

## EXPLORING A MODEL ON GLOBAL MARKET ENTRY STRATEGIES FOR NIGERIAN INDIGENOUS CONSTRUCTION FIRMS

Mohammed Isa Yusuf <sup>a</sup>., Natalia, A. Anigbogu <sup>b</sup>., and Audu Ibrahim Isa Dakas <sup>b</sup>.

<sup>a</sup> Department of Building, Faculty of Environmental Sciences, Modibbo Adama University, Yola, Adamawa state (Nigeria)

<sup>b</sup> Department of Building, Faculty of Environmental Sciences, University of Jos, Plateau State (Nigeria).

### Abstract

*While international construction has been the subject of prior research, no studies have documented the experiences of Nigerian Indigenous Construction Firms (NICFs) within the International Construction Market (ICM). Notably, NICFs are not represented in the Engineering News-Record's (ENR) list of the top 250 international contractors, based on revenue from projects outside their domestic markets. Furthermore, the degree to which established internationalisation models – such as the International Expansion Decision (IED) model, the Decision-making model for ICM entry, the Market Expansion Ability Approach (MEAA) model, the Entry Mode Sequencing (EMS) model, and the Entry Location, Entry Timing, Entry Mode (ELETEM) model – have been adopted or adapted by NICFs for internationalisation is also not established. Employing literature review approach, this paper appraises existing international expansion model and recommends the adaptation of a composite framework incorporating the IED, the MEAA models, as well as sustainability, and sustainable development concepts as basis for developing theoretical or conceptual models for internationalisation of NICFs.*

**Keywords:** Nigerian Indigenous Construction Firms (NICFs), Internationalisation, Expansion Models, International Construction Market (ICM), Model Appraisal, Sustainability, Sustainable Development.

## INTRODUCTION

Construction has to support a world of continuing population growth and economic development at 6 billion people as at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Horvat, 2005), and the construction industry is supposed to provide the infrastructure for the ever changing lifestyle of the world population (Mordor Intelligence, 2022) hence the need to incorporate sustainability and sustainable development. The construction sector increasingly transcends traditional national boundaries, engaging within the International Construction Market (ICM). A critical business strategy employed by firms to leverage opportunities in these international markets is market expansion (Preece, Mat Isa, Saman, & Ibrahim, 2015; Albtoush, Doh, Rahman, & Al-Momani 2022). In the same vein, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed a notable rise in the number of firms from developing economies entering the ICM (Gunhan 2020). However, the ICM remains predominantly composed of Multinational Corporations (MNCs) and international contractors originating from developed nations (ENR 2020; Reina & Tulacz 2022).

While studies have addressed international construction, limited research has specifically focused on the expansion of construction firms into the ICM from the perspective of developing countries (Utama, Chan, Gao, & Zahoor, 2017; Utama, Chan, Zahoor, Gao, & Peli, 2018). Preliminary literature review indicates a significant scarcity of research concerning the expansion of Nigerian Indigenous Construction Firms (NICFs) into the ICM, and despite the importance of sustainable development being the process of conduction human activities in a manner that can be sustained indefinitely (Udoh, 2025; Ujene & Otali, 2024). Indeed, no study has yet documented any experience of NICFs within this global market (Yusuf, 2019; Yusuf, 2023).

Scholarly evidence suggests that the activities of NICFs are conspicuously absent from major international construction resources that report on legal and market trends, and which feature insights from international construction groups or multinational professional services networks such as Ernst & Young Global (EY), KPMG International, Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu, Oxford Business Group, Construction Insight magazine, and PricewaterhouseCoopers International Limited (PwC). Consequently, the mechanisms and pathways of NICF internationalisation, the specific countries or markets they have entered, and their strategic approaches to expansion remain unknown (Yusuf, 2023; Yusuf, Anigbogu, & Dakas, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c).

This lack of attention from researchers highlights a significant gap in understanding the international expansion of NICFs. Furthermore, the issue of NICF expansion into the ICM has yet to be thoroughly investigated and established within the academic literature (Yusuf, 2023; Yusuf, Anigbogu, & Dakas, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c). However, it is a well-documented fact that for over two decades, NICFs from Nigeria have been consistently excluded from the Engineering News-Record's (ENR) top 250 international contractors list, based on revenue generated from projects outside their domestic markets (ENR 2024).

