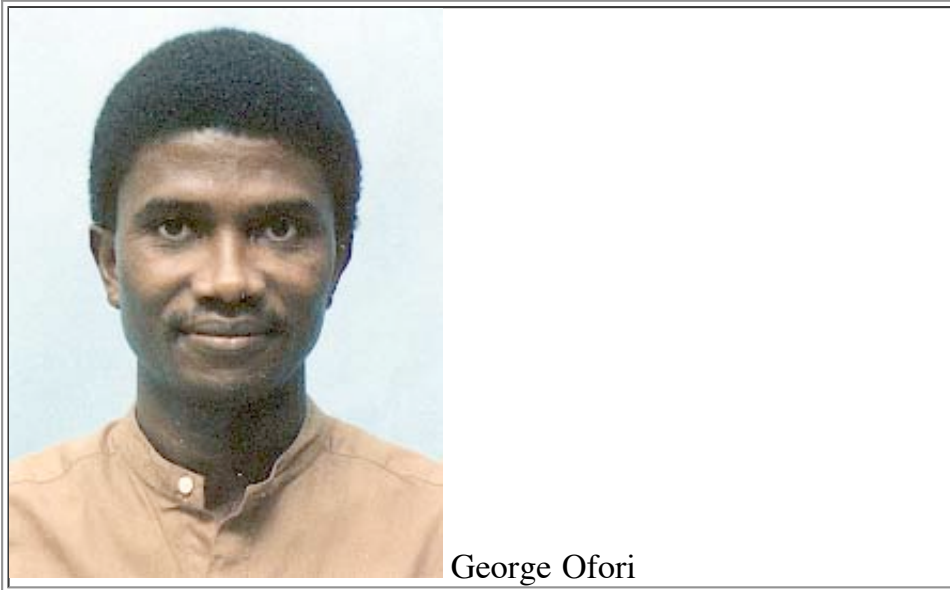


TG29 - Construction in Developing Countries

Coordinator George Ofori reports on the two most recent meetings of TG29.



The first was an unscheduled meeting in Cape Town within the framework of the W055 and W065 Joint Triennial Symposium in September and the second took place in Singapore during the 2nd International Conference on Construction Industry Development and the 1st Conference of TG29 on Developing Countries one month later.

A summary of his Report is reproduced below and it is clear that special priority is being accorded to enhancing the effectiveness of communication among the Members of the Task Group.

Meeting in Cape Town

A meeting of Task Group 29 on Construction in Developing Countries was held in Cape Town on 9th September 1999. This meeting, which had not been previously arranged, was in conjunction with the CIB W055 and W065 Joint Triennial Symposium. The key issues discussed are highlighted in what follows.

Preliminary Issues

A series of preliminary issues were covered in an introductory briefing by the Coordinator. These were:

- an outline of the aims and objectives of the TG for the benefit of 'new' members
- the history and previous activities of the TG were also recalled, including its launch in Singapore in December 1997, and the meetings in Arusha, Tanzania (September 1998), and Kampala, Uganda (June 1999)
- the future activities of the TG, including the first conference in Singapore in October 1999, and the possibility of an event in Latin America.

Also addressed in the introductory statement were the tasks which the Group was expected to accomplish. These included:

- a state-of-the-art report on construction in developing countries

- completion of the research projects which have been launched
- a journal on construction in developing countries.

CIB Membership and Information

An important issue which was discussed at length was how to increase the number of developing-country participants at CIB meetings and other international gatherings of researchers in construction. It was recognised that there were Universities in developing countries who were completely unaware of the existence of CIB and of the benefits attendant on membership. A list should be compiled so that they could be informed.

The meeting suggested that substantial financial concessions with regard to the CIB membership fee should be offered as an inducement to join.

Government departments should also be interested in joining the CIB to ensure an appropriate academia-industry linkage.

Developing Countries' Construction Concerns

The construction-related issues of developing countries should be properly addressed at CIB meetings. The sessions discussing developing country matters should be allocated more centrally located time slots, and given reasonable durations. At such international gatherings, members of TG29 should show greater concern when it came to issues of their interest.

It was considered as a fundamental tenet that the developing countries should find their own way to attain social and economic progress: they should try to accelerate their growth instead of simply following the same trajectories as the industrialised nations. In this regard, researchers from developing countries and TG29 members should look at new and emerging issues and topics such as value management, supply chain management and lean construction, in the context of developing countries. An important question is: "Even considering our problems, how do we move forward?"

Commitment

It was noted that in construction, as in most other matters, the developing countries tend to be sidelined. It was pointed out that the people of these countries should do things for themselves. Therefore, it was stressed that the members of the TG should demonstrate unity and commitment to its tasks. They should actively contribute to its success and in particular participate in the meetings and projects.

