

Original Research Article

## The Contributions of the National Produce Marketing Board (NPMB) in the Socio-Economic Development of Meme Division in the South West Province of Cameroon, 1978-1991: An Historical Evaluation

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### ABSTRACT

Meme Division, within the period of this study, was considered the economic life wire of the then South West Province of Cameroon. Though not an industrial hub, the Division indulged in viable economic activities like agro-industrial related businesses. This was contingent, principally, on its fertile soils which encouraged the settlement of heterogeneous farming populations in the main urban centers and even in the most enclaved parts of the territory. This paper seeks to evaluate the role the National Produce Marketing Board (NPMB) played in fostering socio-economic development in the study locale. It zooms into the pivotal roles the marketing board played in fostering the cultivation and processing of such “king” or cash crops like cocoa and coffee which attracted the various marketing organizations to the area. This, notwithstanding however, the study establishes that most of the supposed development projects initiated by the NPMB were ephemeral in nature and therefore disappeared with the demise of the NPMB without a single vestige. Thus, from the research findings, the focus of the NPMB was not to develop the Division as was generally purported in the decree of creation but rather to facilitate the extraction of vital cash crops from the territory ostensibly for the good of the local farmers.

### Introduction

The National Produce Marketing Board (NPMB) was created by law No 76/20 of 9 September 1976 as a public establishment of an industrial and commercial nature. It had a legal status and financial autonomy. This agency took over the activities of the Price Stabilization Funds and the Produce Marketing Organization that existed in the former states of East and West Cameroon. It was supposed to determine the prices at which cocoa, Robusta coffee, arabica coffee, cotton and groundnut were bought from the farmers.<sup>2</sup> Another decree No 78/54 of February 1978 spelled out the specific objectives and structural framework of the organization. The NPMB was charged with the responsibility of overseeing the commercialization of cash crops within and without the country, thus, ensuring state monopoly over these products. This explained why it was given the added responsibility of granting loans and subventions to the structures in the rural areas that promoted the production of these staple products. The structures included the Cooperative Societies, the Licensed Buying Agents (LBAs) and other state institutions that supervised both the NPMB and these organs as spelled out under Article 5 of the decree creating the organization.<sup>3</sup> Cooperative societies were farmers’ organizations in the various sub divisions in the Province and supervised by a superstructure.<sup>4</sup> This superstructure was partially sponsored by the NPMB. At creation the NPMB inherited 48 billion CFA

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<sup>2</sup> Law No 76/20 of 9 September 1976 creating the National Produce Marketing Board.

<sup>3</sup> Article 5 of the decree creating the NPMB placed it under the supervisory authority of the Ministry in charge of Marketing of staple products which at the time was the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

<sup>4</sup> There were two main super structures that supervised the cooperative societies in the North West and South West Provinces- The North West Farmers Cooperative Union and the South West Farmers Cooperative Union respectively.

francs in cash and over 20 billion CFA francs worth in assets from the PMO alone.<sup>5</sup> This was the reserve fund on which the latter organization operated before its absorption into the NPMB. Article 4 of the text creating the NPMB established its headquarters in Douala but stipulated in paragraph 2 that: "Branches of the National Produce Marketing Board may be opened in other towns in Cameroon..." Thus, with the dissolution of the Produce Marketing Organization (PMO) in Kumba, its structure was transformed immediately into a branch of the NPMB. This organization was expected to champion the economic and social welfare of the farmers in the division as well as stimulate and spearhead rural development in the area.<sup>6</sup> This paper therefore seeks to demonstrate that Meme Division was very crucial in sustaining the activities of this supposed development catalyst. It further intends to investigate the impact this structure had on the socio-economic development of the locale within the period under review.

### **Geographical Location of MEME Division and Justification of the Time Frame**

The administrative evolution of Meme Division could be traced to the Anglo-French partition of Cameroon in 1916. This was following the Anglo-French Condominium of 1914-1916 which led to the defeat and ousting of the Germans from Kamerun.<sup>7</sup> While France administered French Cameroon alongside her Equatorial African colonies, Britain decided to merge her sectors with Northern and Southern Nigeria.<sup>8</sup> The Southern part of British Cameroons was divided into the administrative divisions of Victoria, Kumba, Mamfe and Bamenda. Kumba was composed of some twenty-one clans classified under six principal ethnic groups that covered the Barombi, Bakundu, Balundu, Balong, Bafaw, Bakossi, Bassossi, Mbonge and the Ngolo areas. It covered the administrative sub districts of Ndian, Ekondo Titi, Mbonge, Kumba Central, Konye, Nguti, Tombel, Bangem and Nyasoso. This administrative structure was maintained from the Mandate period until the attainment of the independence of British Southern Cameroon in 1961 through reunification with the state of East Cameroon.<sup>9</sup> The establishment of the Federal Republic of Cameroon in 1961 was soon followed by the creation of other administrative divisions in 1967 by President Ahmadou Ahidjo. Kumba Division was split into Ndian and Meme Divisions.<sup>10</sup> Following these arrangements, Meme Division now comprised Mbonge, Konye, Nguti, Tombel, Bangem and Kumba Central Sub Divisions.<sup>11</sup> This administrative arrangement was maintained until 1992.

