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Addressing Abandoned Public Building Projects in North-Central Nigeria: The Role of Quantity Surveyors in Project Cost Planning and Delivery Enhancing Transparency and Accountability

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Abstract. The abandonment of public building projects remains a major challenge to infrastructure development and effective utilisation of public resources in Nigeria. Abandoned projects represent wasted financial commitments, delay the provision of essential public facilities and can generate additional costs when projects are eventually revived. Evidence from Nigeria indicates that inadequate funding, poor planning, cost escalation, delayed payments, contractor-related problems and weak project monitoring are among factors associated with project abandonment. Research on public projects in Nigeria has particularly highlighted the importance of adequate planning, costing, funding and monitoring at project inception. This paper examines the role of Quantity Surveyors in addressing abandoned public building projects in North-Central Nigeria, with particular emphasis on project cost planning, financial monitoring, procurement transparency and accountability. It argues that Quantity Surveyors can contribute significantly through realistic pre-contract estimates, detailed bills of quantities, cash-flow forecasting, cost control, variation management, contractor financial assessment and transparent financial reporting. The paper recommends stronger professional involvement of Quantity Surveyors from project inception, independent cost auditing, improved procurement compliance, timely release of project funds and effective early-warning mechanisms. These measures can improve project cost certainty, transparency, accountability and ultimately reduce the incidence of abandoned public building projects in North-Central Nigeria.

Keywords: Abandoned projects, Quantity Surveyors, cost planning, public construction, transparency, accountability.

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Introduction

Public building projects are important instruments for providing educational, health, administrative, housing and other social infrastructure required for national and regional development. However, the benefits expected from public construction investment are undermined when projects are delayed or abandoned. Project abandonment occurs when a construction project that has commenced is stopped for an extended period without reaching its intended completion and use. In Nigeria, the problem has been sufficiently extensive to attract sustained academic, professional and policy attention. Ibrahim, Loch and Sengupta reported that Nigeria has experienced a particularly serious project-abandonment problem, with a historical audit identifying thousands of abandoned federal government projects.

The problem is also evident in the Federal Capital Territory, which forms part of the North-Central region [1]. A study of public building projects in Abuja found that inadequate working capital was highly ranked among the factors responsible for abandonment, while cost overrun was identified as a major consequence. These findings demonstrate that project abandonment is not simply a construction problem; it is also a financial planning, cost-management and governance problem.

Quantity Surveyors have a strategic role in addressing these challenges. Their professional responsibilities cover cost estimation, cost planning, preparation of bills of quantities, tender evaluation, procurement advice, interim valuation, variation assessment, cost control and final accounts. These functions position Quantity Surveyors to provide clients with reliable information about how much a project is expected to cost, how much has been spent and how much additional funding will be required to complete it. Cost planning is particularly important because inadequate project planning and financing can create a situation where government commences a project without sufficient resources to complete it [2]. Research on abandoned Nigerian tertiary-institution projects identified delayed payments, fund mismanagement, inadequate budgetary allocation, inadequate finance, inflation and contractor bankruptcy among significant causes of abandonment. The study recommended adequate planning based on detailed design, costing, timelines and sufficient budgetary provision.

Transparency and accountability are equally important. Public construction projects involve taxpayers' resources, making it necessary for project costs, variations, payments and progress to be properly documented and monitored. Quantity Surveyors can strengthen accountability through accurate bills of quantities, objective tender evaluation, valuation of completed work, certification of payments and systematic monitoring of variations. Effective cost documentation also provides an audit trail through which government agencies can determine whether expenditure corresponds with actual physical progress [3].

The role of the Quantity Surveyor should therefore extend beyond conventional measurement and valuation to include early identification of financial risks, cost forecasting and strategic advice on project delivery. This is particularly important in North-Central Nigeria, where public infrastructure investment is needed across education, healthcare, housing and government facilities. Addressing abandoned public building projects requires an integrated approach involving government clients, Quantity Surveyors, architects, engineers, contractors, procurement officers, financial institutions and regulatory bodies. The Quantity Surveyor can serve as an important link between project cost planning, financial accountability and successful project delivery [4].

