

## **Impact of business management on landowner enterprises in Papua New Guinea: A case study of the Kurumbukare Limited Company**

Brodney Kambjak Seip

### **Abstract**

Papua New Guinea (PNG) has experienced a massive natural resources boom in recent years, creating many business opportunities for landowners. Their participation in such opportunities is provided for by project agreements. Spin-off business participation is a potentially important area of participation, and many landowner companies have been established for such purposes. Landowners may see the success of such companies as evidence of effective local participation, something that may contribute to landowner support for the resource project. Some successful landowner companies have emerged in PNG under such arrangements. By contrast the Kurumbukare Limited Company established in 2007 for landowners of the area covered by the Ramu Nickel project in Madang has struggled. Using the literature on “successful business management factors” this study sheds light on the reasons constraining the KLC’s success.

**Keywords:** Successful business management factors, Landowner Companies, Sate, RNJV partners, landowner companies, Memorandum of Agreement, spin-off business activities, Kurumbukare Limited Company.

### **Introduction**

In the past few years PNG has experienced a massive boom in the natural resources sector that continues to positively impact the economy (*PNG Chamber of Mines & Petroleum Bulletin*, 2009). The PNG Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) project and Ramu Nickel project are amongst the top new projects. This was highlighted by Benny Popoitai, the Deputy Governor of the Bank of PNG, during his quarterly presentation at Divine Word University on October 2, 2012.

The resource boom has created many business opportunities in PNG including for landowners of land utilized or otherwise directly impacted by resource projects. The main reason for this is that in PNG landowners’ participation in business spin-off activities created by mining projects is recognized by the PNG Mining Act and provided for by project Memorandum of Agreements (MOA). For example, Section 5 of the Mining Act affirms that all minerals under the land are the property of the state. Section 17 and 19 empowers the state to go into agreement and gives effect to the existence of a Mining Development Contract respectively. Increasingly these MOAs define a number of areas where landowners can derive benefits. Amongst them are spin-off

business activities, seed capital funding support to landowner companies, loan guarantees for landowner companies, employment opportunities, infrastructures, health and education. Royalties and compensations are two other main benefits. Unlike those mentioned earlier that require negotiation through the MOA to identify, these two benefits are compulsory under the Mining Act and are normally paid directly to affected clans and families.

Spin-off business participation by landowner groups is among the most important of all benefits. This has been the cause of many cases of landowner friction in resource development projects in PNG (Dorpar, 2007). The Ramu Nickel Project record shows that landowner desires to participate in the spin-off business activities top the list of queries attended by the Community Affairs Department every day. The success of some landowner companies is evidence of an effective local peoples' participation. Such success can suppress landowner complaints. This is because unlike other benefits that come once in a while, allowed by the Mining Act and where landowners are only at the receiving end, the activities of landowner companies provide clear evidence of local peoples' participation on a daily basis. The Bougainville crisis that began late in 1988 and resulted in the closure of the Panguna Copper Mining in May 1989 is an example of project failure due partly to landowners' feelings of being excluded from direct participation (Hammond, 2011). The success of landowner companies therefore is everybody's concern

The emergence of some of the most successful land owner companies, such as iPi Transport owned by the Porgera landowners, Trans Wonderland owned by the landowners of Kutubu gas fields, Anitua Group and National Catering Services owned by Lihir landowners, are the result of such beneficial arrangements. While these opportunities were well embraced by Anitua, iPi, Trans Wonderland, National Catering Services, others have struggled to make a profit and grow.

An example is the Kurumbukare Limited Company (KLC), where the struggle has been a source of frustration for the landowners of the Kurumbukare area of the Ramu Nickel Project in Madang Province. This is a clan umbrella company incorporated in 2007 under which there are four companies, each owned by one of the four main clans from the Kurumbukare area.

Those four companies are Maure Resource limited, Immuruba Investments Ltd, Arikro Holdings Ltd, and Bina Holdings Ltd. These companies are independent of KLC in the sense that they are not subsidiaries, but the KLC has the prerogative under the MOA to further subcontract or off-load tasks to any of the four clan companies where necessary. The KLC started doing business in 2007, a year after the Ramu Nickel Project went into the development stage of building the mine infrastructure. KLC's area of focus has been in transport services with further interests in engineering and management services.

