

THE WAY AHEAD

Devendra Nath Gongol
Past President, SONA
Past Chair, SAARCH

Prologue

The Society of Consulting Architectural and Engineering Firms Nepal (SCAEF), the Technical Consultancy Development Program for Asia and Pacific (TCDPAP), the International Federation of Consulting Engineers (FIDIC) and its Asia and Pacific regional group (ASPAC), all of them represent associations of consulting engineering industry.

Individuals do not belong to FIDIC (<http://www.fidic.org/federation/>). This is true for other above-mentioned associations as well.

Federation (FIDIC) promotes the business interest of firms supplying technology-based intellectual services for the built and natural environment (<http://www.fidic.org/federation/>). This is, or may be true for the other associations also.

Assuming the above statements as a fact and based on it, this paper will try to expedite a discussion on the following issues vis-à-vis technical consultancy, to address the following parts of the theme of the conference.

- WTO Context
- Professional and business Integrity.

Consultancy is an activity that connotes providing of specialized expertise or advice to the client in return to a stipulated sum of money charged as a fee. In doing so, defending the interest of the client also becomes the duty of the consultant. It implies that consultancy is a business and an industry related to service sector. However, it does not produce any goods as other industries do and it does not exchange any goods as such. This is the fundamental difference between it and many other types of industries. If so, then the essence and significance of its work force cannot be similar to other industries. Work force in consultancy is highly educated specialized group of people. They are regarded as the *crème de la crème* of the nation. A question that comes forward within this context is who the consultant really is? – is it the association or the person in context that provides the expertise or advisory services.

At this juncture of history, when a person is not a person, if he/she is not a party person, when an individual is not an individual, if he/she is not a committee, association or organizational member; how do we define an expert, specialist standing alone in the market place? Do we define him/her as a consultant or work force? In whatever way we define him/her, he/she is the backbone of the industry and pride of the profession and can be termed as the *real consultant*. This matter is discussed further in the following chapters.

Omphalos

Twenty first century will witness the result brought by the third industrial revolution. This revolution has put us into the threshold of a new era – that of knowledge society. Accompanied by Globalization, it has laid down the basis of knowledge economy. Consultancies do extension services to the knowledge societies and form the basis for knowledge economy. Nevertheless, consultancy is a combination of knowledge and information based activities. If one agrees to this deliberation; consultancy then, is in essence, a creative job rather than informative only.

The seminal step forward will be then to scan and contemplate on how we are performing under such criterion.

Continuum

In introspection, the progress made so far by SCAEF, representing the business and industrial interest of technical consulting firms of Nepal, is substantial in nature. Reviewing its future course of action manifested in many articles of the members of super Nepalese consulting firms, we find an echo of the need of their capacity development. Sufficient energy has also have been devoted to formulate, amend and introduce legislation to safeguard its interest. The realists conclude that it is the *raison d'etre* of SCAEF. It is a cogent argument that such activities are *sign qua non*, for it to function, consolidate and organize.

Going back to the definition of consultant, idealist can argue that these achievements really do not match the authentic requirement of a real consultant. Modus operandi of these legislatures does not serve him/her. This idealistic view plods portentously to the grave lopsided situation in defining consultancy not as a creative job. Running consultancy business is an art and managerial talent. To put it more explicitly, let us interrogate if Consultancy Firm is a consultant or a business/industrial entity. If this inquisition is not entertained, dreaming to survive in Globalization will be no more that hallucination. World of WTO will not be for Nepal. Because of not providing the real consultant, their justified position will be tantamount to leaving them behind and their creativity wandering in no man's land. This view therefore, is not pure idealistic in nature but is a fusion with realists. Safeguard and strengthen the expert/advisor who is standing lonely in the market in no man's land is one of the most important responsibilities of SCAEF. Life has shown that, they are creative in nature. He is free of those bondages that limit the movement of an organization.

It may not be possible to be a part of the knowledge society unless creativity is not encouraged. Moreover, the future for us will be a slave trap destined only to justify WTO. The situation becomes more sever when consultants engage in compulsion to participate in Competitive Bidding. Unlike in creative art, effort in technical art and creation is measured in man months devoted to produce it. It is an exemplary act of adding insult to injury. This is the reason of quantitative leap in consultancy organizations rather than qualitative growth.

Terminus ad quem

21st century is also a period when under the aegis of WTO, it has become mandatory for a country like Nepal to embrace a leviathan in the form of Globalization. There is only one option: be prepared if you can or disappear. Taking lessons from Charles Darwin's theory of Survival of the Fittest, let us try to be not less than an ant, if we cannot be a dinosaur. Alternatively, let us be not less than a sparrow, if we cannot be an archaeopteryx. But how do you achieve it?

Usually we think; we have to be able to do what other (North) can do to accommodate Globalization. This assumption is the direct outcome of the conception that, consultancy firms are self-sustained, more informative than others are including the clients. On the other hand, working together with the clients and defending their interest is a unique exercise in qualitative development and competency.

All things considered, the call of the time is, our resolute efforts should gear towards equipping our fraternity the ability to do what the other cannot do. This is possible if we consider consultancy as a creative job. Heretofore, we have never discussed on creative technical science. Obsession towards legislature and blind eye for research activities resulted in absence of any news, articles or publications of creative nature by the consultancy organizations. The best option is - Let us invest in research activities.

What does research mean as an activity for consulting firms? Unlike in other institutions, it is not allocation of budget, but in essence, it is treating every job as a creative activity. Articles in SCAEF documents about technical achievements, attempts and thoughts will be the full proof of if it had adopted creativity as a substance. One need not be extra audacious for this purpose.

Embracing Globalization, maintaining professional and business integrity/dignity is dynamic in nature and is not solely matters that are decided in the consultants' offices. Without any hesitation, some responsibilities are to be transferred to the society also. Expressing it more precisely, consulting firms need to uphold the philosophy of Corporate Social Responsibility. This is not expensive, neither is it compassion fatiguing in nature. CSR for consultants is rewarding in many forms. First, it benefits the recipients, second it gratifies your sublime emotion and the last, helps your creativity.

The aspiration shown in the theme of the conference is somehow has been dealt in the above paragraphs. Therefore, if we wish to attain objective expressed in the theme of the conference, we need not only political revolutions but also need certain renaissance or enlightenment type of movements in one or other form.

In summary, the way ahead for us is to -

Embrace and defend the interest of every type of consultants in the fraternity.

Promote creative approach.

Adopt research as a growth tool.

Uphold Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).