Quality Assessment System in Construction (QLASSIC)

In an interview with B & I, Ir Ahmad Asri Abdul Hamid, General Manager of CIDB Development Sector explains the objectives, mechanism and benefits of Qlassic.

BACK IN THE day, long before phrases like “planned obsolescence” or “on-time delivery” were coined, the built structure, be it car, dwelling or kitchen cabinet, was defined by workmanship with all the elements of form, function and durability. In what are now ‘modern’ times, with the best of machines and materials technology, the exigencies of business dictate expediency and economy, with quality of work quite often compromised, if not, sacrificed, at the altar of ‘quick product delivery’. Charged with the development of capacity and capability of the national construction industry “through enhancement of quality and productivity”, the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) has devised and instituted QLASSIC – Quality Assessment System in Construction. In conversation with B & I, Ir Ahmad Asri Abdul Hamid, Senior General Manager, Development Sector, CIDB, elaborated on its objectives, mechanism and benefits.

B & I: While its objectives are quite clear, who is QLASSIC “targeted” at and, more importantly, what do they stand to gain from it?

AAAH: As an introduction, Qlassic with the ‘Q’ in front stands for and reflects quality. As you know, one of our roles, as stipulated in CIDB Act 520, is to promote quality assurance in the construction industry. Over the years, we have been doing just that but there was a gap, even in the initial years, meaning that you promote diligently but, eventually, how do you know if you have already achieved what you are trying to do? That’s when we decided to have some kind of measure to determine whether a project is of quality or not; hence we came with the standards CIS 7 (2014), revised from CIS (2006), entitled “Quality Assessment System for Building Construction Works”. With these quality standards, we now have a system to measure workmanship called QLASSIC based on a rating or score from 0 to 100%. We introduced QLASSIC in 2006 and, in 2007, adopted it and introduced it to the industry.

There are multi objectives to QLASSIC, for the industry and country as a whole - what we want to do is basically to enhance quality in construction in general and the way to go about it is, we believe, to inculcate this culture of quality in developers, contractors and consultants in the hope that they will emphasise on quality in their construction works. QLASSIC is targeted at them because we want developers to come forward and get their building construction assessed, which eventually will be to their advantage. Secondly, aside from ensuring quality of work, with QLASSIC developers can use it as a kind of branding and can publicise the scores they achieve and even sell property at a higher price.

On the other hand, home buyers benefit from high QLASSIC scores, knowing that developers and contractors have ensured and delivered quality workmanship. At the moment, QLASSIC is targeted at developers and contractors because quality assessment is on workmanship itself, i.e., when the building is completed, inspected and given a score. So, everybody is at a level playing field and you can compare one project with the other. Coming back to inculcating quality culture, a good example is Sime Darby, one of the pioneers, in a sense, of QLASSIC, which they adopted from the very beginning. Now they make it compulsory for all their projects and their contractors are responsible for a certain QLASSIC score. When Sime Darby started adopting QLASSIC in 2007, their score was only 61%; now they are easily scoring 75-76% on their projects! Another example is MKLand which has its own in-house QLASSIC team and contractors who secure their projects are made to comply.

B & I: What is the average score, noting that 100% is the perfect score?

AAAH: For the 2013 and 2014 period that we monitored, the average score is about 72% - we regard 70% and above as passable. Anything less than 70% is not that a good rating and if you score 80% that means...
there is quality in every aspect of the building.

B & I: Keeping QLASSIC in mind, what are some of the key observations should a purchaser make when taking vacant possession of a property?

AAAH: Home owners and purchasers will have to rely on visual inspection and, as a guide, the publication by CIDB and Sime Darby on ‘Sharing of Good Practices Towards Achieving High QLASSIC Score’ is readily available. The areas that the home buyers can look at are floors, walls, ceilings, doors and windows, internal fixtures (fittings and switches), basic wiring, paintwork and also physical defects, e.g., cracks in the plaster, wavy or unlevel floors. They can check tiling work, i.e., gaps or spacing between tiles or knocking on them – a hollow sound comes from very low quality work.

B & I: In CIDB’s experience, what are some of the common complaints insofar as workmanship and contractors' performance?

AAH: In our assessor’s experience, major complaints are crack and damage, sometimes chipped walls, ceilings and, mostly, finishing, i.e., of surfaces with paint drip and different colours. Causes for cracks and damage may be the wrong percentage of cement in the mixture of plaster or wrong selection of materials for plaster. For flooring, it is mostly hollowness and cement screed cracks. Roofs leak because of the use of low quality tiles or inadequate overlapping when laying roof tiles. For staircases, the size of track rise for each step is not the same. For doors, the top and bottom are not painted or misaligned when closed with gaps between door frame and door itself whereas for glass windows, it is the accessories, the rubber linings. The assessor’s various tools include level gauges for floors and walls, wedges for measuring gap tolerances, short level gauge for M&E fixtures, plumb line for calibrating verticalness. Samples of rooms are taken for big housing projects as it is not possible to do all the houses; they do random sampling which covers the whole project.