Mindful of this historical development and the establishment of the NPMB, the chronological approach was adopted in delimiting the narrative in this study. The year 1978 was significant because the NPMB went operational following Decree No. 78/54 of February 1978. In 1991, the NPMB was dissolved. The year 1991 is also significant because the territory coterminous with Meme Division as described in this study underwent some changes. In fact, by 1992, Meme Division was partitioned by Decree no. 92/186 of 01/09/1992 into Meme and Kupe Mwanenguba Divisions.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Tombel, Nguti and Bangem sub-divisions were separated from Meme Division to constitute Kupe Mwanenguba Division. This paper threatens Meme Division before the 1992 administrative repartitioning.

### **Cocoa and Coffee Cultivation before and during the NPMB in Meme Division**

The inhabitants of Meme Division were engaged in a variety of economic activities conditioned by the geographical environment in which they found themselves.<sup>13</sup> But of all the economic engagements, agriculture occupied a crucial slot as a means of employment for most of the people in the division. Over 90% of the indigenous population was engaged in either food crop or cash crop cultivation. Cash crop cultivation developed rapidly following the establishment of plantations by colonial agencies (see table I). The Meanja Plantation Company had been opened in 1903 along the Victoria-Kumba highway, while the Mukonje plantation extended from the Bafawland to the Bakossi area. Other plantations were established around Mundame, near Mukonje, and Bakundu ba Kake. The indigenous populations were encouraged to cultivate cocoa such that a trade centre was established at Barombi by 1908.<sup>14</sup> Cocoa cultivation was carried out intensively in the Bakossilands,

<sup>5</sup> Kingsly, Awang Ollong. "The National Produce Marketing Board in Cameroon, 1978-91: An Analysis of its Origin, Performance and Collapse", in AFRIKA ZAMANI No 22 & 23, 2014-2015. P.109.

<sup>6</sup> Decree No 76/54 of February 1978. Organisation and operation of the National Produce Marketing Board. P10

<sup>7</sup> Lovett, Elango. *The Anglo-French Condominium in Cameroon 1914-1916: History of A Misunderstanding*. (Limbe: Navi-Group Publication, 1987).P.9.

<sup>8</sup> Victor, Julius Ngoh. *Cameroon 1884-Present (2018): The History of a People*. (Limbe: DESIGN HOUSE, March, 2019).P.146.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Pp 236-239.

<sup>10</sup> Victor, Julius Ngoh. *Cameroon, from a Federation to a Unitary State: 1961-1972*. (Limbe: DESIGN HOUSE, 2004) P 90. (Article by Thomas Ngomba Ekali).

<sup>11</sup> Archive of the Divisional Office in Kumba, Meme Division, consulted on 18/01/2017.

<sup>12</sup> Paul, Ninjoh Mbusheko. "The National Produce Marketing Board (NPMB) and the Socio-Economic Development of Meme Division, 1978-2991.MA Dissertation, The University of Bamenda, July 2018. P29.

<sup>13</sup> The Balong were involved in fishing along the Meme and Mungo Rivers; hunting was common in the forested Bakossiland, Supe and Nguti areas; others were involved in local crafts like weaving and smithing to produce baskets, cane chairs, hoes, cutlasses, etc.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Simon Epale. *Plantations and development in Western Cameroon, 1885-1975. A study in Agrarian Capitalism*. (New York: Vantage press, 1985). P.33

especially around Tombel, Ebonji, Nlog, Bekume, Western Bakossi, Etam, and North West Bakossi. This activity was equally popular in the Barombi, Bakundu, Balundu, Ekumbe, Balue, Balong, Bassossi, Bafaw and Mbonge clans<sup>15</sup>.

Table I: Plantations established by the German government and other colonial agents in the areas that eventually become Kumba/Meme Division.

PLANTATION	YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT	APP. SIZE OF PLANTATION	AREA SERVED	ESTABLISHING AGENCY	MAIN CROPS GROWN
Gessellschaft North-West Kamerun	1890s	2,5 hectares	Kumba/Barombi /Bakundu-ba-kake	Bremer Gessellschaft Nord-West kamerun	Cocoa/rubber /coffee
Mundame Estate	1890s	Not stated	Bafaw/ Bakundu localities	Bremer Gessellschaft Nord-West Kamerun	cocoa/rubber
Bavo-Mbonge Estate	1890s	14000 hectares	Mbonge/Iloani /Ndian	German firm	Oil palm/cocoa
Mundame factory	1890s	Not stated	Barombi/ Mundame	Jantzen and Thormaehlen	Cocoa/rubber
Bakossi plantations	1898	Not stated	Bakossi-land	Bakossi lands syndicate	Cocoa/coffee
Kautschuk Pflanzung "Meanja"- (Meanja Plantation company)	1903	5,570 hectares	Victoria/Kumba	K.K.C	Rubber/cocoa
Kamerun Kautschuk Campagnie Mukonje	1909	Not stated	Bafaw/Bakossi lands	K.K.C	Cocoa/rubber
Essosong Estate	1910	Not stated	Bakossi area	Herr Carl Raethke	Cocoa/tobacco

Source: Adapted from Joseph Simon Epale's *Plantations and Development in Western Cameroon, 1885-1975*. PP.28-34

