

Emergence, Stratagems and Extent of Adaptation of Corporate Business Enterprises in the North West and South West Provinces Coterminous with West Cameroon, 1962-1982

Lambert Munang Ngong, Nixon KahjumTakor, PhD

The University of Bamenda, Cameroon

**Corresponding Author: Lambert Munang Ngong, the University of Bamenda, Cameroon*

Abstract: *The transition from the Franco-British titular rule in Cameroon to the establishment of the Federal State came with inordinate exigencies. One of such needs was to provide basic infrastructural amenities to meet the ramified demands of the new independent state. This necessity occurred at a time when expatriate firms, mostly European, were losing grip and security as a result of the retreat of the supervisory authorities. It is in this circumstance that home-grown entrepreneurs emerged as new business players with public limited liability companies to accompany the state in its public works drive. In spite of the fact that most of these companies and their proprietors became household names in Cameroon, the profundity of their entrepreneurial ingenuity remains widely untold. It is in this respect that, this paper, drawing largely from primary evidences and employing a descriptive and analytical approach, explores the resourcefulness associated with indigenous entrepreneurial actors that animated corporate enterprises in the North West and South West Regions Coterminous with West Cameroon from 1962 to 1982. The findings inter alia revealed that, indigenous companies and entrepreneurs in West Cameroon demonstrated entrepreneurial ingenuity in their ability to mobilise capital and scout business opportunities especially in the sphere of civil engineering. It emerged from the study that even though West Cameroon was replete with indigenous public limited liability companies, through strategic maneuvers, the most outstanding ones became the Kilo Bros Ltd of S. K. Kilo, Nangah Company Ltd of D. A. Nangah, and Che Company Ltd of Daniel Che. The paper further disclosed that to boost brand image and company profitability, indigenous companies diversified their business activities to incorporate diverse business interests. Principally, the paper argues that; in spite of the entrepreneurial ingenuity and state policy to protect local corporate business initiatives, the playground was hardly level for all the local enterprises as some were favoured and others marginalised for political reasons. Again, most of the enterprises were unable to optimise their potentials given the obstinate neo-colonial linkages enjoyed by giant European, notably French, and long established expatriate enterprises operating from East Cameroon with tentacles spreading over and dominating most of the lucrative federal projects.*

Keywords: *Adaptation, Business, Corporate, Emergence, Enterprise, Extent, North West, Province, South West, Stratagem, West Cameroon*

1. INTRODUCTION

The immediate period after the independence and reunification of Cameroon in October 1961 saw the emergence of reputable indigenous corporate enterprises which were focused on but not restricted to civil engineering activities. These companies although of limited liability attributes established robust managerial structures that vacillated around the entrepreneurial personality of their founders. This was particularly common in West Cameroon with the budding of corporate enterprises such as the Nangah Company Ltd, Kilo Brothers Company Ltd, Che Company, Cameroon Building Company (CABULCO), Union Profess Company Ltd, S A Arrey Company, Longla Construction Company Ltd and HACAME Company Ltd. These companies were variously initiated and animated by managers like D A Nangah, S. K. Kilo, Daniel Che, Victor Obie, S.A Arrey, S. P. Longla and Joseph C. Kamga respectively. These entrepreneurs for diverse reasons, in spite of their inventiveness to capture business opportunities and determination to compete among themselves and/or with rival, well and long established expatriate firms, did not fully reap from their business marshal plans.

In this respect, this paper sets out to examine the emergence, stratagems and extent of adaptation of the corporate business enterprises in the North West and South West Provinces coterminous with

West Cameroon, from 1962 to 1982. Principally, the paper argues that indigenous corporate business enterprises in West Cameroon between 1962-1982, masterfully improvised strategies such as the identification and appropriation of business opportunities, capital mobilisation, diversification of business activities and lobbying tactics to establish prominence and contain competition from household expatriate firms in East Cameroon. However, the political economy of the Federal republic of Cameroon did not provide a level playing ground for the local firms to level up opportunities. Again, the privileges given to expatriate firms in terms of contracts made rebuff of the state policy to protect rising home-grown companies.

2. IDENTIFICATION AND APPROPRIATION OF BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

The unfurling of an embryonic nation gave daring indigenous entrepreneurs ample opportunity to find purpose and place. Cameroon as we know was a German Protectorate consequent to the July 1884 Germano-Duala treaty.¹ German rule was however short lived (1884-1916) because of the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 led that to their expulsion from the territory by Britain and France in 1916.² This was followed by the partition of the territory such that Britain took one-fifth of the territory and France took four-fifth. The two sectors were placed under the Mandate Committee of the League of Nations in 1922 and were respectively handed to Britain and France to Administer on behalf of the League. That same year 1922, Britain partitioned British Cameroons into British Northern Cameroons and British Southern Cameroons. Britain also decided to administer British Cameroons as part of Nigeria. After the Second World War of 1939 to 1945, there was an upsurge in nationalist activities in both British and French Cameroons culminating in the granting of independence to French Cameroon on 1st January 1960 and Southern Cameroons on 1st October 1961 by reunification with the Republic of Cameroon to form the Federal Republic of Cameroon.³ The New Country was divided into two states- East Cameroon comprising former French Cameroon and West Cameroon comprising former British Southern Cameroons.