B & I: By the same token, what are the remedies available to consumers who seek redress and/or compensation for such complaints (defects)?

AAAH: When you sign the S&P Agreement, it is actually a contract between you and the developer - it spells out the duty and responsibility of the developer to ensure that the project is delivered to you with a certain expected quality. Should you have problems with defects, it is your right to complain to the developer and the developer has got to remedy such defects. Developers who voluntarily adopt QLASSIC and make it compulsory are, to me, heroes, people we should promote. There is also the Housing Tribunal to refer your complaints, including House Buyers Association. We are not empowered to intervene, we have no legal status in buyer/developer disputes. except to provide advice if called upon.

QLASSIC has been around for 7 years and we have been promoting it to developers and contractors via road shows, seminars and so on but the take-up has been slow because it is voluntary and only serious developers see the value of it. That’s the reason why we have changed our strategy over the last 1-2 months; now we want to promote it downstream, to home buyers, to tell them it is their right to demand for QLASSIC whenever they want to buy a house, even before signing the S&P. We want them to be aware that there is such an assessment system so they know whether the project is of quality or not. If more house buyers were to demand it, then developers will have no choice but to adopt QLASSIC.

B & I: What are the action plans for this new strategy of sensitizing home buyers?

AAAH: We are promoting it through the media and advertising and next in the pipeline is the website link to CIDB, YouTube video and distribution of the guidelines we spoke of earlier to home buyers. A half-day workshop for the media is being finalised for 10 November 2014.

B & I: Any thought about legislating QLASSIC?

AAAH: Actually, that is one of the inputs in our proposals to the Government for 11MP (11th Malaysia Plan), the last lap before 2020, another five years to go. We are hoping that there will be changes and we want to suggest that QLASSIC be compulsory, the best way to go because there are so many projects in Malaysia. However, you cannot do QLASSIC the way we are doing now; what we want is for QLASSIC assessment scores to be included in submissions for getting CCC (Certificate of Completion and Compliance) for buildings, with the assessment/score duly certified by the consultant who is to be responsible and liable for it, especially for scores below 70%.

B & I: Finally, how does one go about to use QLASSIC, i.e., from registration through to the assessment process, and what is the desired end result?

AAAH: Requests for QLASSIC assessment, as far as housing projects are concerned, will have to come from developers and contractors. After submissions of application, our team will start to do the scoping and sampling of areas to be inspected on site by our assessors who would then file their report. However, assessment is post-construction, i.e., to be done before vacant possession of the premises and before handover of keys, failing which home owners will lose ground and advantage as developers can quite easily blame them for defects. In a lot of cases, when buyers are unhappy with workmanship quality, they end up doing their own repairs. We charge a fee of RM500 to developer or home buyer and we require, at the very least, two weeks’ notice.
What is MyCREST?

Malaysian Carbon Reduction and Environmental Sustainability Tool (MyCREST) is a carbon reduction and sustainable tool that guide construction industry players and stake holders to design, construct and operate building to integrate with the low carbon and sustainable practices. The buildings that apply for MyCREST will be given certification based on points achieved.

MyCREST is developed by taking into account the whole building life cycle starting from pre-design until demolition of a building.

Aim

MyCREST is aimed to integrate carbon assessment criteria and reduction strategies into the matrix of sustainability resulting in a combined sustainable assessment rating system for the built environment.

Objective

1. To quantify the environmental impacts of the built environment in both carbon reduction and sustainable impact terms.
2. To ensure the best environmental practice according to global and local standards and targets.

Elements in MyCREST

MyCREST

Malaysia Carbon Reduction & Environmental Sustainability Tool
Credit Points Based

Carbonized Items
- Energy
- Water
- Lifecycle Analysis
- Carbon Sequestration
- Waste Management

Methods of Assessment

Assessment Criteria
Carbon Calculators
Carbon Reduciton (CR)
Carbon Impact (CI)
Sustainability (S)
Credit Points

SUSTAINABILITY DEVELOPMENT
- Economic Growth
- Environmental Protection
- Social Equality

Carbon Impact (CI)
Non-quantified carbonized items

Sustainability (S)
Not related to carbon emission/reduction but has impact on other sustainable issues

Embodied Carbon Calculator
Operational Carbon Calculator
Carbon Sequestration
Carbon Offset

Methods of Assessment