Coffee was also cultivated in both the warm and cold areas of Meme Division, especially, in the Bakossi highlands of Bangem and Nyasoso. It was planted alongside cocoa in some parts of Bassossi, Bakundu and Bakossi lowlands. The cultivation of these cash crops (coffee and cocoa) was intensified with the establishment of cooperative societies in Southern Cameroon from 1922, such that by 1958 there were over 141 of them. They helped to shield the farmers from extortionist buyers who dominated the sector before the establishment of the Marketing Board Systems. Benefits derived from the marketing of both products encouraged the inhabitants of Meme Division to develop a keen interest in the cultivation of these crops and equally to set up cooperative societies. Marketing of cash crops had been in the hands of firms during the colonial era<sup>16</sup>, and later through the intermediary of the Nigerian Cocoa Marketing Board (NCMB) since British Southern Cameroon was administratively linked to Nigeria. This marketing situation had pushed the farmers to form cooperative societies such as the Kumba Farmers Cooperative (KUFCOOP), the Mbonge Area Farmers Cooperative (MBAFCOOP), the Tombel Area Farmers Cooperative (TAFCOOP) and others which were inseparable from agricultural development, mindful of the interest of the farmers.

<sup>15</sup> The NPMB, 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Diary 1978-88. (obtained from Tayong Patrick, manager NPMB Kumba from 1978-89).

<sup>16</sup> Epale, *Plantations and Development*. P 61

Development of the cooperative societies caused the government to set up a training school for agriculture and forestry at Barombi Kang in Meme Division. Nurseries and demonstration farms were equally set up such that over 30,000 seedlings of cocoa were distributed to farmers through their cooperatives by the Production Development Board in the late 1950s. Thus, by 1961 cocoa and coffee exportation in Meme Division stood at 9,007 tons and 2,877 tons respectively.<sup>17</sup>(see Table II). The West Cameroon Marketing Board (WCMB), during the period 1961-72, ensured the marketing of both products through the intermediary of cooperative societies in Konye, Mbonge, Tombel, Nguti, Bangem and Kumba Central.

Table II; Development of the cultivation of cocoa and robusta coffee in Meme Division from the colonial era to the 1890s.

PERIOD	Approximate produced in Kumba/Meme Division	
	cocoa	Robusta coffee
1955-1960	3,902	1,657
1961-1965	7,037	2,877
1966-1970	14,700	3,300
1971-1975	24,000	8,400
1976-1980	36,700	14,800
1981 upwards	>45,000	>18,000

Source: Culled from Emmanuel Alongamo Aka's *The British Southern Cameroons 1922-1961...and the 10th Anniversary Dairy of the NPMB 1978-88*.

The statistics clearly indicated that production increased over the years. Significant increases were registered from the period of the WCMB (1961-74), the PMO (1974-78) and the NPMB (1978-91). This increase in production was based on the offer of pesticides, fertilizers and other chemicals to the farmers through the intermediary of the cooperative societies. Loans were equally given to farmers who paid back with produce at the moment of sales, thus making the situation lighter for them. This financial assistance came to the farmers from FONADER, through the cooperative societies to which they were registered.<sup>18</sup> These cooperatives were giant organizations that grouped thousands of farmers who had acquired skills in cocoa and coffee cultivation from the plantations (see Table III).

Table III: Cooperative Societies in Meme Division, approximate membership and management staff by 1985.

Cooperative Society	Management Staff	Registered Farmers
Bangem Area Farmers Cooperative (BAFCOOP)	25	2,250
Konye Area Farmers Cooperative (KONAFCOOP)	45	5,278
Kumba Farmers Cooperative (KUFCOOP)	50	5,450
Mbonge Area Farmers Cooperative (MBAFCOOP)	65	6,310
Nguti Farmers Cooperative (NGUFCOOP)	30	2,435
Tombel Farmers Cooperative (TAFCOOP)	40	3,225
TOTAL	225	24,948

Source: SOWEFCU Office, Kumba, 24/10/2016.

This table clearly portrayed the great number of farmers who were active in cash crop cultivation. They were motivated by the prices paid per kg of cocoa and coffee which rose by geometric progression from 130frs and 120 per kg in the 1960s to 380frs and 350frs per kg in the 1970s and by 1984 the price per kg was 450 and 410frs respectively. The farmers further received bonuses on the quantity of produce sold, paid to them through their cooperative societies.<sup>19</sup> The very impressive number of farmers in the division and the production tonnages (see table II) were evidence of the financial input that came into the division through the farmers. The NPMB sent out controllers regularly to ensure that the recommended prices were paid to the farmers and equally that they received the appropriate bonuses. This made Meme Division a great cocoa and coffee cultivation centre in West Cameroon and justified why numerous co-operative societies were established there having

<sup>17</sup> Emmanuel Aloatangamo Aka. *The British Cameroons: 1922-61. A Study in Colonialism and Underdevelopment*. (Plattville:Nkemnji Global Tech, 2002).P 84-85.

<sup>18</sup> Accountant/Cashier KONAFCOOP, interviewed 21/08/2017 at Konye.