Despite the acknowledged complexity, uncertainty, and inherent risks associated with the ICM (Gunhan 2020; ENR 2024), globalisation has generated opportunities for interested firms to internationalise (Gunhan & Arditi 2005a, 2005b). By expanding into the ICM, NICFs could gain valuable exposure to novel ideas, acquire business

sustainability skills involving the incorporation of the objectives of sustainable development, social equity, economic efficiency, and environmental performance into the operational practices and projects of a company (Martens & Carvalho (2016), and knowledge, alongside access to a broader range of international customers, suppliers, and specialised skills. This implies that for Nigerian Indigenous Construction Firms (NICFs) to expand into the International Construction Market (ICM) they must address the questions of social impacts from proposed investments such as; business ethics, fair trade, human rights and minorities' issues and the capitalism of stakeholders as suggested by (Martens & Carvalho, 2016), as well as issues of sustainability, and sustainable development. However, Labuschagne and Brent (2005) have suggested that organisations can incorporate principles of sustainability into their activities in the following ways; (1) by considering sustainability during the preparation and review of business strategies, (2) by supporting new agreements and negotiations that promote sustainable practices, and (3) by developing new projects driven by sustainability principles and (4) finally, by broadening their vision of sustainability beyond the limits of the company.

This engagement could position them at the forefront of ongoing innovation and technological advancements. However, the Nigerian construction industry faces considerable challenges, including limited resource availability, an unstable business environment, rapidly evolving market conditions and economic cycles, a declining national currency (Naira), complex governmental regulations, intense competition, and the lingering effects of the 2019 economic recession (World Bank 2021).

In response to the cyclical nature of domestic construction project availability, the need to mitigate economic downturns, and the pursuit of improved performance, local construction firms in other nations have successfully expanded into the ICM to overcome similar domestic challenges and ensure sustainable growth and development. Examples include firms from China, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Turkey, countries that have strategically leveraged periods of domestic economic constraint to venture into the ICM, thereby enhancing their competitiveness and the quality of their products and services (Ofori 2003; Öz 2001; Özorhon 2014a, 2014b; Özorhon & Cinar 2015; Pangarkar 2008; Setiawana, Erdogan, Ogunlana, 2015.; Shigang & Guozhi 2017).

Considering the challenges confronting NICFs and the broader Nigerian construction industry, this paper posits that the current subdued domestic economic conditions in Nigeria could serve as an opportunity or catalyst for NICFs to expand into the ICM, thereby exploring potential investment opportunities, drawing parallels with the experiences of the aforementioned countries. It is plausible that numerous NICFs possess the inherent potential for successful expansion and integration within the ICM. However, many of these firms may not take the initial steps to explore international market opportunities. It is crucial to recognise that even firms remaining solely in the domestic market will inevitably face significant competition from both MNCs and international firms (Preece, Mat Isa, Saman, & Ibrahim, 2015).

Furthermore, the timeline of international expansion for construction firms globally has varied. Consequently, the level of understanding and sophistication of models designed for international expansion differs across countries. Moreover, the diverse infrastructure needs of individual nations necessitate the development of context-specific models to address their unique requirements.

These issues warrant significant attention from researchers, NICFs, the Nigerian government, and other stakeholders within the national construction industry. Against this backdrop of developments and challenges, and with the aim of addressing the identified knowledge gaps, this paper undertakes an appraisal of existing models proposed for the international expansion of construction firms in the extant literature. The ultimate goal is to build a compelling argument for the expansion of Nigerian Indigenous Construction Firms (NICFs) into the International Construction Market (ICM), taking into consideration, the need to incorporate the objectives of sustainability and sustainable development in the quest for international expansion, which serves as the primary motivation for this study. Figure 1 shows the Map of the Study Area (Nigeria) a country located on the African continent.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to Natural Building Technologies NBT (2009), the construction industry is responsible for a high rate of energy consumption, environmental impact and resource depletion. The fact that construction industry cuts across national borders implies that expansion and integration of NICFs into the ICM is not an exemption with regards to environmental and social implications. Labuschagne and Brant (2005) suggested that organisations can incorporate principles of sustainability into their activities in the following ways;(1) by considering sustainability during the preparation and review of business strategies, (2) by supporting new agreements and negotiations that promote sustainable practices, and (3) by developing new projects driven by sustainability principles and (4) finally, by broadening their vision of sustainability beyond the limits of the company. However, the choices construction firms make about products and processes can have profound environmental and social implications (Sarkis, Meade, and Presley (2012)). This is because of the challenges faced by management, and posed by interested stakeholders, such as environmental agencies and the social conscience of workers, consumers, and communities constitutes major concerns (Sarkis, Meade, and Presley (2012)). These concerns about the local and global environment situation are rising all over the world (Udoh, 2025; United Nations Environment Programme UNEP, 2003). Such concerns have forced many countries to introduce legislations in that regard.