This context presented a unique opportunity for some indigenous West Cameroonians to emerge as building contractors. Kilo and Nangah demonstrated entrepreneurial ingenuity in their ability to perceive business opportunities even before they emerged and to turn them into profitable businesses. Considering all the economic potential and infrastructural needs of the nascent nation in terms of office space and other necessary structures, S. K. Kilo and D. A. Nangah, for example, decided to quit their jobs and become building contractors. Kilo resigned from his position as Cooperative Inspector with the Southern Cameroons Cooperative Department and established the Kilo Bros Limited in 1959 as a construction Company which he later transformed into a diversified conglomerate. Influenced by Kilo, D.A. Nangah also ventured into construction and established the Nangah Company to carry on business as building and civil engineering contractors. So, at independence, Kilo and Nangah found themselves as the only indigenous registered corporate public construction entrepreneurs in the entire country who had to compete with well established and capitalized expatriate companies in East Cameroon such as Satom and Asquini Encorad in constructing buildings and facilities to host the numerous structures and services of the new country. In the late 1960s, Che, inspired by Nangah, also established the Che Company as a Construction Company.⁴ They were all able to make use of savings accumulated from earnings in their previous jobs as startup capital. Nangah for example had worked with the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) and the Public Works Department (CDC), while Kilo had worked with the Cooperative Department. The working capital of the companies was expanded through plough back profits, issuing of shares and bank loans.

3. CORPORATE ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT DYNAMICS

Commencing from the early 1960s, various indigenous Construction Companies took the legal form of Joint Stock Companies. After independence in 1961, these companies were incorporated in West

¹P.M. Kale, *Political Evolution of the Cameroons* (Buea: Government Printing Press, 1967), 6.

²V.G. Fanzo, *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges Vol.2* (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1989), 56.

³Victor Julius Ngoh, *History of Cameroon Since 1800* (Limbe: Presbook, 1996), 233.

⁴Zacheaus Ful Amandoh (retired social insurance worker and quarter Head for Ntemnifor quarter-Nkwen, 70 years), Foncha Street-Bamenda, 3rd February, 2017.

Cameroon under the Companies Ordinance Caps 37 of the 1958 laws of Nigeria.⁵ The Nangah Company for example was incorporated on 20th March, 1962 under the Companies Ordinance of West Cameroon principally as a building Construction with headquarters in Buea.⁶ The Kilo Bros Company Limited was equally incorporated in 1962 under the same ordinance with its registered office at Bamenda.⁷ This form of entrepreneurship was seen as a means to benefit from tax advantages by being eligible to corporation tax on their taxable profits and exempted from higher personal income tax rates. Also, it was also intended to give them greater access to capital through the issuing of shares, acquisition of loans and exploitation of other sources of finance.

In the management of these companies, indigenous entrepreneurs also demonstrated ingenuity. Policy and executive authority was exercised by the Managing Directors (M.D.) of the respective companies.⁸ These Managing Directors were often the founders and principal shareholders of the companies. It was in this respect that D. A. Nangah served as Managing Director in the Nangah Company, S.K. Kilo in the Kilo Bros Company, Daniel Che in the Che Company,⁹ S.K. and Victor Obie in CABULCO. Under the Managing Directors were subordinate managers who were designated to various units and components of the companies. In the case of the Kilo Bros Company, Kilo's closest collaborators in the management of the company were mostly his family members.¹⁰ Nevertheless, ultimate business decisions were in Kilo's hands. As far as the Nangah Company was concerned, the Company had a board of Directors in which the number of Directors was not to be less than 2 or more than 12 unless otherwise determined by the Board of Directors.¹¹ Only people with at least 100 shares in the Nangah Company were eligible to become members of the board. The signatories to the company's memorandum and Articles of Association who were holders of at least 1000 shares and made initial contributions of at least 500 pounds, were to be Life Directors. Meanwhile, a proportion of directors subject to rotation were expected to retire every year from the Board of Directors.¹² The remunerations of the Directors were from time to time determined by the General Assembly of the Company. The directors were also empowered to grant special remunerations to any member of the Board of directors who rendered any special or extra service to the company.

The directors were in charge of managing the business of the company and the day to day management, coordination and supervision of the company's affairs was vested on the Managing Director who was appointed by the Directors.¹³ The Managing Director was exempted from retirement by rotation. His remuneration was by way of salary, commission, and participation in profits. D.A. Nangah was the lone and only Managing Director of the Nangah Company.¹⁴ He carried on the day to day business of the company and exercised control and supervision over the acts and proceedings of all servants of the Company in matters of execution of duties, administration as well as matters concerning the appointment of staff and accounts and records of the Company.¹⁵ The directors delegated to the Managing Director, the functions necessary to facilitate the smooth and efficient performance of the day to day business of the company. Furthermore, the Directors were empowered

⁵Luke Kudze Sendze (Attorney at Law and former legal Adviser to the Kilo Bros Ltd, 78 years), Veterinary Junction –Bamenda, 16th /10/2017.

⁶Idem.

⁷Idem.

⁸Barminjoh Chambers Archives Bamenda, Kilo Bros Company File, Board of Directors Meeting of Kilo Bros Limited, Holden at the Bamenda the Bamenda Office of the Company, 15th May 1977, 3.

⁹Charles Kilo (Businessman and son to S.K. Kilo, 46years) Foncha Street-Bamenda, 8th/12/2016.

¹⁰Idem.

¹¹Memorandum and articles of Association of Nangah Company Limited.

¹²Ibid, 13.