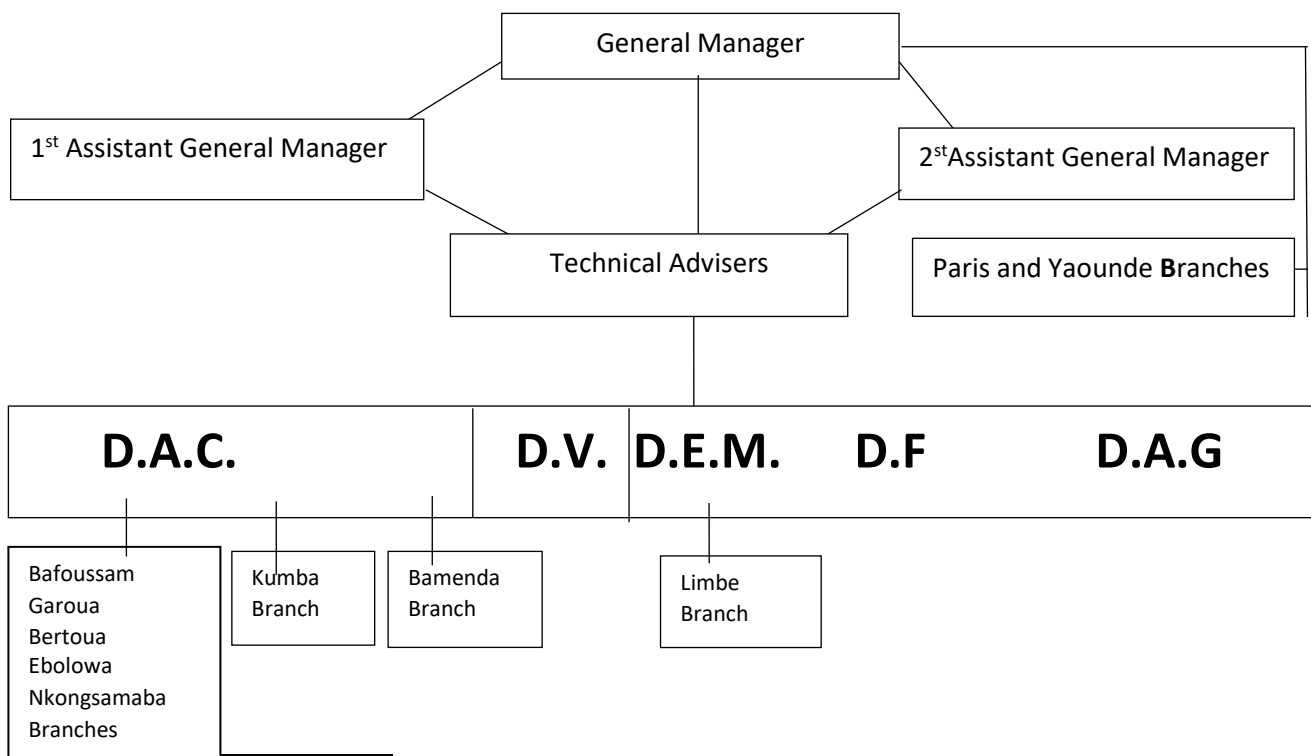
<sup>19</sup> Tenth Anniversary diary of the NPMB; 1978-88.

huge followings and equally why branches of the Marketing Board were opened in Kumba, capital of the Division, from the very inception.<sup>20</sup>

The WCMB and later the Produce Marketing Organization (PMO), established in 1961 and 1974 respectively, had offices in Kumba. These offices gathered and supplied produce to the PMO headquarters in Victoria. Meme Division was the heartbeat of the South West Provincial branch of the PMO. This Division was one of the highest cocoa and robusta coffee producing zones in Cameroon before 1976. It produced about 45,000 tons of cocoa and 18,000 tons of robusta coffee each year out of a total national annual tonnage of 135,000 for cocoa and 80,000 for robusta coffee. This represented 33.3% and 22.5% of the total national production for cocoa and robusta coffee respectively, coming from a single division.<sup>21</sup> Thus, when the NPMB was established in 1978, the PMO office in Kumba was made a sector ( see Table IV). By 1984 the NPMB sectors existed only in Bamenda, Bota and Kumba throughout the United Republic of Cameroon.<sup>22</sup> In 1984, Kumba was raised from the status of a sector to a full department (branch) of the NPMB. It was the only branch in Cameroon where the Chief of Branch had the rank of an Assistant Director while his assistant had the rank of Chief of Service just like heads of the other branches in the country. The simple explanation for this was the production capacity of the Division. It supplied 80% of the overall produce from the South West Province to the Marketing Board. It was equally the headquarters of the South West Farmers' Cooperative Society Union Limited (SOWEFCU).

Meme Division alone hosted six out of the twelve cooperative societies that existed in the South West Province. The cooperatives in the Province had about 33,200 farmers enlisted and of this number over 24,900 farmers were in Meme Division. Out of the eighteen Licenced Buying Agents authorised by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in the former State of West Cameroon (South West and North West Provinces), about eleven were located in Meme Division.<sup>23</sup> it was therefore expected that within the logic of the mission assigned to the NPMB some significant economic and social development activities be undertaken in the locale, both for the wellbeing of the farmers and the growth of the division as a whole.

Table IV: Structure of the NPMB.



<sup>20</sup> 1983 Dairy of the NPMB.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Dairies of the NPMB 1983 and 1984, obtained from Tayong Patrick on 07/03/2017.

<sup>23</sup> The LBAs included; Mbanya Enterprise, Sam-Tibi Enterprise, Atabong Enterprise, Njumbe and Company Produce Enterprise; V.C Produce Company, Tanyim and Sons, Direct suppliers (Fomenki Enterprise), Dean Enterprise, Mukete Enterprise, Ngassa Enterprise, and Njikam Estate. Culled from NAB 13/13 No 005.