Since 2007, a total of K13,423,318.59 in contracts has been awarded or off-loaded to KLC as the main clan umbrella company and a further K8,774,961.78 was awarded or off-loaded directly to the individual clan

companies by the RNJV Partners and the State (a total in excess of K22,198,280.37) These contracts were mostly awarded using selective tendering. The big and complex contracts, however, have been awarded through public tender. An example of this is the catering service contract which was awarded to National Catering Services. An additional K300,000.00 was also provided in 2008 by the RNJV Partners and a further K2,000,000.00 in 2010 by the state. The latter two funding awards were made as seed capital funding support to build the capacity of the KLC. The State and RNJV Partners also established the Ramu Business Management Professionals Limited in 2007. The aim of this company was to provide business management services to all landowner companies for up to five years until all landowner companies are fully established. This service, however, did not continue when the parties to the MOA did not co-fund the management service company as stipulated in the agreement.

Despite all these contracts and support it was noted with concern that KLC was not able to sustain its growth over time. This was highlighted in the company's Internal Audit Report that recorded rapid decline in profits in 2009 and 2010, and a loss in 2011. This study aimed to uncover the reasons for the lack of growth and profitability of the KLC, by determining the level of effectiveness of a number of generally accepted business management factors.

### **Theoretical background**

A quick search on the internet on the topic of "successful business management factors" indicated over six million results. A further search into the first five internet sites gave many different combinations of factors, such as: leadership vision and success, customer care, profitability (return on investment), finance, management, process: developing a smart business process, strategy: engaging in strategic thinking and business planning, research and development, innovation, reinvention, responding to the competition, marketing, product, price and positioning, component base, transparency, leadership vision and success, vibrant eco-system, competitive velocity, extensive business architecture, policy and rules, open technology, analysis, quality of company products, industrial relations, added value profitability, market share, growth, cash-flow, achieving business capability, managing people for business success, establishing a clear customer focus, measuring performance to achieve results, complying with all federal, state, and city laws and government regulations, labour, finding the people you need and training and developing your staff, distribution, getting your products or services to market timely and economically, production, creating with consistency and high quality over the long term, money and accounting for your receipts. The literature on successful business management factors also identified many factors (Scarborough & Zimmer, 2006; Kongucher & O'Leary, 2006).

Business success and failure has been one of the most investigated topics in the business literature during the last seven decades (Korgaonkar & O'Leary, 2006; Crutzen & Caillie, 2008). The high degree of interest in this domain can be explained by the fact that a large number of stakeholders in firms are concerned

with a firm's activity and with its evolution over time. Its workers, its suppliers, its creditors, are all interested in the future of the firms (Crutzen & Caillie, 2008). The failure of a large firm will have disastrous consequences for many interested parties. The success however, can be enjoyed by the owners and can also have a positive effect on the economy.

There are many different models and perspectives in the analysis of business success and failures. Examples include: the behavioural model, that emphasizes the human factors of everything people do in an organization (Arumugam, et al., 2011); the social embeddedness approach, that focuses on the context of the culture of the society (Curry, 2005); the total quality management model that focuses on the quality of the outputs (Arumugam, et al., 2011); and the chronological perspective that looks at the chronology of events that lead to success or failure in a business.

This study draws on the literature on factors of successful business management to determine the reasons for the lack of growth and profitability of the KLC. The factors of successful business management chosen in this study include; leadership vision and success record, transparency, earning money and being accountable, marketing, complying with rules and regulations, and finding the right people and training and developing them. The final reasons for the choices of these factors were; (i) their frequency of appearance was high in reviewed literature, (ii) the researcher's exposure to the KLC, and (iii) preliminary interviews with selected officers on the most problematic factors in the KLC.

### **Reasons for establishing landowner companies in PNG**

All businesses are established to make a profit. However, enterprises in PNG are also formed for other reasons, for example, to meet costs of bride price payments, compensation, school fees and other domestic or family needs. Such enterprises usually cease to exist when these objectives are achieved (Curry, 2005). Other enterprises are established to stop the splitting of a company. For example, the **EHDC** and Gouna coffee plantations in the highlands were formed by two neighboring clans to stop former expatriate owned plantations being split up. In resources development projects, landowner companies are formed to participate in the spin-off business activities created by the resource projects (*Energy Publication Issue 3*, 2012). Likewise the KLC was formed to participate in the spin-off business activities created by the Ramu Nickel Project (*Ramu NiCo Sustainability Report, 2006-2008*).