Concept of Abandoned Public Building Projects

Abandoned public building projects refer to government-funded building projects that have been initiated through planning, procurement and construction activities but are subsequently stopped or left incomplete for a prolonged or indefinite period without achieving their intended purpose. Such projects may include schools, hospitals, government offices, housing schemes, university buildings, roads-related structures and other public facilities. Abandonment is therefore different from a normal temporary construction delay because an abandoned project experiences a prolonged cessation of work and lacks a clear or effective mechanism for resumption and completion [5]. In the Nigerian context, project abandonment has been identified as a significant problem affecting public infrastructure development. Ibrahim, Loch, and Sengupta observed that Nigeria has experienced extensive project abandonment, particularly among large public projects, resulting in unfinished structures and substantial loss of invested resources.

Meaning of Public Building Projects

A public building project is a construction project initiated, financed or substantially controlled by a government institution for the provision of facilities and services to the public. Examples include government offices, schools, hospitals, police stations, university buildings and other civic infrastructure. Because these projects are financed largely through public resources, their successful completion is closely associated with public accountability, effective financial management and value for money [6].

Project abandonment occurs when construction activities are discontinued before the planned facility is completed and put into use. Abandonment may occur at different stages of construction. A project may be abandoned shortly after commencement, after substantial structural work, or when it is almost completed. The distinguishing feature is that construction stops and remains incomplete without timely and effective intervention.

Mamman and Umesi, in their study of Nigerian public construction projects, identified total abandonment as one of the consequences of project delays, alongside time and cost overruns. Their study identified delayed payment, inadequate client funding, changes in government, and poor site management and supervision among important causes of delays in public construction projects.

Major Characteristics of Abandoned Public Building Projects

- 1) Incomplete physical development: The building remains unfinished and cannot perform its intended public function.
- 2) Suspension of construction activities: Contractors, workers and other project participants withdraw from the site or construction activities continue only minimally [7].
- 3) Wastage of public resources: Money already committed to the project may not produce the expected public benefit.
- 4) Deterioration of completed work: Uncompleted structures can deteriorate because of exposure to weather, vandalism and inadequate maintenance.
- 5) Cost escalation: When a project eventually resumes, inflation, material-price increases and changes in design may increase the cost of completion.
- 6) Loss of public value: The intended social and economic benefits of the project are delayed or completely lost.
- 7) Accountability concerns: Abandoned projects can raise questions about procurement, financial management, project monitoring and responsibility for project failure [8].

Methodology

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory was developed and popularised by R. Edward Freeman in 1984 in his influential book *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*. The theory argues that the success of an organisation or project depends on effectively identifying, managing and balancing the interests of individuals and groups who can affect or be affected by its activities. In construction projects, relevant stakeholders include the government/client, Quantity Surveyors, architects, engineers, builders, contractors, project managers, financiers, regulatory agencies, local communities and end users. The theory is particularly appropriate to abandoned public building projects because abandonment rarely results from a single factor. It can emerge from poor coordination among stakeholders, inadequate funding, delayed decisions, weak communication, poor contract administration, political interference and ineffective monitoring. A Nigerian study specifically proposed Stakeholder Theory as a framework for addressing housing project abandonment, arguing that improved stakeholder involvement can help reduce the problem.

Application of Stakeholder Theory to the Study

The theory can be applied to the study in the following ways:

- 1) Government/client responsibility: Government as project owner must provide adequate funding, make timely decisions and ensure continuity of projects beyond political administrations.
- 2) Quantity Surveyor's responsibility: Quantity Surveyors should provide accurate cost estimates, prepare Bills of Quantities, monitor expenditure, manage variations and provide reliable financial information to the client.
- 3) Contractor responsibility: Contractors should possess the technical and financial capacity to execute projects and comply with contractual requirements.
- 4) Professional coordination: Architects, engineers, builders, Quantity Surveyors and project managers need effective communication and coordination to prevent design errors, variations, delays and cost escalation.
- 5) Transparency and accountability: Stakeholder Theory supports the sharing of relevant project information among stakeholders. This can improve accountability in procurement, expenditure, valuation and contract administration.