Key: D.A.C.- Directorate of Purchase and Commercialization.

D.V. –Directorate in charge of Sales.

D.E.M.-Directorate of Export and Marketing.

D.F. –Directorate of Finance.

D.A.G.-Directorate of General Administration.

Source: NPMB Diary of 1984.

The importance of the Kumba , Bamenda and Limbe branches were in function to the special status they had before 1984. This explained their unique and direct attachments to the D.A.C and D.E.M.

### **NPMB's Contribution to the Social and Economic Development of MEME Division**

The contributions of the NPMB to socio-economic development of Meme Division will be assessed both quantitatively and qualitatively. In the domain of human development the NPMB was a source of employment as it managed some seven hundred (700) permanent and about five hundred (500) non-permanent workers in Kumba alone.<sup>24</sup> These workers earned salaries ranging from 533,966 to 78,927 CFA francs which they spent within the locale, thus, having a multiplier effect on the economy of the town.<sup>25</sup> As a consequence businesses thrived in Kumba and its precincts as these workers spent their earnings to purchase goods and pay for other services thus generating much income within the community. This implied that in Kumba Central, there were at least one thousand two hundred (1200) families or households that were guaranteed of their subsistence by this structure.<sup>26</sup> It equally implied that more investments were made in terms of infrastructural development especially in the building of permanent and semi -permanent houses. Mr Tayong Patrick was able to build a duplex at Alaska Street- Buea Road- Kumba from his earnings at the NPMB where he serves as branch manager in Kumba for eleven years.<sup>27</sup> This could justify the rapid expansion of Kumba Central into such areas as Kossala, Kake, Mabanda, Buea Road, and others in the 1980's. Both the NPMB and its workers rented houses and structures in the town thus injecting a lot of money into the economy. For example, most of the giant ware houses run by the NPMB in Fiango were rented structures.<sup>28</sup>

It was customary in the 1980's to see giant business ventures in Kumba such as Ngassa enterprise, Atabong enterprise, Fomenki enterprise, Sam-Tibi enterprise, Mbanya enterprise and others. The economic activities in the Kumba Central market, the Fiango market and other localities within the town all combined to make Kumba the economic capital of the South West province. These activities were sustained by the buoyant cocoa and coffee trade in Kumba. The number of Licensed Buying Agents (LBAs) in the town and the existence of the Kumba Farmers Cooperative (KUFCOOP) generated much labour force. This implied more economic power by the over eight hundred and five (805) persons employed by the LBAs, KUFCOOP and SOWEFCU in Kumba central alone.<sup>29</sup> These were all institutions dependent on the NPMB, an indication of the multiple economic effect that the vibrant cocoa and coffee trade had on the population at the time. The end result was that businesses flourished and the local economy boomed since members of the various households could afford basic social amenities.

These developments were replicated in the other sub divisions of Meme where the NPMB operated. The five cooperative societies in Bangem, Konye, Mbonge, Nguti and Tombel all employed over five hundred and seventy (570) persons who were guaranteed of regular incomes and other gratifications.<sup>30</sup> Thus, within the peak seasons for cocoa, activities were vibrant in all these localities. The farmers were enthusiastic to develop their farms since they were sure to receive assistance (both material and financial) from the NPMB. More so, they were confident to sell their produce at harvest time. They received interest free loans from the NPMB via the Farmers bank FONADER.<sup>31</sup> They were also sure of bonuses at the end of each season paid by the NPMB. Bonuses acted as a form of stimulus for the farmers to step up production. It equally prevented

<sup>24</sup> Patrick Tayong. Manager of NPMB Kumba from 1978-89, interviewed 07/03/2017.

<sup>25</sup> *Etat de Reliquat de Paiement. Deuxieme Vague, deux*, P.3

<sup>26</sup> Patrick Tayong, Kumba, 07/03/2017.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 07/03/17.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Ninjoh. " The National Produce Marketing Board (NPMB) and the Socio-Economic Development of Meme Division, 1978-1991." M.A. Dissertation, Department of History and Archaeology, The University of Bamenda. July 2018.P.73 .

<sup>29</sup> Sourced from Flobert Mbanya ( former LBA proprietor) and Patrick Esapa (President of SOWEFCU),interviewed 24/08/2017 and 24/10/2016 respectively.

<sup>30</sup> Patrick Esapa, President SOWEFCU, interviewed 25/10/2016. These figures included the permanent, temporal and seasonal workers.

<sup>31</sup> Patrick Tayong, Kumba, 07/03/17.

the farmers from falling into the hands of usurers since they were guaranteed some income before, during and at the end of each cultivation season.<sup>32</sup>

The contribution of the NPMB to the development of Meme Division can be viewed in its road maintenance projects. The division was blessed with abundance of cocoa and robusta coffee especially in areas like Matto, Bai, Ekombe, Konye, Ikiliwindi, Ebonji, Bangem, Makassa amongst others. It was however difficult to evacuate these products to the main towns for sales because of the seasonal nature of the roads. Road maintenance works were sponsored by the NPMB, supervised by the Provincial Delegation of Equipment for the South West Province and executed by private contractors (see table V).

Table V: Cocoa evacuation roads in Meme Division sponsored by the NPMB, 1980/81 crop season.