Business enterprises in PNG also operate in conditions of increasing law and order problems, poor infrastructure, political instability, bureaucratic red tape, and corruption, which make owning a business even more challenging (Kavanamur, 2001; Bowman, 2005; Revinder, 2009). There are also specific factors constraining starting enterprises in PNG such as: (i) bureaucratic red tape that discourages business, (ii) cultural impediments to encourage entrepreneurs, (iii) overly bureaucratic licensing process, (iv) negative attitudes towards women entrepreneurs, (v) lack of support for rural entrepreneurs, (vi)

lack of support and recognition for the informal sector, in which more people are involved than in the formal sector (Rena 2009).

### **Methodology and research questions**

The data for this study came from structured interviews undertaken with four focus groups (state, developer, landowners, and staff of KLC). A total of 16 respondents were interviewed using semi-structured questionnaires. A five point Likert scale was used with one representing very ineffective and five representing very effective. The scales 1 represents very ineffective at the range 1-1.49, 2 ineffective at range 1.50 to 2.49, 3 moderate at 2.50 to 3.49 range, 4 effective at range 3.50 to 4.49, and 5 very effective at 4.50 to 5.00 range. The questionnaire was written in English but the same questions were translated to *Tok Pisin* when asked to ensure the respondents understood the questions. The data collected were then subjected to statistical treatment using the tools of frequency distribution, rank and weighted mean.

The specific research questions investigated were:

1. What is the level of effectiveness of Kurumbukare Limited Company along the indices of successful business management factors of leadership vision and past success record, transparency, marketing, finance, company policy and rules, legal compliance, and labour?
2. What is the level of effectiveness of the stakeholders in honoring the Ramu Nickel Project MOA obligations along the indices of providing seed capital, training and localization, loan guarantees, management support and others?
3. What are the problems encountered by the Kurumbukare Limited Company along the indices of problem questions one and two?
4. What measures can be recommended to minimize the problems encountered?

### **Research findings**

#### ***Level of effectiveness of the successful business management factors in the Kurumbukare Limited Company***

The raw data obtained from the survey of 16 respondents were processed in an Excel computer program and the results were further summarized and presented in the following tables 1, 2, 3 and 4. Findings in regard to the level of effectiveness of the successful business management factors in the KLC are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Effectiveness of management of Kurumbukare Limited Company**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Rating</b>
Leadership vision & past success record	4	6	6	0	0	2.13	Ineffective
Transparency	7	9	0	0	0	1.56	Ineffective
Finance (earning money & being accountable)	6	7	3	0	0	1.81	Ineffective
Marketing(product, price & positioning)	5	5	6	0	0	2.06	Ineffective
Policy(company policy and rules)	4	6	6	0	0	2.13	Ineffective
Laws (complying with government regulations)	3	6	5	2	0	2.38	Ineffective
Labour (finding right people, training & developing them)	4	9	3	0	0	1.94	Ineffective
<b>Overall mean</b>						<b>2.00</b>	<b>Ineffective</b>

It can be seen from Table 1 that the indicator of transparency was the least ineffective with a mean of 1.56. This was followed by earning money and being accountable on second with a mean of 1.81. The overall mean was 2.00. This indicated the rating of successful business management factors in KLC as ineffective.

A subsidiary question on board members' education level and experience was also asked in the indicator of leadership vision and past track record. It was noted that only 2 out of the 7 directors had past experience in business management and only 2 had education level beyond secondary school. The rest of the board members had no past experience in business management and had no or little education.

**Table 2: Ranking of Kurumbukare Limited Company effectiveness in terms of weaknesses**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Transparency	7	44	1
Finance (earning money & being accountable)	6	38	2
Marketing (product, price and positioning)	5	31	3
Leadership vision & success	4	25	4
Policy (company policy and rules)	4	25	4
Labour (finding right people, training & developing them)	4	25	4
Laws (complying with government regulations)	3	19	5

A further analysis of the ranking of frequencies of each factors of successful business management indicators in table 2 shows lack of transparency as the most frequent at 44%. This is followed by finance (earning money and being accountable) at 38%.

***Level of effectiveness of Ramu Nickel Project MOA support to KLC***

The KLC was established to participate in the spin-off business activities created by the Ramu Nickel Project. In order for the KLC to be effective the State and the RNJV Partners through the Ramu Nickel Project MOA agreed to provide certain assistance to support the landowner companies. Some of them include; seed capital funding, training & localizations, loan guarantees, and professional management assistance. This question was asked to establish the respondent assumptions on level of effectiveness of those MOA support. It is assumed in this research that an effective level of support by the parties to the KLC could have had a positive impact.