¹³ Lambert N. Munang, "Indigenous Entrepreneurs in Bamenda, 1939-1991 : Emergence and Contributions " M A Dissertation in History, The University of Bamenda, 2018, 82.

¹⁴Peter Ngufor (Commercial Entrepreneur and former worker of the Nangah Company, 74 years), Mile 3 – Bamenda, 15th /10/2017.

¹⁵Lambert N. Munang, "Indigenous Entrepreneurs in Bamenda" 83.

to borrow money or raise funds from other sources in times of need for the purpose of the Company. They were equally empowered to work to secure the repayment of the company's debts. The Chairman of the Board of Directors was elected by the Directors and was empowered to coordinate the proceedings of board meetings.



Plate1. *Some Prominent Indigenous Entrepreneurs in West Cameroon*

Sources: *Peter Ngong's Photo Album, Old Town Bamenda and Charles Kilo's Photo Album, Bamenda culled in 2021.*

From left to right, D.A. Nangah, M.D. of the Nangah Company and S K Kilo (Right) M D of Kilo Bros Ltd.

By mid 1970, D.A. Nangah personally owned 64.65% of the total amount of shares issued by the Nangah Company, valued at 129,290,000 FCFA, with the next person having 6% valued at 12,000,000 FCFA.¹⁶ Prominent politicians, administrators, businessmen and professionals were shareholders in the Nangah Company. Examples include J. N. Foncha, Anna Foncha, S.T. Muna, Professor Victor A. Ngu, Kadji Joseph, and Francis Max Moffo. Foncha in particular was the fourth highest shareholder in the company. A vast majority of shareholders in the company were family members of D. A. Nangah. These included Elisabeth N. Nangah, Emmanuel A. Nangah, Francis F. Nangah, Ana A. Nangah, L. I. T. Nangah, S.N. Nangah, Ignatius F. Akenji, A.M. Nangah, C.T. Nangah, Marie S. Nangah, D. Ade Nangah, Ngwa T. Nangah, Willy C.J. Nangah, Paricia A. Nangah, Awah a. Nangah and Ivo Nangah.¹⁷

As concerns the sharing of dividends, the amount to be shared was recommended yearly by the Board of Directors and declared by the company in the General Assembly. Interim dividends were also often paid out by the Directors from time to time as it appeared to them to be justified by the profits of the company.¹⁸ However, before recommending dividends, the Directors often set aside from the profits amounts of money as reserves perhaps for reinvestments in the company. In such cases, it was calculated to increase the share capital of the Company's shareholders in the company.

The Company also had Auditors who at least once each year, examined the accounts of the Company and established a balance sheet.¹⁹ Both the Auditors and the Directors made out a balance sheet every year and presented before the General assembly. The balance sheets were often accompanied by reports from the Directors and Auditors. Copies were delivered to those entitled to, 14 days before the General assembly. The reports were read before the Company in the General assembly and were subject to inspection and questioning by its members.

¹⁶Barminjoh Chambers Bamenda, Nangah Company Limited File, Issued Share Capital, Shedule 1.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Luke Kudze Sendze (Attorney at Law and former legal Advicer to the Kilo Bros Ltd, 78 years), Veterinary Junction –Bamenda, 16th /10/2017.

¹⁹Idem.

4. LABOUR RECRUITMENT AND TREATMENT

Concerning workers, the Kilo Bros Ltd, Nangah Company and Che Company, recruited a bulk of workers who did not possess the requisite professional skills and trained them on the job. They initially relied on former workers of the Public Works Department (PWD). Such persons experienced in construction works, were most often permanently engaged by the construction companies and placed on fixed salaries.²⁰ The workers enjoyed social security benefits and even had vacations. In the 1960s, the Nangah and Kilo Bros Companies employed more than 800 and 500 employees, respectively on permanent contracts.²¹ These workers were employed as builders, transporters and office staff. During the construction of the Mbalmayo Forestry School in the early 1970s, the Nangah Company engaged 450 remunerated local workers.²² Besides, the companies employed dozens of expatriate staff to head the engineering, design and architectural units of their companies. In fact, in the 1960s when only the PWD could boast of an architect, the Nangah Company shared in that luxury. During the construction of the Forestry School in Mbalmayo executed by the Nangah Company in the 1970s, the company made use of 11 Russian engineers and architects and 3 Italian experts.²³ One of the Italians by name Mario Vita was the “Chef Chantier” in the Mbalmayo construction project and was paid a monthly salary of 400000 FCFA. He was assisted by another Italian expert called Gabriel Damuline who was paid 300000 FCFA per month.²⁴ Another Italian by name Juvani was in charge of electrical work in the project. Mario unfortunately died in a motor accident in 1975 while on his way to supervise a Nangah Company construction job in Dschang.²⁵ The 11 Russian staff were paid by their home government but received honorariums of 50,000 FCFA each from the Nangah Company. This was in line with the Cameroon-Russia partnership agreement in the construction of the Mbalmayo Forestry School which explicitly stated that Russia was to provide supervisors and financial and material resources worth 1.7 billion FCFA.²⁶

The skills and intelligence demonstrated by some of the expatriate workers in Cameroon deserves attention. Gabriel Damuline the Italian expatriate worker who worked with the Nangah Company was widely hailed for his intelligence and skillfulness. In the Mbalmayo Forestry School project, Damuline fabricated chairs for the Salle de Cinema with local materials in lieu of imported chairs. The chairs were indeed amazing and highly appreciated by Cameroonian authorities.²⁷ However, many of the expatriate workers were criticised by Cameroonians who worked with them for displaying superiority. The expatriate staff provided on the job training to the largely unskilled indigenous workers. This became instrumental in enhancing technological transfer and some of the indigenous workers later emerged as great builders and contractors in the likes of Alfred Tayu who later became a formidable tilling contractor.²⁸

As stated earlier, workers in these companies were mostly employed on permanent basis with the respective companies taking social security engagements through the payment of monthly social insurance dues. Workers were remunerated according to their respective categories and these categories ranged from categories 1 to 12. Category 1 was for domestic servants, category 3 for labourers, category 4 for carpenters, categories 5 and 6 for time keepers and clerks.²⁹ While categories

²⁰Idem.