LOCALITY	CONSTRUCTION ENTERPRISE	DISTANCE	COST
Wone-Koba-Ibemi	Timms Enterprise	12 kilometres	38,400,000frs
Konye-Mekom- Nyandong	Timms Enterprise	17 kilometres	
Ikiliwindi-Matto-Butu	Timms Enterprise	20 kilometres	
Ekombe Junction-Barombi	Mamicam Enterprise	35 kilometres	19,500,000frs
Kotto-Bai Grass-Bai Kuke	Mamicam Enterprise	8 kilometres	
Mofako Junction-Massaka	Sabcam	13 kilometres	14,100,000frs
Ebonji- Mahole-Ngomboko-Bangem	Yonda Peckson	72 kilometres	27,000,000frs
Bangem- Mboasum- Ekulkang	Ewusi Enterprise	27kilometres	29,150,000frs
Ebonimin- Mouamenam- Manjo	Ewusi Enterprise	27kilometres	

Source: Provincial Delegation of Equipment, South West Province

The NPMB spent 38,400,000frs for the grading of the roads from Wone - Koba - Ibemi, Konye – Mekom – Nyandong and Ikiliwindi – Matto – Butu. This project was executed by Timms Establishment along a stretch of 49 kilometers. Another project executed by Mamicam Enterprise was the Ekombe – Barombi – Kotto – Bai Grass, Bai Grass – Bai Kuke covering a distance of 43 kilometers at the cost of 19,500,000frs. The road from Mofako Junction to Massaka covering a distance of 13 kilometers was executed by Subcam at 14,100,000frs. The Ebonji – Mahole – Ngomboko – Bangem road stretching some 72 kms was executed by Yonda Peckson at a cost of 27,000,000frs. The Ewusi Enterprises graded the Bangem – Mboasum – Ekulkang, Ebonimin- Mouamenam – Manjo road of about 54km at 29,150,000frs.<sup>33</sup> These projects were all executed during the 1980/81 season.

For this 1980/81 season alone, the NPMB spent one hundred and twenty-four million one hundred and fifty thousand francs (124,150,000FRS) for road maintenance covering a distance of 231kms. These road maintenances were carried out at regular intervals and they eased the evacuation of produce from the hinterlands to the NPMB stores. These roads did not only serve the cocoa and coffee farmers, but the wider public. Other farmers especially those specialized in food crops easily moved their plantain, cassava, cocoyam, maize, yam and other items to the urban centers for sale and even for onward transportation to the other provinces. The population therefore benefited from the investment since it facilitated the evacuation and easy movement of goods and people. Other fruit crops such as plums and oranges, grown in substantial quantities in some parts of the Divisions, were also easily evacuated to other parts of the country. All these contributed to the economic wealth of the Division.<sup>34</sup>

Road maintenance also facilitated the movement of persons within the Division and to other parts of the country. Transportation was therefore rendered cheaper and easy for the indigenes of the division. Transportation from Matto to Kumba, for example, which used to cost 2,500 FRS dropped to 1,000 FRS in the 1980s as a result of the road works sponsored by the NPMB. The situation was the same for roads from the other sub divisions to Kumba Central.<sup>35</sup> This development made it possible and easy for NPMB phytosanitary service personnel to move into the sub Divisions and educate farmers on pest control and health care. Farmers received lessons from NPMB agents on the effective use of the different chemicals and pesticides, some of which could be very dangerous and destructive to human life and property.

<sup>32</sup> Tenth Anniversary Dairy of the NPMB, 1978-1988.

<sup>33</sup> Annual report of the Provincial Delegation of Equipment, South – West Province for 1980/8/. P.24.

<sup>34</sup> Ninjoh, "The National Produce Marketing Board (NPMB) ".PP.74-75.

<sup>35</sup> Primus Nsom, farmer at Matto village, interviewed at Matto on 20/08/2017..

The level of Juvenal delinquency was greatly reduced in the 1980s. In the 1970s youths in Kumba were involved in various forms of banditry, addiction to drugs and alcohol, prostitution among other nefarious activities. By the early 1980s, these acts of delinquency had significantly reduced.<sup>36</sup> This was because youths were engaged in different activities within the coffee and cocoa sectors like harvesting, sharing, drying and picking of bad grains. Money derived from these sources assisted in the education of the children and, most importantly, engaged their productive energies, keeping them away from crime. Some youths even got involved in small businesses with money earned from the temporal jobs as Ngassa Jean-Claude intimated. All these were possible because the NPMB made resources available to the farmers, the cooperative societies and the LBAs to be able to sponsor such activities.<sup>37</sup>

Another important social investment made by the NPMB in Meme Division was in the domain of sports. The corporation owned and sponsored a football team in Kumba called CAMARK (Cameroon Marketing) football club created in 1978. The NPMB provided the budget, to the sum of over 70 million CFA francs annually, for this club while some of the players were fully employed within the Board's office.<sup>38</sup> Football was not only a recreational activity which provided much entertainment to the community, but also a source of income to economic operators each time the team played in Kumba. The recreational activity promoted by this club had a ripple effect on the entire division. Other clubs such a Meme Rivers and Tombel United were formed in Mbonge and Tombel respectively by the 1980s and sponsored by the local populations who derived their earnings from cocoa and coffee sales.<sup>39</sup> Thus, from this simple initiative of the NPMB to establish a football team in Kumba the social activities in the Division were kept active and alive up to the early 1990s.