Findings in regard to the level of effectiveness of MOA agreed support to the KLC is shown in Table 3. These indicators are key areas that were agreed on and signed by all the stakeholders (State, RNJV Partners and Landowners) before the project. The undertakings by the parties to support the landowners are specified in various clauses of the Ramu Nickel Project MOA. These main clauses formed the indicators for this question.

**Table 3: Effectiveness of Memorandum of Agreement support to Kurumbukare Limited Company**

<b>State undertakings</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Rating</b>
Seed capital/business establishment (Clause 10)	1	4	6	1	4	3.19	Moderate
Training & localization (Clause 13.1)	6	6	4	0	0	1.88	Ineffective
Loan Guarantees by state (Clause 15)	6	6	3	0	1	2.00	Ineffective
Professional management assistance (all parties)	4	7	5	0	0	2.06	Ineffective
<b>Overall mean</b>						<b>2.28</b>	<b>Ineffective</b>

<b>RNJV undertakings</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Rating</b>
Seed capital (Clause 22)	3	5	4	4	0	2.56	Moderate
Local business development	3	6	3	3	1	2.25	Ineffective
Training & localization (Clause 25)	4	7	3	2	0	2.19	Ineffective
<b>Overall mean</b>						<b>2.42</b>	<b>Ineffective</b>

<b>Landowner undertakings</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Rating</b>
Accountability report (Clause 26)	4	6	4	1	0	2.06	Ineffective
Landowners to co-operate and consult (Clause 27)	1	6	2	5	2	2.72	Moderate
<b>Overall mean</b>						<b>2.39</b>	<b>Ineffective</b>

<b>Total overall mean</b>	<b>2.36</b>	<b>Ineffective</b>
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These results shows that the state was ineffective in providing the MOA agreed support to the landowners at mean of 2.28. An interesting result is seed capital support, which scored 0.6 points less to being effective. This was interesting because seed capital funding was sufficiently provided by both the **RNJV** Partners and the State. However, perhaps this funding was not well directed to its intended purpose. This might have influenced the respondents' overall view.

In regard to the question of the RNJV partner's undertakings, though results for seed capital to LOAs was discovered to be moderate at 2.56, the ineffective local business development support and training and localization at mean of 2.52 and 2.19 respectively pulled the overall mean down to 2.42, consequently indicating ineffective support to KLC.

Results for LOA undertaking shows accountability as ineffective on 2.06 mean and landowner's support to the project as moderate on 2.72 mean. However, the overall rating was 2.39 indicating ineffective. The total overall mean was 2.36, indicating overall assumption by respondents that the parties were ineffective in honouring their Ramu Nickel Project MOA.

**Table 4: Ranking of the effectiveness of MOA support to Kurumbukare Limited Company in terms of weaknesses**

<b>State undertakings</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Training & localization (Clause 13.1)	6	38	1
Loan guarantees by State (Clause 15)	6	38	1
Professional management assistance (all parties)	4	25	2
Seed capital/business establishment (Clause 10)	1	6	3

<b>RNJV undertakings</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Training & localization (Clause 25)	4	25	1
Infrastructure (Clause 21)	3	19	2
Seed capital (Clause 22)	3	19	2
Local business development	3	19	2



<b>LOA undertakings</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Rank</b>
LOA Undertakings			
Accountability report (Clause 26)	4	25	1
Landowners to co-operate and consult (Clause 27)	1	6	2

Further analysis of the ranking of frequencies of the MOA undertakings support by the various stakeholders in Table 4 indicates loan guarantees and training and localization as the most frequently assumed by respondents as weakest of all at 38%. This is followed by professional management assistance to Landowner companies by state on 25%.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

It was discovered from this research that all the indicators of factors of successful business management (leadership vision and success track record, transparency, earning money and being accountable, marketing, company policy and rules, complying to legal requirements, and finding the right people and training them) that ensures a company succeeds were found to be ineffective. No company can succeed if these key business successes management factors are not well managed. A subsidiary question on past experience and the education level of directors shows almost all had very little past experience in business management. This might have led to improper management decisions. The KLC 2012 Internal Audit Report 2009, 2010 and 2011 also emphasized the lack of visionary leadership and prudent financial management by the KLC Management and the Board as among the main reasons. It is critical for the key stakeholders of Ramu Nickel project to acknowledge these problems and address them.