²¹Peter Ngufor (Commercial Entrepreneur and former worker of the Nangah Company, 74 years), Mile 3 – Bamenda, 15th /10/2017.

²²Joseph N. Abongwa (Entrepreneur and Former Nangah Company Accountant, 88 years), Mile 5 Nkwen-Bamenda, February 2020.

²³Idem.

²⁴Idem.

²⁵Idem.

²⁶Peter Ngufor (Commercial Entrepreneur and former worker of the Nangah Company, 74 years), Mile 3 – Bamenda, 15th /10/2017.

²⁷Joseph N. Abongwa (Entrepreneur and Former Nangah Company Accountant, 88 years), Mile 5 Nkwen-Bamenda, February 2020.

²⁸Peter Ngufor (Commercial Entrepreneur and former worker of the Nangah Company, 74 years), Mile 3 – Bamenda, 15th /10/2017.

²⁹Joseph N. Abongwa (Entrepreneur and Former Nangah Company Accountant, 88 years), Mile 5 Nkwen-Bamenda, February 2020.

8, 9, 10, 11 and 12, were for the cadre. Between 1972-1975, the average salary of a lower category construction worker was 15000 FCFA, while daily wage however stood at 1000 FCFA.³⁰In the recruitment of workers especially in the higher categories, job interviews were conducted in fairness. Mass recruitment was done for labourers with priority given to those who ranged first. It is also important to state that, the Nangah Company as well as other indigenous companies, made efforts to continuously improve the professional competencies of the workers.

Apart from the on-the-job training workers received from experts in the field, some of them were sent abroad for more specialised training. The goal was to safeguard the continuity and sustainability of the business by raising indigenous expertise. It was in this respect that indigenous entrepreneurs selected people who were close to them and sponsored them to study in relevant fields abroad. In the Nangah Company, a close associate of Nangah called Mofokeh serving as an accountant in the Nangah Company was sent abroad for a specialised study course in business administration.³¹ Furthermore, J. C. Awundakah who hailed from Nangah's Mbatu village and related to Nangah was also sent abroad by the company for a similar business managerial study course.³² Socially, well established indigenous companies such as the Nangah Company sponsored workers on pleasure trips. For example, during the execution of the Mbalmayo Forestry School project, workers went for excursions to Kribi and Douala at least twice annually.³³ This was intended to help them to socialise and feel rejuvenated.

5. DIVERSIFICATION OF BUSINESS ACTIVITIES

To boost brand image and company profitability, indigenous construction companies diversified their business activities to encompass diverse business interests. It was in this respect that Kilo Bros Ltd was also involved in several business activities. The Kilo Bros Ltd provided mail delivery services for the North West Province across the Ring Road. The service served Bamenda through Ndop, Nso, to Nkambe and Kom through Wum, and Bafut.³⁴ In fact, after 1961, there were five routes of mail transportation in Bamenda. These were run by the administration and Kilo Bros Ltd. Kilo Bros limited transported mails through the ring road which was subdivided into two mail routes; C1-Bamenda-Nkambe-Misaje (208km) and C2-Bamenda-Wum-Njinikom (145km). This was done on a thrice weekly frequency.³⁵ The Company was able to endure the appalling state of roads to render the mail delivery service for over 30years. Kilo also ventured into Texaco petrol dealership and became proprietor of petrol stations in Bamenda, Jakiri and Kumbo. Furthermore, Kilo invested in hospitality businesses operating the famed New City Hotel in Bamenda. The hotel also provided classic restaurant and night club services. Meanwhile in Nso, Mbve Market Guest House and the BuiHill Top Residence were raised. These structures provided decent hotel services. Kilo Bros Ltd was also deeply involved in the marketing of national cash produce such as coffee and cocoa as a Licensed Buying Agent (LBA).

Besides, Kilo operated a Coffee milling and bagging factory that was located at Sonac Street in Bamenda.³⁶ Elsewhere, Kilo was the proprietor of the most reputable Life Band in Bamenda. The grandeur, splendor and dignity of a wedding ceremony in Bamenda were judged by the presence of this band. The band was led for several years by the renowned John Ngassa.³⁷ Another commercial activity operated by Kilo was Toyota dealership. He was the first to introduce Toyota cars in Bamenda.³⁸ This led to the introduction of yellow taxis and Hiace buses for inter-urban transportation.

³⁰Idem.

³¹Idem.

³²Idem.

³³Joseph N. Abongwa (Entrepreneur and Former Nangah Company Accountant, 88 years), Mile 5 Nkwen-Bamenda, February 2020.