6) Community and end-user involvement: Beneficiaries should have opportunities

to communicate their needs and concerns, particularly where changes in project requirements or community conditions may affect project implementation.

7) Project continuity: Effective stakeholder relationships can help protect projects from unnecessary interruption when there are changes in political leadership or government priorities.

Relevance to Quantity Surveying

The theory provides a strong foundation for explaining the strategic role of Quantity Surveyors in preventing project abandonment. Quantity Surveyors occupy an important position between the client, contractor and other project professionals because they provide financial and cost-management information throughout the project lifecycle. Research on abandoned Nigerian building projects has identified inadequate planning, inadequate funding, wrong estimates, inadequate cost control, delayed payment and variation of project scope among the factors associated with abandonment.

Stakeholder Theory suggests that Quantity Surveyors should not be viewed merely as professionals responsible for measurement and valuation. They should participate actively in project planning, cost forecasting, procurement, financial monitoring, risk management, variation control and project reporting. This broader stakeholder-oriented role can help identify problems early and support informed decisions that improve project continuity.

Theoretical Proposition

The study can therefore be anchored on the following proposition:

When the interests, responsibilities and relationships of key stakeholders in public building projects are effectively coordinated, monitored and managed, the likelihood of project delays, cost escalation and eventual abandonment can be reduced.

This makes Stakeholder Theory highly suitable for examining how Quantity Surveyors can contribute to reducing abandoned public building projects through cost planning, transparency, accountability, coordination and continuous project monitoring.

3.0 Result and discussion on Addressing Abandoned Public Building Projects

Abandoned public building projects represent a significant loss of public resources and reduce the availability of essential infrastructure. In North-Central Nigeria, Quantity Surveyors can contribute to reducing abandonment through effective cost planning, financial monitoring and transparent procurement practices. Evidence from North-Central Nigeria shows that compliance with public procurement requirements is an important issue in public construction, while studies of Nigerian projects associate abandonment with funding problems, inadequate planning and cost escalation.

Result and Discussion

Strengthening Pre-Contract Cost Planning and Realistic Project Budgeting

Quantity Surveyors should be fully involved from the feasibility and pre-contract stages to prepare realistic estimates, bills of quantities, cash-flow forecasts and life-cycle cost assessments. Poor initial estimates can create a funding gap between the approved project budget and the actual cost required for completion [9]. Inflation, inaccurate estimating and inadequate financial planning have been identified as factors affecting the performance of Nigerian public construction projects. Babalola, Aderogba and Adetunji, for example, found that inflation and cost overruns contributed to project abandonment, delays and disputes in Nigerian public building projects. Quantity Surveyors should therefore undertake detailed market surveys, assess material-price trends, provide appropriate cost contingencies and advise clients on realistic project budgets before contracts are awarded. This is particularly important because research on Abuja public buildings identified inadequate working capital and lack of funds among major factors associated with project abandonment [10].

Improving Cost Monitoring, Contract Administration and Early Warning Systems

Quantity Surveyors can help prevent abandonment by continuously monitoring actual expenditure against the approved budget and work progress. Regular interim valuations, variation assessments, cash-flow monitoring, financial forecasting and cost-

value reconciliation enable project teams to identify financial problems before they become severe. Mohammed and Idris, based on Quantity Surveyors in Abuja, Kaduna and Kano, found that developing proper systems of site management and supervision and engaging appropriate professionals from project inception were among the most important measures for improving cost-control effectiveness in Nigeria. Similarly, errors in procurement documentation have been found to have significant effects on the eventual cost performance of Nigerian construction projects [11]. Quantity Surveyors should therefore establish early-warning mechanisms that immediately alert clients when expenditure, variations, inflation, delayed payments or physical progress deviates significantly from the approved plan. Early intervention can allow government to restructure financing, revise project scope or resolve contractual problems before the project becomes financially unviable.

