

## **SECOND BUILDERS' DAY:**

### **REMEMBERING SCHOOL CHILDREN THAT PERISHED IN A COLLAPSED BUILDING AT ITA-FAAJI, LAGOS ISLAND AND VICTIMS OF OTHER BUILDING COLLAPSES IN NIGERIA**

Exactly two years ago, 13th March, 2019, a five-storey building collapsed at No 63, Massey Street, Ita-Faaji, Lagos Island, killing about 20 occupants, including many pupils.

This building that collapsed at Ita-Faaji immediately Mr. Babajide Sanwo-Olu won the Lagos State gubernatorial election served as a challenge to the then incoming government on the rise in the spate of building collapse and the importance of addressing the building collapse menace dispassionately.

Meanwhile, the outcome of many investigations on collapsed buildings has identified inappropriate management of the building production process on sites as the major problem. The interwoven complex activities of building construction require expertise in their management. The expert to handle this delicate process is the trained and certified Builder, who has been licensed by the Council of Registered Builders of Nigeria (**CORBON**).

Following the collapse of the five-storey building at Ita-Faaji, the loophole in the law and development process that had been severally exploited to promote quackery on building sites, in Lagos State in particular and Nigeria in general, was again identified by the panel of investigation. The Lagos State House of Assembly took steps to decisively block the loophole through a stakeholders public hearing on its physical planning and building control regulations which regulations were eventually signed by the Commissioner responsible for Physical Planning and Urban Development.

These steps birthed the 2019 physical planning and building control regulations of Lagos State. One of the key parts of the regulations is the correct and unambiguous provision of Section 4, Subsection 2 of the 2019 Lagos State Building Control Regulations which states: 'The site execution of every building under construction shall be managed by a registered builder.'

The historical context and relevance of March 13 come through the building collapse of that day, (in 2019), where innocent, helpless but promising school children lost their lives (due to system failure of older Nigerians) and reactions from within and outside Nigeria coupled with other events that took place after that day. March 13 is thus symbolically chosen to remember Ita-Faaji building collapse victims and all other victims of building collapse in various parts of the country.

What are the lessons learnt from this Ita-Faaji tragedy and many others? What things should we do to prevent a recurrence? The main cause of the Ita Faaji calamity was quackery, which also remains the major cause of several building collapses in Nigeria.

Closely and generally associated to this fundamental cause is negligence with respect to appropriate building regulations and their enforcement on the part of the

government. The third factor in this series of building collapse is lack of accountability and failure to bring culprits to book.

There have been many building collapses in Nigeria. Conservatively, Lagos accounts for about 60% percent of the figure of collapses.

The worrisome question is: How many of those that participated in the construction of collapsed buildings have been prosecuted? How many culpable government officials have been made accountable?

Even where there have been efforts at prosecution, such sometimes come too little or too late to achieve the required effects of deterrence. Sometimes even other little efforts towards prosecution are either frustrated or prolonged. Of course, justice delayed is justice denied. Sentiments and political considerations have remained the clog in the wheel of justice. The doctrine of consequence is the appropriate method that can eradicate quackery from building sites in Nigeria.

The problem with building construction in Nigeria is that some of those who are engaging in it as a business to make quick and cheap money only see the gains, not the risks. Additionally, some of those who are investing in building development have the mindset of profiteering at the expense of quality output. Consequently, for construction work, they prefer to use quacks that would not insist on quality output. This is the reason why buildings constructed by many developers cannot stand the test of time.

As revealed in our record, most of the buildings that collapsed in Nigeria lacked professionalism in the production and construction process and its management. This is an aberration and an affront on the law of the Federal Republic of Nigeria that recognizes a trained and licensed professional (the Professional Builder) to handle and manage the construction and production processes of every building.

A system that tolerates quackery which obviously does not insist on professionalism is bound to face repercussions such as witnessed two years ago at Ita-Faaji, Lagos Island. Use of experts and specialists will help this nation overcome the menace of building collapse.

The need for the Nigerian government to get rid of quacks on all building sites in Nigeria cannot, therefore, be over-emphasized. The respective states of the Federation should prioritize the safety of lives during and after construction by having laws and regulations that meet or exceed the basic minimum requirements of the Nigerian National Building Code. The use of experts in their various areas of competency in the entire building project delivery chain, that is from design to construction and even post construction, should be upheld.

Builders are the experts in the technology of building construction and maintenance. They manage the processes to achieve safe, sound, functional and economical buildings which all stakeholders, professionals and non professionals' alike desire.

The development of result-oriented Building Regulations of Lagos State and attempts by some states to incorporate the well thought out project delivery requirements of the National Building Code in their urban development laws should be emulated by states of the federation which have not done so. This will help put in motion the machinery for orderliness and end the sordid story of incessant building collapse in our nation.

The lack of veritable National Building Code with adequate enforcement aggravates and accentuates the building collapse crisis. A nation without building code leaves its construction sector to the whims and caprices of quacks and emergency profiteers.

We hereby enjoin the Federal Government of Nigeria through the Honourable Minister of Works and Housing, Mr. Babatunde Raji Fashola, SAN to expedite further actions on the National Building Code project. Giving legislative backing at the national and subnational levels are further steps in the right direction. The members of the public and the media should continue in the campaign to protect lives. The battle against building collapse is one that we must all join hands together to win. Building collapses are mostly avoidable tragedies. We need not fall twice on the same proverbial stone. We must learn our lessons and save lives and property. This is the concern of the Nigerian Institute of Building, sister professions in the building industry and all other good spirited organizations.

To commemorate the March 13 building collapse, Professional Builders (not 'Building Engineers', which is a wrong name and misnomer in Nigeria) in the 36 states of the federation and FCT are embarking on community service on building sites. March 13 remains a symbolic day to remember victims of building collapse and campaign against shoddy and unprofessional workmanship.

It is a day to sensitize stakeholders on building projects and also the public on the need to construct to standard in order to prevent a repeat of Ita-Faaji calamity.

This second edition of the Builders' Day has its theme as 'Professional Builders' Engagement in Building Production Management.' A lot of activities have been lined up for this day.

In a pro bono exercise engendered by need for social responsibility, Builders will pay visits to various building sites across the country and provide clients, developers and their workers technical advice and construction techniques that will help uplift and sustain the serviceability of their buildings.

Call-in programmes on TVs and radios will enable Professional Builders provide solutions to the technical challenges members of the public could be having in their homes and offices.

Pre- Builders' Day activities have seen Builders across the nation carry out Building Condition Survey on existing buildings and also Career Talk on Building Profession in order to draw attention for necessary actions.

The campaign against building collapse and substandard construction should be owned by all Nigerians. The public and private sectors should insist on using only the

right professionals for their building projects. Leaving, by omission or commission, the building construction process to chances and non-professionalism is the way NEVER to go again. All professional stakeholders in the building industry should continue in teamwork while performing their unique roles. We are all in the business to save lives and promote public safety.

On this occasion, we empathize again with all the survivors of building collapse and those who have lost loved ones in various collapses. The school children at Ita-Faaji and others who survived one collapse or the other need care and attention to pick up their lives again in addressing the scars. Help and counseling in overcoming the trauma of such collapse remains necessary.

On a final note, it is our prayer that the Almighty God give all relevant authorities the political will to stop quackery in the Nigerian building industry and end avoidable waste of lives and investments.

Thanks for your attention. I appreciate you all.

**Bldr. Kunle Awobodu, FNIOB**  
**National President, Nigerian Institute of Building**