



CIB NEWS ARTICLE

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February 2008

Around the Task Groups and Working Commissions

W107 - Construction in Developing Countries

Conference Report "Construction in Developing Economies: New Issues and Challenges" Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago

by

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CIB W107 / UWI International Conference "Construction in Developing Economies: New Issues and Challenges" took place in Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago, January 16-18, 2008.

The Conference was opened by the Deputy Principal of the University of the West Indies, Professor Gurmohan S. Kochhar, who stressed the importance of such conferences in helping to seed new ideas in small developing countries where there are limited opportunities for direct interaction with academic colleagues. As he pointed out, one cannot just drive down the road to discuss research issues with other who share the same interests. This echoed a wider issue of the conference, which was the special circumstances faced by small island developing states (SIDS). The issues for a large, heavily populated country are necessarily different both in scale and type.



The first session and keynote were directed towards the need for transparency in procurement, especially in developing countries. Again, the issues are

exacerbated in small countries because 'everybody knows everybody', and accusations of nepotism or cronyism are almost unavoidable. The discussions on this and related issues of corruption and transparency were pointed and are likely to lead to a follow-up cooperative research effort by colleagues from Malaysia, UK and Trinidad who all expressed interest. The discussion led into the need for value management (VM) of the whole process of procurement from the first stages of concept development right through to operation and maintenance and disposal. VM is not a quick fix, but a continuing process and one that forces the logic of decision making into the open. It promotes transparency. Part of the discussion of VM also led to the need nowadays for sustainability issues to be included in the decision making process.



Victor Hart, keynote day 1

The second major session was led off by a keynote that pointed out that public sector procurement is not a politically neutral exercise, and that the interventions of international funding institutions (IFIs) also come

laden with the implications of the development paradigm that they subscribe to. If the IFIs believe that a public sector organisation cannot be efficient as a consulting engineer or as a contractor, then the conditional ties that they impose will exclude such organisations from projects they underwrite. The role of IFIs in influencing the developmental process in developing countries was discussed at length, and the recent book on 'Economic Hit Men' naturally came into focus. The role of politics in economic decision making, as it affects the construction sector, was also highlighted in its choice of how to provide 'living space' for the lower income members of society – not just the houses they need but the whole physical environment that they will live within.

The third major session was introduced by the Deputy Director of construction on a major waterfront development in Port of Spain. This hotel, conference centre, car-park, restaurant and office buildings was a fixed price contract of just under US\$300 million. The special considerations of building such a development in a developing country with limited construction support infrastructure were highlighted and contrasted with the experience on a similar scale job in London or Paris. At the other end of the scale was a presentation on the provision of safe drinking water to villages in a small, relatively poor, developing country (Belize), and the emphasis on self-help and sustainability. It is obvious that the technology of any such system must be appropriate to the environment, and that 'efficient' modern systems that are expensive and difficult to maintain are rarely appropriate. Again the 'economic hit men' come to mind.



Mr. Chris Strock been awarded the prize for the 'Best Presentation'

The conference was closed by the Chairman, Prof 'Mike' Lewis who announced that Chris Strock from Myers-Lawson School of Construction, Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University, Blacksburg had been awarded the prize for the 'Best Presentation' for his lively and informative talk on the paper "Appropriate Technologies for Sustainable Access to Safe Drinking Water: a case study in Belize", written by himself, Anthony Songer and Christine Fiori.

Other Events

The conference banquet was held at the Battimamselle Restaurant with its beautiful décor and fine local cuisine. The entertainment was provided by one-time calypso king 'Lord Relator' who sang a wide range of old-time calypsos as well as a selection of more international music.



Timothy Lewis involved in discussing papers

A site visit was made to the site of a major project known as the 'Government Campus'. In all this involves four office towers, a car-park and various retail and entertainment facilities in all costing something in the region of US\$100 million. The various elements of the project are being constructed by different contractors and including one from Malaysia. Contractors from China and France are also working on neighbouring projects.

Proceedings

28 papers were received and published in the proceedings, together with two of the keynote presentations. Presenters of papers arrived from Canada, USA, England, Ireland, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Venezuela, Zambia and The Bahamas, so there was an excellent cross-section of countries represented. Local participation was also strong with 18 from the local construction sector on the first day, 20 on the second and 25 on the third – with more participants at the final technical session than the first (which must be something of a record!).

The format of the proceedings is a CD-ROM together with a booklet of 2-page summaries. The proceedings are available for US\$60, which includes postage and packing.

Additional Information

Further details can be obtained from:
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