³⁴Sylvia Clarice Kilo, "Sylvester Kinzeka Kilo: A Window into His Life" (Memorial & Thanksgiving in Remembrance of Sylvester Kindzeka Kilo, Church of Resurrection Burtonsville, April 29th 2017), 5.

³⁵RAB, NW/sg/a/580/1/Bk, Annual Report on the Activities of the Provincial service for 1981/81

³⁶Charles Kilo (Businessman and son to S.K.Kilo, 46 years), Foncha Street-Bamenda, 8th/12/2016.

³⁷Idem.

³⁸Sylvia Clarice Kilo, "Sylvester Kinzeka Kilo: A Window into His Life" (Memorial & Thanksgiving in Remembrance of Sylvester Kindzeka Kilo, Church of Resurrection Burtonsville, April 29th 2017), 4.

The economic impact was far reaching. Kilo successfully used the business strategy of giving out cars on hire purchase to aspiring entrepreneurs. Many young aspiring entrepreneurs collected cars on hire purchase from Kilo and were able to use the cars to work, raise money and conveniently pay for them.³⁹ This gave way to the emergence of a new cream of indigenous transporters in Bamenda.

Daniel A. Nangah and his Nangah Company Ltd were also involved in business diversification. Apart from building construction, Nangah was the proprietor of the famed Nangah Bakery in Bamenda. This Bakery introduced outstanding innovations in the type and varieties of bakery products. Also, Nangah operated businesses in the hospitality sector. He established the famous Skyline Hotel in 1969 that had 22 rooms with 33 beds⁴⁰ and constituted a jewel for the town of Bamenda. In 1977, he equally established the Ringway Hotel in Azire Bamenda. The Hotel provided lodging facilities with the Capacity of 10 rooms with 17 beds.⁴¹ The hotel also provided classic restaurant services and a snack bar. By 1965 the Nangah, Company expanded its business activities to include the production of high quality furniture, using seasoned wood for office and house hold purposes. Compared to the prices charged on imported furniture, the rates charged by the Nangah Company were more moderate and the goods producible at required time. Several government offices, educational establishments, commercial enterprises and state corporations acquired office furniture from the Nangah Company. The Company also got engaged in coffee and cocoa dealership as LBA, making use of their branch managers in various localities to buy these produce from farmers. A.N. Jua for example even served as the Branch Manager for the Company at Kom and enabled the company to dominate the buying of coffee in the area.⁴²

Bamenda indigenous Building Construction Companies- Kilo Bros Ltd, Nangah Company Ltd and Che Company Ltd; went on in the 1960s and 1970s very successfully executing several projects for the government, other agencies and even individuals all over the Country, with their business turf being in West Cameroon. The Nangah Company in particular, was the biggest private company in West Cameroon with a share capital of 400,000,000 FCFA by 1968.⁴³ These companies competed with French Companies operating in Cameroon in the execution of construction contracts in both West and East Cameroon. They used all proper business strategies to gain market share in East Cameroon while maintaining their firm grip over the West Cameroon market. One of the tools they used was lobbying which constituted an important feature of the modus operandi of the building construction companies and deserves adequate attention.

6. LOBBYING FOR BUSINESS FAVOURS AND CONTRACTS

The lobby for contracts was one of the interesting features of entrepreneurial inventiveness. The business magnets often invested skills to try to influence politicians or government officials to grant attractive contracts to their respective companies. This began at the slightest signal of the availability of a contract service even if the offer was not yet open for tenders. This was meant to persuade public authorities to award them contracts. Lobbying was often modeled to win the considerations or favour of public managerial vote holders. It was a subtle wooing approach that began with publicising to the top public administrators the quality of services that the indigenous company in question could offer. In lobbying for contracts, indigenous contractors often enticed the top ranking government officials by projecting the skills, products and fairly attractive execution cost of projects.

Lobbying became an essential part of most if not all of the local companies given the fact that they operated in a context of stiff competition, not only from rival indigenous firms but from expatriate companies that were better equipped and well financed.⁴⁴ It was done through various forms; formal and covert correspondences. A case in point was the official correspondence addressed to the PM, J.N. Foncha on 15th October 1963, by the Managing Director of the Nangah Company soliciting for a contract that was yet to be launched. It stated among other aspects that:

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰RAB, NW/sg/a/580/1/Bk, Annual Report on the Activities of the Provincial service for 1981/81

⁴¹William Tamo Nji (Retired Businessman and cousin to D. A. Nangah aged 96 years), Njimafor- Mbatu, 11/6/2017.

⁴²Luke Kudze Sendze (Attorney at Law and former legal Adviser to the Kilo Bros Ltd, 78 years), Veterinary Junction –Bamenda, 16th /10/2017.

⁴³Idem.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

...we are made to understand that a new office is to be put up for you and we humbly ask to carry out the design and building of it.... Our reason of asking to do this is to enable you see the new designs which can be done by our Architect who is very qualify.... Time has come in this country when we have to change the old style of buildings having the same pattern.... We are prepared to give you guarantee on our design special foundation for the office taking into consideration the position of Buea on an active Volcanic [sic] mountain. In other progressive countries the indigenous companies are given the chance to improve on the building set up of the country but here we stick on PWD which cannot give a new design and more so, their cost will certainly be about 5-15% higher than our own....⁴⁵

In response to Nangah's letter, on November 21st 1963, the P. M.'s secretary writing for the P.M. acknowledged receipt of his letter and sought to inform him that "although it was intended to start the construction of the new office for the Prime Minister this year, the project has regrettably had to be shelved." This was explained on grounds of lack of sufficient funds. Nangah was however assured that as soon as it becomes possible to go ahead with the project, he was going to be invited to provide his position on how to proceed."⁴⁶ It is evident from the correspondence that the Nangah Company successfully won the attention of the P.M. as potential executors of the construction of the new P.M.'s office. The Nangah Company lobbied and was assured by the P.M. through official correspondence of an eminent invitation to solicit its services. This suggests that the company was very much connected with top government officials who readily provided useful information on prospective contracts.