The benefit reaped by the NPMB in the division was reflected in the high salaries paid to the workers. As indicated earlier, these salaries ranged from 533,966 to 78,927 CFA francs monthly. This implied that the over 700 workers at the NPMB were within this salary range, besides the temporal and seasonal workers employed regularly. It was equally evident that by the volume of produce from the division (over 33.3% and 22.5% of cocoa and robusta coffee national production statistics) the NPMB made significant profits from the sales at the international market. It was this dividend that the NPMB invested into some state corporations as subventions (see Table VI).

Table VI: NPMB subventions to certain state institutions between 1978 and 1981.

CORPORATION	SUBVENTIONS IN CFA FRANCS		
	1978/1979	1979/1980	1980/1981
FONADER	7,435,000,000	8,005,193,000	7,000,000,000
SODECAO	1,000,000,000	1,000,000,000	1,550,000,000
SODECOTON	1,817,837,906	2,340,000,000	800,000,000
MIDEVIV	120,000,000	150,000,000	95,000,000
<b>YEARLY TOTALS</b>	<b>10,372,837,906</b>	<b>11,495,193,000</b>	<b>9,445,000,000</b>

Source: Kingsly Ollong Awang. "The National Produce Marketing Board in Cameroon, 1978-91..." in AFRIKA ZAMANI, Nos, 22 & 23, 2014-2015. P.121.

This table depicts the benefit made by the organization which enabled it grant assistance to other state corporations. The support if provided to the Cooperative Societies, the LBAs and SOWEFCU, besides the other organizations, was testimony to the impressive profits derived from the sales of produce. Thus, the Cooperative Societies and LBAs were able to function normally for as long as the NPMB remained vibrant.

### Socio-economic Impacts of the NPMB in MEME Division

The NPMB had the mandate to sustain the cooperative societies, open up the sub divisions and promote economic activities in the Division during the period of its existence, that is, from 1978 to 1991. The substantial benefits reaped by the organization from this Division within the same period creates some doubts as to whether the investments were actually genuine. For a Division that accounted for about 30% of the total purchase made by the NPMB each year, it was disturbing

<sup>36</sup> Jean- Claude Ngassa, Kumba inhabitant and former accountant at the NPMB office in Kumba. He intimated that the delinquency and crime wave reduced by more than 50%, interviewed 23/08/2017.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. Kumba 23'08'17

<sup>38</sup> Patrick Tayong. Kumba 24/10/16.

<sup>39</sup> Vincent Ituka Njumba, businessman at Nganjo- Mbonge, interviewed 17/08/17 at Nganjo village.



that most, if not all of the ancillary organs and investments made by the structure disappeared shortly after its demise. This was because the NPMB could no longer provide the necessary resources for them to pre-finance production, pay for purchase supplied by farmers and meet up with their daily expenses. Thus, the local market system in the Division was gradually destroyed beginning from 1989. The Cooperative Societies and LBAs were confronted with low quality products from the farmers which they sold at lower prices to the new foreign exporters in Douala. These new exporters paid little attention to the quality of the cocoa and coffee they bought.<sup>40</sup> The cooperative societies, the LBAs and SOWEFCO were very active and helped the NPMB in the collection and evacuation of produce from Meme Division. Unfortunately, the NPMB did not keep reserves to sustain these structures. From 1991 most of the LBAs had disappeared, implying that over five hundred employees became redundant. This certainly had a pernicious impact on the economic structure of the division. It explained why vibrant enterprises like the Atabong, Mbanya, Fominki and others disappeared from the scene in the Division shortly after 1991.<sup>41</sup>

Besides, the cooperative societies, which were the principal link between the farmers and the NPMB, became less functional. These societies found it difficult to meet up with their engagement towards the farmers. Most of them laid off their staff while others closed temporarily. The Cooperatives in Konye, Mbonge, Nguti, Tombel, Bangem and Kumba Central ran into serious financial difficulties and cut their staff by over 70%.<sup>42</sup> This had a negative effect on the social and economic activities in the whole Division. The cooperatives could no longer buy the farmers' produce since the reserve funds which had been accumulated for this purpose had been exhausted. Much of this fund came from the farmers of Meme Division, and the PMO had transferred over 48 billion CFA in cash and over 20 billion CFA in assets to the NPMB.<sup>43</sup> In spite of this huge reserve fund, the NPMB could not support the cooperative societies, and by inference the farmers, after 1991. The conclusion to this situation was therefore that the interest of the organization in Meme Division was influenced by the huge benefits it derived from there and not by the zeal to invest. The cooperative societies and the farmers were all abandoned to themselves with the consequent socio-economic impact. Life became unbearable for both the employees of the cooperatives and the farmers to the extent that most farmers diverted to the cultivation of cash crops. Some farmers, especially in Mbonge, cut down their cocoa plants and intensified the cultivation of plantains, since this food crop did quite well in this area because of the soil type. Some other farmers completely abandoned their cocoa plantations and opened new farms for food crop cultivation, especially after 1991 when the NPMB completely shut down without paying the arrears owed the farmers.<sup>44</sup>