For instance, most European governments have introduced policy instruments such as the European Community's energy performance directive for buildings (EPBD) in order to reduce the negative impacts from the building and construction sectors (Bowie & Jahn, 2002). This means that the pressures (posed by institutional environment of business) must be considered and balanced against a reasonable return on investment in international expansion and the long-term viability of the firm to the shareholders (Martens & Carvalho, 2016). The next section reviewed, analysed and discussed selected international expansion models from different countries with a view to adopt or adapt for used by prospective NICFs.

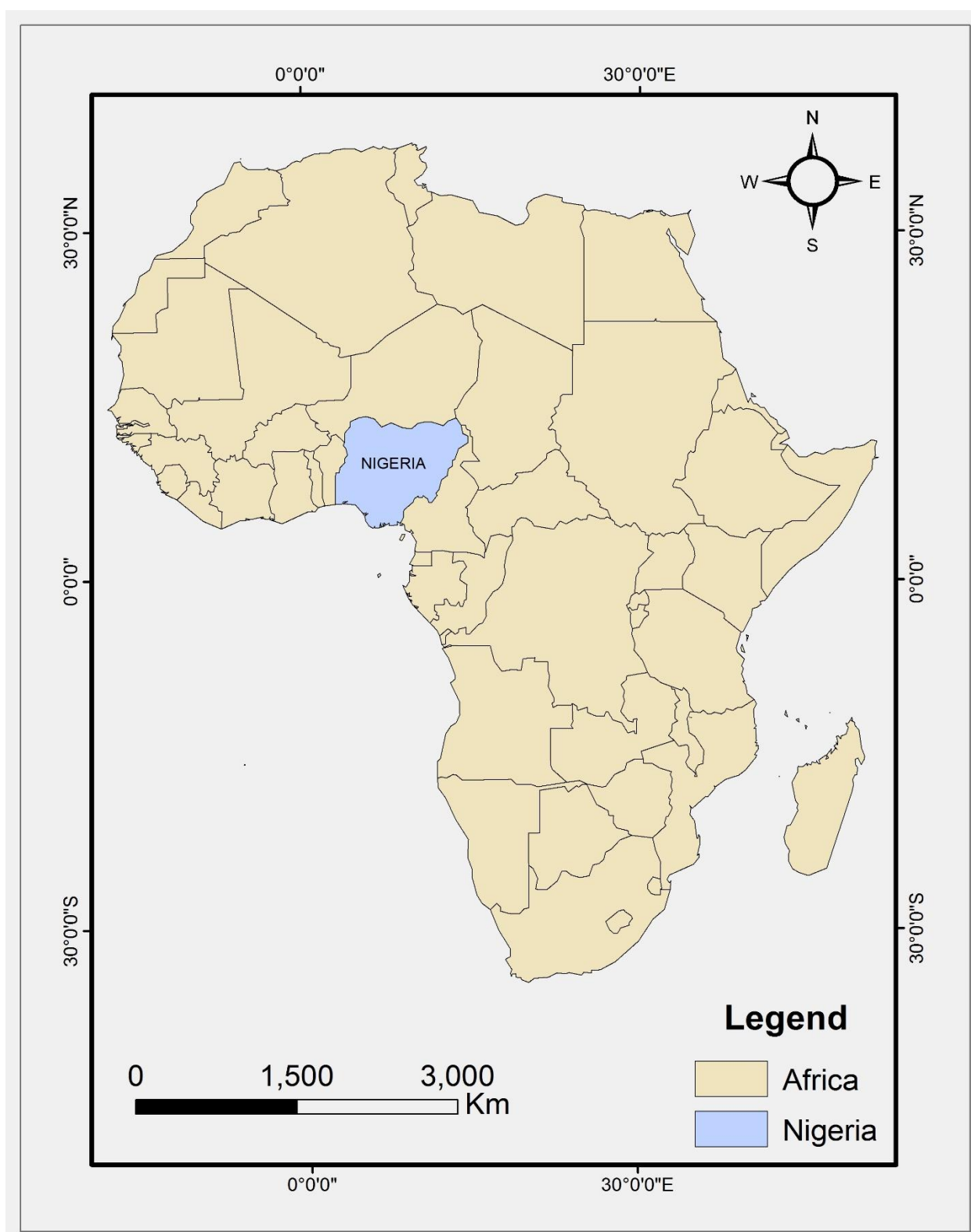


Figure 1: Map of Nigeria located on the African Continent.