Eventually, by 1964, when the 1964/1965 budget had been approved by the West Cameroon House of Assembly in which provisions were made for the building of a new office for the P.M, the P. M.'s office wrote to the Managing Director of the Nangah company, in August 1964, requesting his company to make a design for the building as soon as possible and submit it for consideration. After stating some specificities of the building in view, the letter explicitly stated that "the present office of the Prime Minister is an old ramshackle building filled to capacity. It is therefore intended that a new office should come into being within 4 months from now. Your early action in submitting your plans if you wish to undertake the construction of this office will therefore be highly appreciated."⁴⁷ The Nangah Company wasted no time to submit its sketch plans for the proposed office. In order to seek the approval of the P.M., the Nangah Company, in a letter addressed to the P.M., continued to seek considerations for the award of contracts. This is captured in the following extract:

An office for the Prime Minister is a prestige office and cannot be a common design like that of the KNDP secretariat as mentioned in your letter....As you will see from the Sketch, it is a storey building of a very high prestige design and you will be glad to see it when finished.... It is our intention to give a very special finish to the Prime minister's own section....This will be a copyright building and will not be used anywhere else in the country....⁴⁸

The lobby produced the desired results as on 31st August 1964 through letter no. P.200/8.3/71 the P.M.'s office wrote to the Nangah Company acknowledging receipt of the plans/letter and stating that "...the Executive Council considered the sketch plans and agreed that the Company should undertake the construction of new offices on negotiated contract terms...."⁴⁹

Lobbying was crucial because of the fierce competition that indigenous corporate business concerns faced from expatriate and other East Cameroon based companies like ASQUINI & ENCORD (Douala), SOFRA T.P. (Douala), SOTRAFOM (Douala), HALLE & CIE (Douala), DAMICO (Nkongsamba) as well as other rival indigenous companies in West Cameroon.⁵⁰ The enterprises competed over the execution of both Federal and State contracts. Several evidences have revealed

⁴⁵ NAB, File no. Re/a 1965/1 /New offices for Prime Minister's Office ,1965.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ NAB.Fileno.Qb/d(1966) 18, Business and construction Companies in west Cameroon, 1966.

that, owing to political intrigues, in the 1960s, the Nangah, Kilo and Che construction companies had an upper hand in the award of State contracts in West Cameroon while French Companies such as the Douala based ASQUINI had an upper hand in the execution of Federal Contracts.

Understandably, the privileged position enjoyed by Nangah, Kilo and Che Companies in the execution of state contracts in West Cameroon could be explained by certain factors. The KNDP government recognised the ability of indigenous companies to provide specialised infrastructural services and had a policy to support and protect them against rival expatriate companies. It was a subtle form of state capitalism which though important did not totally curtail neo-colonial linkages and influences as in most cases ASQUINI, an expatriate company, remained a giant actor in the execution of Federal Contracts even in West Cameroon. Nevertheless, in the spirit of economic competition, indigenous construction companies especially the Nangah, Kilo Bros and Che Companies wrestled hard to acquire market shares in the execution of Federal Contracts all over the country.⁵¹

The bias towards expatriate engagements in public contracts was more than evident in the politics of attributing contracts. This was the case in 1963 when the dominant role played by French Expatriate Companies in the execution of Federal Contracts was clearly demonstrated in the award of the contract to construct buildings for the services of the Federal Inspectorate in Buea. The first tender was launched in 1962 and 12 tenders were received from both indigenous and expatriate builders. The selection committee that sat on 29th November 1962 composed of: M.M. Noah Ahada (President of Administrative Council of S.I.C.), N'Dumu ((Director of Public Works in West Cameroon) and Ceiner Fichiefet (S.I.C. Technical Director)⁵² meticulously examined the tender documents received from the various contractors and construction companies and unanimously concluded that; of the 24 buildings to be erected, the UNION PROFESS Company will execute the construction of 6 single apartments for 6.200.000 FCFA and the Nangah Company Carryout the construction of 18 Villas for 57,624,000 FCFA.⁵³ The Federal authorities however annulled the decision of the tender's commission and established another commission headed by Jean Claude Ngoh who was the Federal Inspector of Administration in West Cameroon to receive and examine tenders for the re-award of the same contract. The Nangah Company tendered for an amount that was 25% less than that tendered by ASQUINI. The contract was however awarded to ASQUINI for 86,377,269 FCFA in March 1963.⁵⁴ Some perverse and unpersuasive arguments were advanced for eliminating the Nangah Company that had been earlier shortlisted and that had demanded an amount 25% less than that proposed by ASQUINI. The Nangah Company vigorously protested this bias by addressing protest letters to the P. M. of West Cameroon decrying the partiality and advocating for adequate protective mechanisms against foreign companies.⁵⁵