Enhancing Transparency, Procurement Compliance and Accountability

Quantity Surveyors can strengthen transparency and accountability by ensuring that project costs, quantities, variations, payments and contract changes are properly documented and traceable. Transparent bills of quantities, objective tender evaluation, accurate valuation of completed work and proper certification of payments can reduce opportunities for overpricing, fraudulent claims and misuse of public funds. This issue is particularly relevant to North-Central Nigeria. Akinradewo, Bamidle and Ogunsemi specifically examined compliance with the Public Procurement Act in North-Central Nigeria and involved construction stakeholders working on TETFund projects. More broadly, research on Nigerian infrastructure procurement identified lack of transparency, corruption, embezzlement, procurement bottlenecks, collusion and inadequate procurement capacity as major impediments to effective infrastructure delivery [12]. The importance of independent project monitoring is also demonstrated by the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) [13]. Its 2022 project-tracking exercise reported abandoned projects and identified cases of project padding, while the Nigerian Institute of Quantity Surveyors participated as one of the stakeholders in the tracking framework.

Establishing Transparent Variation and Change-Control Mechanisms

Quantity Surveyors can reduce project abandonment by establishing effective systems for controlling variations, design changes and additional works. Uncontrolled variations can substantially increase the contract sum and create funding difficulties for government agencies. Evidence from the Federal Capital Territory shows that design changes, discrepancies in contract documents and variation orders are among important factors affecting construction project performance [14]. The Quantity Surveyor should therefore assess every proposed variation, determine its financial implications and ensure that additional costs are properly authorised before implementation. A transparent variation register should record the reason for the change, estimated cost, approval authority and effect on completion time.

Strengthening Cash-Flow Forecasting and Payment Monitoring

Delayed payment is an important contributor to construction delays and possible abandonment. Quantity Surveyors can reduce this problem by preparing realistic project cash-flow forecasts, monitoring interim valuations and promptly identifying discrepancies between work completed and payments made. Mamman and Umesi found that delay in payment and lack of funds by clients were among the leading causes of delays in Nigerian public construction projects, while the consequences included time overrun, cost overrun and total abandonment. Similarly, Dlakwa and Culpin identified lack of prompt payment and fluctuations in material, labour and plant costs as important causes of cost and time overruns in Nigerian public construction.

Introducing Independent Cost Auditing and Project Financial Reporting

Transparency can be enhanced when public construction projects are subjected to independent cost auditing and periodic financial reporting. Quantity Surveyors can provide an independent assessment of the relationship between the approved contract sum, expenditure, work completed, variations and outstanding financial commitments. This is important because abandonment is often associated with inadequate funding, cost

escalation and poor financial management. A study of public building projects in Abuja found that inadequate working capital was highly ranked among factors contributing to abandonment, while cost overrun was identified as a major effect of abandonment. Babalola et al. similarly reported that inflation and cost overruns contributed to abandonment, delays and disputes in Nigerian public building projects [15]. Independent cost reporting would enable government to know, at any point, how much has been spent, how much work has been completed, how much remains to be paid and how much additional funding is required.

Strengthening Early-Warning Systems and Accountability for Project Continuity

Quantity Surveyors can contribute to project continuity by developing early-warning systems that identify emerging risks before they result in suspension or abandonment. Such risks may include rapid increases in material prices, inadequate funding, delayed payments, design changes, contractor financial difficulties and political or administrative changes. Research in Abuja identified inadequate working capital, governance instability, imported materials, contract type and other environmental factors among issues contributing to project abandonment. More broadly, research on Nigerian construction projects has identified inadequate funding, poor pre-construction planning, contractor failure, improper scheduling and failure to engage qualified professionals as significant abandonment factors. The Quantity Surveyor should therefore provide periodic cost-risk and project-status reports to the client. When the cost-to-complete begins to exceed available funding, the QS should immediately advise the client rather than waiting until the project has reached a crisis point.

Strengthening Contractor Prequalification and Financial Capacity Assessment

Quantity Surveyors can help reduce abandonment by contributing to a rigorous prequalification and financial assessment of contractors before public building contracts are awarded. Contractor insolvency, inadequate financial capacity, technical incompetence and inability to sustain project cash flow can result in work stoppage. Evidence from Nigerian studies identifies contractor bankruptcy and inadequate financial capacity among important causes of project abandonment. In a study of abandoned projects in Nigerian public tertiary institutions, delayed payments, fund mismanagement, inadequate budgetary allocation, inadequate finance, inflation and contractor bankruptcy were identified among the significant causes of abandonment. Quantity Surveyors should therefore examine contractors' financial statements, previous project performance, available equipment, technical personnel, current workload and capacity to finance project activities before recommending contract award.