The KLC was established to participate in the spin-off business activities created by the Ramu Nickel Project. Hence the State and the RNJV Partners agreed in the MOA to provide certain support to the landowner companies. This study assumed that the KLC could have performed better if those support were effectively provided. The result from the study confirmed the respondent's view that there was a low degree of support provided to the KLC by the State and the RNJV Partners at a mean of 2.36. Though seed capital funding by the state fell, being effective at 0.41 points, it was noted that the state involved three levels of government (national, provincial and local governments). The national government was effective in honoring its commitment; however the other two levels of government were not. It was also discovered from this study that ineffective performance of the KLC was due to the ineffective support provided by the project stakeholders.

A further question on the respondents view on problems encountered by the KLC pointed to the following common problems: ineffective contract negotiation and management; lack of prudent financial management and accountability; lack of company policy and guideline to expend its funds,

employment of unqualified people and no cooperation and communication among landowners.

It was also noted from the study that KLC also paid out huge sums of money to meet other social obligations such as funerals and loans to landowners and others. This indicates that the company had other objectives apart from making a profit – a problem common in PNG (Curry, 2005). One of the main factors contributing to the success of PNG's most successful landowner companies, Anitua Group and National Catering Services has been its clear and explicit understanding of its business goals operating along with its social goals (*Energy Publication Issue 3, 2012*).

This study therefore concludes that the lack of growth of KLC is due to several factors. One factor is poor management of the factors of successful business management. Another is the lack of support by the key stake holders as agreed to in the Ramu Nickel Project Agreement. And although sufficient seed capital funding was provided, these funds were not well directed to address essential areas that could have enabled the growth and profitability of the KLC.

Despite all these problems KLC has the potential to succeed if managed properly. This potential lies especially in the spin-off business contract benefits, which by MOA will still be awarded or off-loaded to the KLC. Another potential is in the seed capital funding support by the state which if directed properly can grow the landowner companies. Some of the recommendations for improvement are provided in the next section.

### **Recommendation**

Two sets of recommendations arise from this study. The first set consists of the incorporation of respondents' recommendations for improvement, given in response to research question four.

These included but were not limited to the following:

- for immediate training of management and directors
- to improve and be up-to-date with all legal compliance requirements such as tax returns, labour laws and others
- to improve output by uses of minimum resources
- for the project developer through its management service company to work closely with KLC to ensure appropriate advice is provided as and when necessary.

The second sets of recommendations include the following.

- The KLC Board and Management should acknowledge the importance of the indicators of successful business management (leadership vision and success track record, transparency, earning money and being accountable, marketing, company policy and rules, complying with legal requirements, and finding the right people and training them) and effectively embracing them in its management system.

- As well as immediate training for the current board and management, a long term strategy to train tomorrow's local entrepreneurs should be seriously considered. This will ensure that the next generations of landowners have the skills to be successful business leaders.
- Some problems emerge due to lack of continuous communication and consultation within the various levels of management of the landowners, for example between the Landowners Association and the landowner Companies. This study recommends for continuous communication and consultation between these and other landowners groups.
- Ensure the KLC enters new business through Joint Venture arrangements with established and reputable companies. This will enable an eventual transfer of skills and knowledge to local people.
- KLC as a company should have one goal and that is to make a profit. The company should seriously cut down costs in areas that will not add value to its core business operations.
- There is a wide support among landowners to dissolve KLC in order to give contracts benefits directly to the clan companies. This should not be encouraged because of many reasons, one of which is 'the benefits will be too small to make an impact at a bigger level'.
- The workforce needs of the section responsible for landowner companies in the Ramu NiCo Management Limited should be improved so that it can effectively provide much needed management services to KLC and other landowner companies.
- Any future seed capital funding by the state and other assistance to landowner companies should be well directed so that the funding can truly serve its purpose. This can be done by ensuring the mechanisms to coordinate and implement this funding are in-place to direct funding to its intended purpose.
- A detailed comparative study of successful landowner companies should be undertaken. This will ensure a full coverage of the range of problems constraining the growth of landowner companies in Papua New Guinea.
- Finally, at the policy level, the government must create an avenue to undertake further investigation to see whether landowner companies can provide an alternative model of development in PNG.

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### Author

Brodney Kambjak Seip has been employed at Ramu NiCo Management Ltd as a Senior Business Development Officer since June 2012. From 2006 to 2012 he was attached to the Madang Provincial Administration as an Economic Development Policy Planner where he was responsible for initiating economic development strategies to empower economic growth and development in the Madang Province. In his current job he is responsible for ensuring the growth and development of landowner companies in the Ramu Nickel Project impact areas. Brodney has a Bachelor of Management Degree from the University of Papua New Guinea and a Masters of Leadership in Business Administration from the Divine Word University.