The frustrations of indigenous companies in the face of competition from expatriate companies also came to the lime light in 1967 when the 250,000,000 FCFA contract for the construction of Bilingual Grammar School, Molyko- Buea was launched. The Nangah Company spent so much for the tender with the hope of winning the contract but lost it to ASQUINI. This generated numerous reactions from both the Nangah Company and other indigenous companies in West Cameroon. The frustrations that ensued from the loss of this contract made D. A. Nangah to indicate to Nangah Company workers that they were going to be declared redundant because jobs were not more coming. Other indigenous contractors in West Cameroon who had tendered for the contract such as Victor Obie, S. A. Arrey and Neba Abongwa were happy with the fact that Nangah lost the 250,000,000 FCFA contract. This according to them stemmed from the fact that "Nangah monopolised state contracts in West Cameroon on Party principles given his frontline militancy in the party⁵⁶ and close family relations with the party leadership.

⁵¹Luke KudzeSendze (Attorney at Law and former legal Advicer to the Kilo Bros Ltd, 78 years), Veterinary Junction –Bamenda, 16th /10/2017.

⁵²NAB.Fileno.Qb/d(1966) 18, Business and construction Companies in west Cameroon, 1966.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵Joseph N. Abongwa (Entrepreneur and Former Nangah Company Accountant, 88 years),Mile 5 Nkwen-Bamenda, Febuary 2019.

⁵⁶NAB.Fileno.Qb/d(1966) 18, Business and construction Companies in west Cameroon, 1966.

Meanwhile, in the award of State contracts in West Cameroon, the Nangah, Kilo and Che Companies received preferential treatments. An example was in the contract of the Mankon Urban Town Market. The contract was given to the Nangah Company for 200,000,000FCFA. Tellco Cameroon Ltd had offered to build the market for 135,000,000 FCFA.⁵⁷ The political favour made to the Nangah Company could be judged from the significant difference in the above amounts, amounting to a magnificent sum of 65,000,000 FCFA. It was in this respect that, other indigenous companies in West Cameroon such as CABULCO, Union PROFESS Ltd, Tellco Cameroon Ltd and S.A. Arrey Company equally protested against the monopolisation of State contracts in West Cameroon by the Nangah, Kilo and Che Companies. A series of joint petitions were addressed to both State and Federal authorities decrying this phenomenon. One of such petitions in the mid 1960s was cited in confidential security report no.197/126 of the West Cameroon Security Service in Buea in the following words: "The rich who were in abundance; easily received huge credits as opposed to those who were really in need." The rich in this quote refers to the Nangah, Kilo and Che companies.

However, the dominant role played by the Nangah, Kilo and Che companies in the execution of state contracts in West Cameroon could be explained by the fact that these companies had largely distinguished themselves in the proper and timely execution of contracts, whose structures were reputable for ruggedness, solidity and durability. Besides, they often submitted tenders at prices far reduced than those demanded by expatriate companies. This was the case with the contract for the construction of Senior Staff Quarters to house American experts in Bota. The lowest expatriate tender was 95 million FCFA. The Nangah Company Ltd. tendered for 52 million FCFA,⁵⁸ got the contract and satisfactorily executed. In another perspective, the predominance of the Nangah, Kilo and Che companies in the execution of State contracts could partly be explained by the subtle form of state capitalism practiced by the KNDP Government in West Cameroon that gave favours to political acolytes in the guise of promoting indigenous enterprises. The establishment of the single party in September 1966 and later the Unitary State in May 1972 transformed the political landscape in Cameroon and removed the subtle KNDP political covering hitherto enjoyed by these indigenous companies.

Political wrangling between Daniel Che and D. A. Nangah over CNU Section Presidency in Mezam, brought a major split between these two figures who were in a joint stock company. This speeded the collapse of the Che Company Ltd.⁵⁹ Meanwhile political suspicion and social clashes between D. A. Nangah and President Ahmadou Ahidjo led to the political victimisation of the Nangah Company between 1979 and 1982. The Nangah Company ran into financial difficulties owing to the fact that, the company became a victim of arbitrary tax assessments resulting in protracted and devastating tax disputes with the government of the Cameroon. The company equally ran into financial difficulties due to nonpayment of executed contracts by the state amounting to 700,511,357 FCFA.⁶⁰ Under such circumstances, the Nangah Company in her 7th extraordinary general meeting held on the 9th of May 1982, resolved to go into voluntary liquidation.⁶¹ Within this same period, managerial problems that ensued in the Kilo Bros Company following the death of S. K. Kilo in 1977, hastened the demise of the Company in the early 1980s.⁶²

7. CONCLUSION

This paper examined the efforts made by indigenous public limited liability companies and their frontline entrepreneurs to adjust to the space of public works provisioning slackened by the transition from trusteeship rule to an independent and reunified state of Cameroon. Taking a focus on the North West and South West Provinces roughly representing the erstwhile British Southern and later West Cameroon(s) it argued that indigenous corporate enterprises between 1962-1982 masterfully improvised strategies through the identification and appropriation of business opportunities, capital

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Helen Bih Che, (Wife to Daniel Che, 76 years), Che Street Bamenda, 12/01/2017.