Maintaining Comprehensive Project Cost and Contract Documentation

Quantity Surveyors can improve accountability by ensuring that cost estimates, bills of quantities, tender documents, valuation certificates, variation orders, payment records and final accounts are properly prepared and maintained. Comprehensive documentation makes it easier to trace how public funds are committed and spent and reduces disputes arising from unclear contractual obligations. Research on abandoned government construction projects in Nigeria identified improper documentation, inadequate cost control and faulty designs among factors associated with project abandonment. Damoah et al. further reported that inadequate planning, improper documentation, delayed payment, disputes and insufficient cost control were among factors contributing to government construction-project abandonment. The Quantity Surveyor should therefore maintain an accurate financial history of each project from inception to completion. Such documentation also provides an important basis for auditing and investigating projects that experience delays or abandonment.

Promoting Project Continuity through Proper Planning and Stakeholder Coordination

Quantity Surveyors can contribute to reducing abandonment by participating actively in project planning, risk identification and stakeholder coordination from project inception. Projects should not be commenced without adequate feasibility studies, approved designs, realistic cost estimates, identified sources of funding and clearly

defined project objectives. Evidence from Nigerian research indicates that inadequate planning, inadequate funding, variation in project scope, faulty design, delayed payment and contractor incompetence are important contributors to construction-project abandonment. Damoah et al. specifically identified inadequate planning, inadequate funding, faulty design, delayed payment and scope variation as important causes of government construction-project abandonment. The Quantity Surveyor can help coordinate the financial dimension among the client, architect, engineer, contractor and other consultants. Early identification of cost, design and funding problems allows stakeholders to take corrective action before the project reaches the point of abandonment.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Abandoned public building projects constitute a significant obstacle to infrastructure development and efficient utilisation of public resources in North-Central Nigeria. Available evidence indicates that inadequate funding, poor planning, cost escalation, delayed payments, weak monitoring, contractor problems and governance-related factors can contribute to project abandonment. Quantity Surveyors have an important professional role in preventing these problems. Through realistic cost estimates, detailed cost planning, cash-flow forecasting, procurement advice, contractor assessment, cost monitoring, variation control and financial reporting, they can help government agencies make better decisions before and during construction. Their involvement can also improve transparency by ensuring that project expenditure is traceable to measurable physical progress. Based on the study the following were recommended: Mandatory pre-contract cost planning: Government should require detailed cost planning, feasibility studies and professionally prepared bills of quantities before major public building projects are approved. Adequate project funding: Projects should not commence without credible evidence that sufficient funds are available to support the planned construction programme. This is important because inadequate funding and working capital are strongly associated with abandonment. Early involvement of Quantity Surveyors: Qualified Quantity Surveyors should be involved from project conception through design, procurement, construction and final account preparation. Strengthen cost monitoring: Quantity Surveyors should prepare regular cost-value reconciliation reports showing the approved budget, expenditure, value of work completed, variations and estimated cost to completion. Establish early-warning mechanisms: Government agencies should require Quantity Surveyors to immediately report significant deviations in project cost, cash flow, progress, material prices and contract variations. Improve procurement transparency: Contractor selection should be based on competence, financial capacity, technical capability and previous performance rather than solely on tender price. Strengthen variation control: All variations should be properly evaluated, justified and approved before implementation to prevent uncontrolled increases in project costs. Introduce independent cost auditing: Major public building projects should undergo periodic independent cost audits to improve accountability and identify financial irregularities at an early stage. Ensure timely payment: Government should establish mechanisms for prompt payment of certified contractors' claims because delayed payment can contribute to project delays and abandonment. Maintain project continuity: Changes in political administration should not automatically lead to the abandonment of ongoing projects. Government should establish policies that protect properly conceived and adequately funded projects from unnecessary discontinuation.

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