Source: Wikipedia.

### **International Expansion Decision Model**

Gunhan and Ardit (2005b) proposed a two-step International Expansion Decision (IED) model for construction companies, incorporating a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis. This model assists construction firms in deciding whether to expand their operations into International Construction Markets (ICMs) and into specific countries. The flowchart of the IED model is illustrated in Figure 1.

The first stage of the model assesses a construction company's internal strength and readiness for international market entry. As depicted in the upper section of Figure 1, developing the Internal Readiness Test involves an initial two-round Delphi process to gauge the relative importance of various company strength factors. These factors, crucial for international construction success, include project management expertise, financial strength, specialist expertise, international network, track record, technology level, and support for equipment, materials, and labour (Gunhan & Ardit, 2005b).

The mean standard deviations of these company strengths are calculated for each Delphi round and subsequently compared. If the Internal and External Readiness tests in the first step yield a positive outcome, the model proceeds to the second step. This stage enables the company to conduct a country-specific analysis of market mode and entry strategies. The aim is to determine whether the potential benefits of operating in a particular country outweigh the associated drawbacks.

A positive outcome at this stage leads the model to recommend the most suitable entry mode or strategy for that specific country. These modes can include joint ventures (establishing a jointly owned entity with one or more independent firms, potentially based in the target foreign country), wholly-owned subsidiaries (acquiring an existing firm within the foreign country), or lone operations (where the contractor assumes responsibility for all project details without external assistance) (Odediran 2016; Gunhan & Ardit 2005b).

Gunhan and Ardit (2005b), the originators of the International Expansion Decision (IED) model, acknowledge that it lacks universal validation. Nevertheless, the model offers several significant strengths and advantages. It provides an accessible framework for evaluating construction firms' readiness for international business expansion. Furthermore, its application can illuminate the key factors contributing to successful international construction ventures.

The model also aids company executives in identifying, analysing, and potentially enhancing their firm's strengths while mitigating weaknesses relevant to international expansion. Additionally, it allows executives to better understand the threats and opportunities present in international construction, as well as the benefits and costs associated with operating in specific countries, particularly during domestic market downturns when international markets become crucial for survival and a comprehensive understanding of the influencing factors is essential (Gunhan & Ardit 2005b). Consequently, this model is considered appropriate for adoption due to its generic nature, allowing for the assessment and comparison of diverse construction firms. It has also been found to be reliable in comparison to other models in existing literature and is appealing due to its simplicity and ease of use.