⁶⁰ Barminjoh Chambers Archive Bamenda, Buea High Court Suit No.HCF/47/89 "Report on reconciliation of Accounts Between the Nangah Company (In Liquidation) and Cameroon Government," April 1991.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Charles Kilo (Businessman and son to S.K. Kilo, 46years), Foncha Street-Bamenda, 8th/12/2016.

mobilisation, corporate organization and management dynamics; labour mobilisation, diversification of business activities and lobbying tactics to establish prominence and contain competition from household expatriate firms in East Cameroun, some of which had multinational tentacles. The paper revealed that, though the indigenous building contractors in West Cameroon demonstrated entrepreneurial ingenuity in their ability to create a business niche in the project of provisioning infrastructural needs of the emerging nation, the landscape sometimes did not give them adequate opportunities and protection as compared to the remnants of expatriate companies operating especially from East Cameroun. It also emerged from the study that although West Cameroon was replete with indigenous construction companies such as the Kilo Bros Ltd, Nangah Company Ltd, Che Company Ltd, Cameroon Building Company, Union Profess Company Ltd, Tellco Cameroon Ltd, S. A. Arrey Company Ltd and Longla Construction Company Ltd., the State politics especially under the KNDP administration up till 1966 characteristically gave opportunities to those that were managed by their political acolytes. This was illustrative with the favours received by the Kilo, Nangah and Che companies coordinated by S.K. Kilo, D.A. Nangah and D. Che, staunch KNDP militants, respectively in Bamenda. Given the privileges accorded to them, these three companies strikingly outsmarted the other corporations in the business landscape eliciting frustrations and petitions from them. At the same time it put to question the lofty state policy to protect local corporate initiatives from a holistic perspective. It also exposed the inseparable link between state politics and corporate business actions.

SOURCES CONSULTED

Primary Sources

Interviews

Abongwa, Joseph N. Entrepreneur and Former Nangah Company Accountant, 88 years, Mile 5 Nkwen-Bamenda, February 2019.

Amandoh, Zacheus F. Retired social insurance worker and quarter Head for Ntemnifor quarter Nkwen, 70 years, Foncha Street-Bamenda, 3rdFebruary 2017.

Che, Helen Bih, Wife to Daniel Che, 76 years, Che Street Bamenda, 12/01/2017.

Kilo, Charles. Businessman and son to S.K. Kilo, 46 years, Foncha Street-Bamenda, 8th/12/2016.

Ngufor, Peter. Commercial Entrepreneur and former worker of the Nangah company, 74 years, Mile 3 – Bamenda, 15th /10/2017.

Nji, William Tamo. Retired Businessman and cousin to D.A. Nangah aged 96 years, Njimafor Mbatu, 11/6/2017.

Sendze, Kudze Luke. Attorney at Law and former legal Adviser to the Kilo Bros Ltd, 78 years. Veterinary Junction –Bamenda, 16th /10/2017.

Archival Sources

Barminjoh Chambers Archives Bamenda, Kilo Bros Company File, Board of Directors Meeting of Kilo Bros Limited, Holden at the Bamenda the Bamenda Office of the Company, 15th May 1977

Buea High Court Suit No. HCF/47/89, Report On Reconciliation Of Accounts Between Nangah Company Limited (In Liquidation) and the Cameroon Government, April 1991.

National Archives Buea, File no. Re/a 1965/1 /New offices for Prime Minister's Office , 1965.

File no.Qb/d(1966) 18, Business and construction Companies in west Cameroon, 1966.

Regional Archive Bamenda, NW/sg/a/580/1/Bk, Annual Report on the Activities of the Provincial service for 1981/81

Memorandum and Articles of Association

Articles of Association of Kilo Bros Ltd, Victoria: Cameroon Times, 1962.

Memorandum and articles of Association of Nangah Company Limited, 1962.

Eulogies to Deceased Entrepreneurs

Kilo, Sylvia Clarice “Sylvester Kinzeka Kilo: A Window into His Life” (Memorial &Thanksgiving in Remembrance of Sylvester Kindzeka Kilo, Church of Resurrection Burtonsville, April 29th 2017), 5.

Secondary Sources

Fanso, V.G. *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges Vol.2*. London: Macmillan Publishers, 1989.

Kale, P.M. *Political Evolution of the Cameroons*. Buea: Government Printing Press, 1967.

Munang, Lambert N. "Indigenous Entrepreneurs in Bamenda, 1939-1991 : Emergence and Contributions" M A Dissertation in History, The University of Bamenda, 2018.

Ngoh, Victor Julius. *History of Cameroon Since 1800*. Limbe: Presbook, 1996.

AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHY



Lambert Munang Ngong, is an educator with one and a half decade experience of serving in public academic institutions in Cameroon. He is equally a PhD Research Fellow in the History Department of The University of Bamenda, Cameroon. He specializes in Economic and Social History with special interest in Entrepreneurial History.



Nixon Kahjum Takor, PhD, is currently an Associate Professor of History and Chair of the Department of History and Archaeology at the Faculty of Arts, The University of Bamenda (Cameroon). He was a participant at the 2013 Columbus-Ohio Business History Congress. He is member and one of the Technical Advisers of the Cameroon History Society. His teaching and research interests over the years have centered largely on aspects of economic and social historical dynamics.

Citation: Lambert Munang Ngong & Nixon KahjumTakor. "Emergence, Stratagems and Extent of Adaptation of Corporate Business Enterprises in the North West and South West Provinces Coterminous with West Cameroon, 1962-1982" *International Journal of History and Cultural Studies (IJHCS)*. vol 7, no. 2, 2021, pp. 104-115. doi: DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20431/2454-7654.0702009>.

Copyright: © 2021 Authors. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.