Moreover, The NPMB devoted a very insignificant proportion of its profits for road maintenance in Meme Division. If one were to take a single year 1981, it spent just 124,150,000 (one hundred and twenty four million one hundred and fifty thousand francs) in the Division out of a total of 52,000,000,000 (fifty two billion), thus investing only about 0.0024% of its total profit for the period in the Division. Going by the fact that Meme Division alone supplied over 30% of its total exports in a year, it would have been logical that semi-permanent or in some cases permanent roads be constructed to link the center to the sub Divisions. If such projects were carried out, they would have been more useful to the population even after the closure of the organization. Unfortunately, just a few years after the collapse of the NPMB almost all the roads to the sub Divisions became impassable. It became increasingly difficult to access areas like Bangem, Koba Tombel, Mofako, Matto, Bai, which were all easily accessible before 1991.<sup>45</sup> This implied that the NPMB simply operated in this domain to facilitate the extraction of its badly needed cash crop without considering the long term benefit of the roads to the indigenous population. Another area of concern was the sponsorship of the road projects. By the specification of the contracts, bridges had to be constructed along certain roads, but the work done on the road from Wone to Koba revealed that the bridges were not built. The same scenario was observed on the road between Konye to Matto where the temporal bridge remains impossible during the rains. All these implied that the NPMB never followed up the projects to ensure their complete execution.<sup>46</sup> This could be attributed to the policy lapses within the organization since it had no technical services to follow-up such projects. It

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<sup>40</sup> Patrick Tayong, interviewed 24/10/2016 at Alaska Street- Buea Road, Kumba.

<sup>41</sup> Flobert Mbanya, interviewed 24/10/2016 at Hausa Quarters –Kumba.

<sup>42</sup> Zachee Asek Ojong, manager of the Konye Farmers Cooperative Society. He was accountant in this cooperative in the 1980s and rose to the position of Manager in 2005, interviewed 22/08/17.

<sup>43</sup> Kingsly Awang Ollong. "The National Produce Marketing Board in Cameroon, 1978-1991: An analysis of its Original, performance and collapse". In the Journal *"Africa Zamani"* Nos 22 and 23 (CODESRIA, 2014-2015) P.109

<sup>44</sup> Joseph Mboke, 63 years, farmer at Mbonge, interviewed 18/08/2017.

<sup>45</sup> Zachee Asek Ojong, 22/08/17.

<sup>46</sup> Primus Nsom, farmer and inhabitant of Matto village, interviewed 20/08/2017.

depended on the supervisory ability of the Provincial Delegation for Equipment and the good faith of the contractors to whom the projects were attributed.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, if we were to assess the road construction projects in the 1980s and their general state of degradation after the 1990s, it would be factual to assert that the main concern of the NPMB was to extract as much produce as it could from the sub Divisions. The road construction works were therefore not necessarily executed to advance the long- term socio-economic development of the indigenes. Their efforts in this sector did not reflect the contributions of the division to the income of the organization throughout its period of activity from 1978 to 1991. This assessment is buttressed by the fact that the vibrant economic activities that were carried out around the NPMB offices and Fiango all ended after 1991. The assessment is buttressed by the fact that the vibrant economic activities that were carried out around the NPMB offices and Fiango all ended after 1991. The office area at Three Corners in Fiango, Kumba, was a veritable hot spot in the 1980s, but the locality soon became a quagmire after 1991. The buoyancy of the 80s was replaced by the lifelessness of the 90s, a clear indicator of the transience of the activities and impact of the NPMB in Kumba.

The socio-economic implication of the demise of the NPMB could be further measured by the level of unemployment that reigned in the Division. This was the most disturbing social problem after 1991. The over 700 permanent workers of the organization in Kumba Central were laid off.<sup>48</sup> This excluded the hundreds of people who indirectly benefited from the agencies. The effect of unemployment was felt across the six sub- divisions that made up Meme Division at the time. Most small businesses, like provision shops, wound up by the end of 1991 as well as the local financial houses, such as Incaflaw Warranty, that had flourished in the division before then. Even the football clubs: CAMARK, Meme Rivers and Tombel United were all dissolved, contingent upon the collapse of the cocoa and coffee sectors. Therefore, the demise of the NPMB was a significant turning point in the socio-economic development of Meme Division. This was the case because the NPMB during its lifespan had been the hub around which every development in the division emanated.

## Conclusion

Meme Division, as has been demonstrated in the study, was. Indeed, the epicenter of cash crop cultivation in the South West Province and Cameroon. Accordingly, it attracted the attention and eventual installation of the various marketing organization ranging from the WCMB through the PMO to the NPMB. These successive marketing agencies, of necessity, invested on a number of infrastructure and employed a whole lot of workers to accomplish their mission in the area. On aggregate therefore, there were lots of injections into the economy in the form of salaries to workers, earnings by farmers for their produce and earnings from subsidiary and service industries that had sprouted in Meme Division. The impact of the NPMB was however ephemeral as by 1991 this giant organization collapsed and was shut down. Within a few years after its demise there was hardly any vestige to show for its existence. This leads us to conclude that the NPMB was not committed to developing the Division on a permanent basis. Its development endeavors were geared towards facilitating the extraction of cash crops for export, which yielded them fabulous profits. The infrastructural improvement and other ancillary facilities provided by the NPMB could rightfully therefore be considered as incidental benefits which were not intended but which served the local populations of Meme Division.

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<sup>47</sup> Patrick Tayong, Kumba, 24/10/16.

<sup>48</sup> Jean Claude Ngassa, Kumba 23/08/17..

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