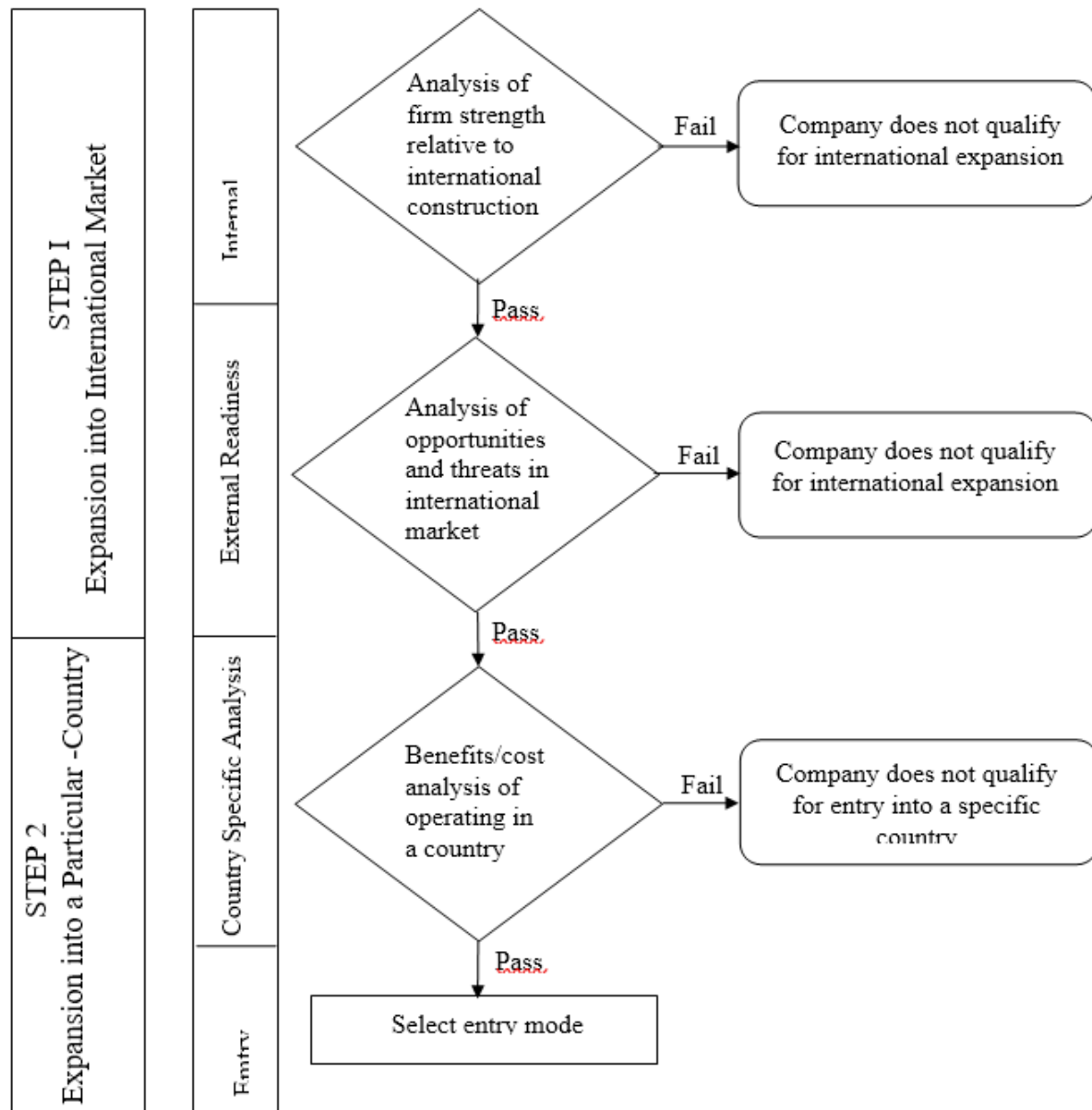


Figure 1: Flow chart of the International Expansion Decision Mode.  
Source; Gunhan and Arditi (2005b).

### **Market Expansion Ability Approach Model**

Yang, Leone, & Dana. Alden (1992) developed a four-stage Market Expansion Ability Approach model, which posits that a firm's export marketing behaviour is a strategic choice between expanding within the domestic market and venturing into foreign markets (Figure 2). The model was designed to identify non-exporting manufacturers with significant potential for future export activities. It incorporates a predictive construct, market expansion ability, and considers the temporal dimension of firm behaviour, including established attitudinal constructs such as perceived barriers to exporting. The first stage of the model examines the business environment, focusing on aspects such as firm size and the internationalisation propensity of its managers.

The second stage of the framework encompasses the export exploration phase, covering three key aspects: Export Enablers, Market Expansion Ability (MEA), Decision-maker Propensity to Expand/Direction of Expansion, and Barriers to Exporting (BE). The third stage assesses export intention, evaluating the firm's readiness and inclination towards export activities. The fourth and final stage, export behaviour, represents the operational phase following export intention. Activities in this phase include monitoring, identifying potential export markets, and realising the benefits of exporting. The framework was intended to assist decision-makers in both the public and private sectors to predict the likelihood of a currently non-exporting firm engaging in export activities.

Yang et al. (1992) developed this framework to target resources more effectively towards non-exporting firms with high export potential. This aimed to enhance the success of public promotion efforts, as governmental outreach programmes appeared to be hampered by a lack of reliable models for identifying high-potential exporters and insufficient understanding of firms' pre-export behaviour. The profiles of non-exporting firms were used to identify suitable targets. Private sector managers also lacked parsimonious and reliable models to determine their firm's export potential. Accurately assessing export potential proved challenging for non-exporting managers, leading to a limited willingness to allocate scarce resources to exploring overseas markets and business opportunities.

Yang et al. (1992) also emphasised that the routine application of the model would likely enhance overall management commitment to exporting, a crucial element for the successful initiation and expansion of firms into international markets. While the model was initially developed for the manufacturing industry, Ofori (2000, 2003) has suggested the potential for adopting or adapting models and frameworks from other industries for use in the construction sector to explore relevant constructs or variables, aiming to determine relationships and explain phenomena for possible application or operationalisation within the construction industry.