Dissemination of Information

The effective dissemination of information among those interested, and involved in issues relating to construction in developing countries was also scrutinised in some detail. The following possible vehicles were mentioned:

- publication of a journal on construction in developing countries such as that by the Department of Civil Engineering, University of Botswana, which is free for 'subscribers', and was initially supported by the United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)
- establishment of an Internet discussion group which would be linked to a website with databases on research topics and abstracts on construction in developing countries - (Dr Stephen Ogunlana will deal with these issues, starting from January 2000.)
- creation of a network of academics (faculty members) and researchers on construction in developing countries - (Dr Benjamin Uwakweh will set up the network when he receives the names and contact addresses of those present at the meeting. Dr Alfred Ngowi will develop the current database of the University of Botswana's journal to embrace people who will be interested

in the proposed TG29 journal. Mr Dan Tindiwensi will liaise with Dr Uwakweh and Dr Ngowi as he undertakes the preparatory work on the proposed TG29 journal)

- ensuring that the reports and documents on CIB meetings relevant to developing countries are made available to researchers in these countries

What Can TG29 Do?

Some questions were raised, touching on aspects of relevance pertinent to all Groups. For example: What is the attraction of TG29? How can it add value?

It was agreed that TG29 should concentrate its efforts on research issues which are tangible and of direct interest to the developing countries. A suitable topic was identified as that of the development of construction methods which can help countries to prevent and cope with disasters. It was pointed out that it might be quite possible to obtain funding for such work which will also raise the profile of the CIB and allay its "ivory-tower" image. (Professor Winston Suite will write a proposal for an international research project on this topic. Dr Uwakweh and Miss Amira Mustafa will jointly work on disaster-recovery construction.)

Future Meetings

It was agreed that:

- the next meeting in Africa will be held in Gaborone, Botswana in 2000. The actual date will be fixed later. (Dr Alfred Ngowi will lead in the organisation of the meeting; he will be helped by Mr Theo Rugeiyamu and Mr O.B. Keitheile)
- the possibility of holding a meeting in Asia in 2000 will be explored. (The Coordinator will pursue further the suggestion of Professor K.N. Vaid that a meeting be held in India in the near future)
- the possibility of organising a meeting in Latin America will be studied. (The Coordinator will discuss this with some colleagues in Latin America including Dr Alfredo Serpell of Chile)

Meeting in Singapore

The meeting in Singapore during the Second International Conference on Construction Industry Development and First Conference of CIB TG29 on Developing Countries, was on 28 October 1999.

As in Cape Town, the Coordinator commenced by briefing those present by bringing them up to date on TG29 affairs.

Relations with Industry

This is a topic which has engaged CIB almost since its inception and it was a major item for discussion in TG29. Here it was stressed that efforts should be made to involve the construction industry in the developing countries themselves in the activities of the TG. For example, in the organisation of the meeting in Kampala, the intention had been to involve the industry as much as possible. Thus, many of the papers which were presented were written by practitioners. The proposed meeting in Botswana will also involve the industry in order to increase the level of acceptance among the local practitioners.

Communication

The need for an effective means of communication among members of the TG was stressed again (as it was in Cape Town). It became evident that very few members receive copies of the CIB newsletter. Few members at the meeting had received information about the 'ongoing' international research projects of the Group. Thus, direct information links should be established between the Co-ordinator and members,

and among members themselves.

Another aspect of communication was that between the Group and the industry, as well as other researchers. The current situation with regard to the proposed international refereed journal on construction in developing countries was outlined by Mr Dan Tindiwensi. The key issue appears to be funding. The CIB General Secretariat has made it clear that its promised funding should only be used to meet any shortfall, not as the principal source of finance. The office of the World Bank's representative in Kampala has also indicated that it will only provide some funding support once a commitment has been made by CIB or others.

It was proposed that a "web-based" journal for the Group should be started, even if this is a preliminary step to the establishment of the journal itself. Some possible problems with this were stated, including:

- the low popularity of 'electronic' journals among potential contributors of papers
- the lack of access to the Internet of a significant proportion of the subject audience in many developing countries.

Immediate Project

It was agreed that a project for the Group which would be relatively easy to complete, and lead to a very useful product would be the preparation of a book on country experiences. It was agreed that the TG should concentrate on this single task in the short term.

Meeting in Botswana

There was consensus that the meeting scheduled to be held in Botswana will be global, and relevant to all developing countries. It will be appropriate and timely following the co-ordinated initiatives to form construction industry councils in the member countries of the Southern African Development Co-ordinating Council (SADCC), as well as a regional umbrella organisation of the councils. Thus, it was resolved that the proposed meeting will be upgraded to the Second Conference of TG29. Members of the Group will be informed of the actual dates later.

George Ofori

