company is to be doing business in should be areas where government is struggling as earlier mentioned. The current and future board members should always focus on solutions to existing government challenges.

FIDIC AFRICA should also encourage member associations (MAs) to not only rely on member subscription fees and to some extent training but start businesses that are to rescue them from financial deficits at times of need.

I call upon therefore all the directors of the member firm of UACE to give support to Providence for the decision made to start it was the best decision ever made.

Let us build businesses to support the member association that will also solve challenges that governments are constantly facing.

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