### **Decision-making Model to Support Entry Mode Selection for a Construction Industry Enterprise into International Markets**

Li, Jin, Li, Liu, and Skitmore (2013) developed a decision-making model to support entry mode selection for construction industry enterprises entering international markets. This model integrates two multiple criteria decision-



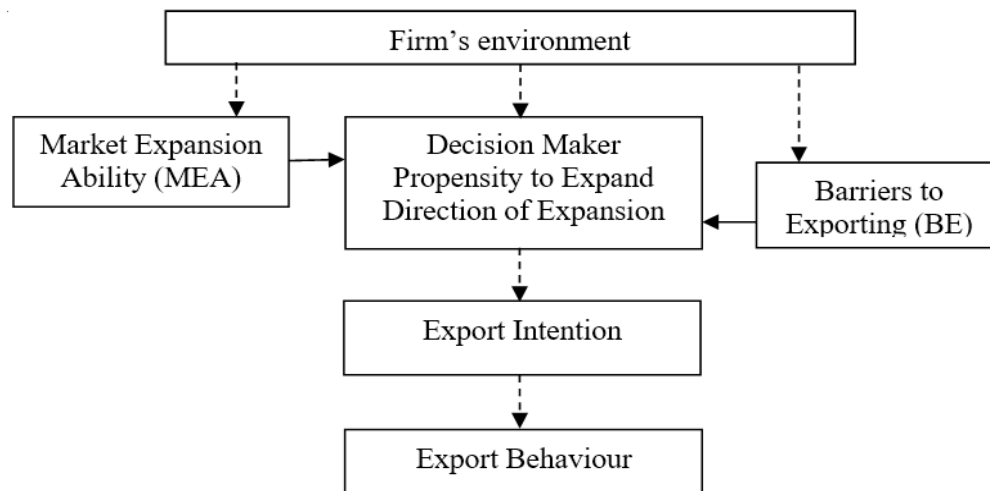


Figure 2: Market Expansion Ability Approach Model.  
Source: Yang, Leone, & Dana. Alden (1992)

aid techniques: the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) and the Preference Ranking Organisation Method for Enrichment Evaluations (PROMETHEE) (Figure 3). The AHP is employed to break down the entry mode problem into various dimensions and to determine the weighting of each criterion. Subsequently, the PROMETHEE method is used to rank potential entry modes and conduct sensitivity analyses. Li et al. (2013) asserted that PROMETHEE also provides a conceptual framework with five determinants for construction company entry mode selection, based on the unique characteristics of the construction industry. These five determinants are: international environment factors, international strategy, national factors, enterprise and industry factors, and the intrinsic properties of the entry mode.

The initial step in applying PROMETHEE involves establishing an evaluation table where alternatives are assessed based on the criteria formulated using the AHP method. Two additional types of information are required to complete the PROMETHEE process: (A) the relative importance of the criteria, and (B) the decision-makers' preference function. Despite the authors' claim that using the PROMETHEE method for sensitivity analysis can enhance the reliability of entry mode selection decisions, they did not provide detailed explanations of the PROMETHEE methodologies, instead referring readers to other sources. Furthermore, the model involves complex mathematical computations that may not be readily understood by managers of NICFs

for adaptation or adoption to address their existing international strategies (which are yet to be established), if any. Additionally, the authors utilised Decision Lab software, which supports PROMETHEE and the Geometrical Analysis for Interactive Aid (GAIA) plane, to apply the model and test stability intervals. This reliance on specialised software may also present a significant technical barrier for NICFs. The GAIA plane is presented as a valuable analytical tool for identifying alternatives, the differentiation power of criteria, similar criteria, and independent criteria (Li et al. 2013). Other limitations of the PROMETHEE model, stemming from the complexity of international expansion challenges faced by construction industry firms and acknowledged by the authors, include the fact that the model was not specifically designed for new or intending entrants into the ICM. It provides a generic framework for solving the entry mode decision-making problem, and its practical application necessitates supplementing the criteria with detailed case study information relevant to the actual market environment. Moreover, the model's application is heavily dependent on a company's operational strategies and relies on a group of experts to determine the preference function for each criterion based on their understanding of the company's strategies.

This reliance on expert opinions for preference function determination can potentially lead to divergent or conflicting results. This is particularly pertinent given the potential lack of technical and managerial data within NICFs to determine the preference function and other necessary information for the PROMETHEE process. Moreover, the model was developed for construction firms that have already expanded into the ICM and aims to select suitable entry strategies or modes for a specific country or market. Given that NICFs have yet to accumulate prior experience in the ICM (ENR 2022), a prerequisite for using the PROMETHEE model, the aforementioned reasons (among others) render this model unsuitable for the international expansion of NICFs

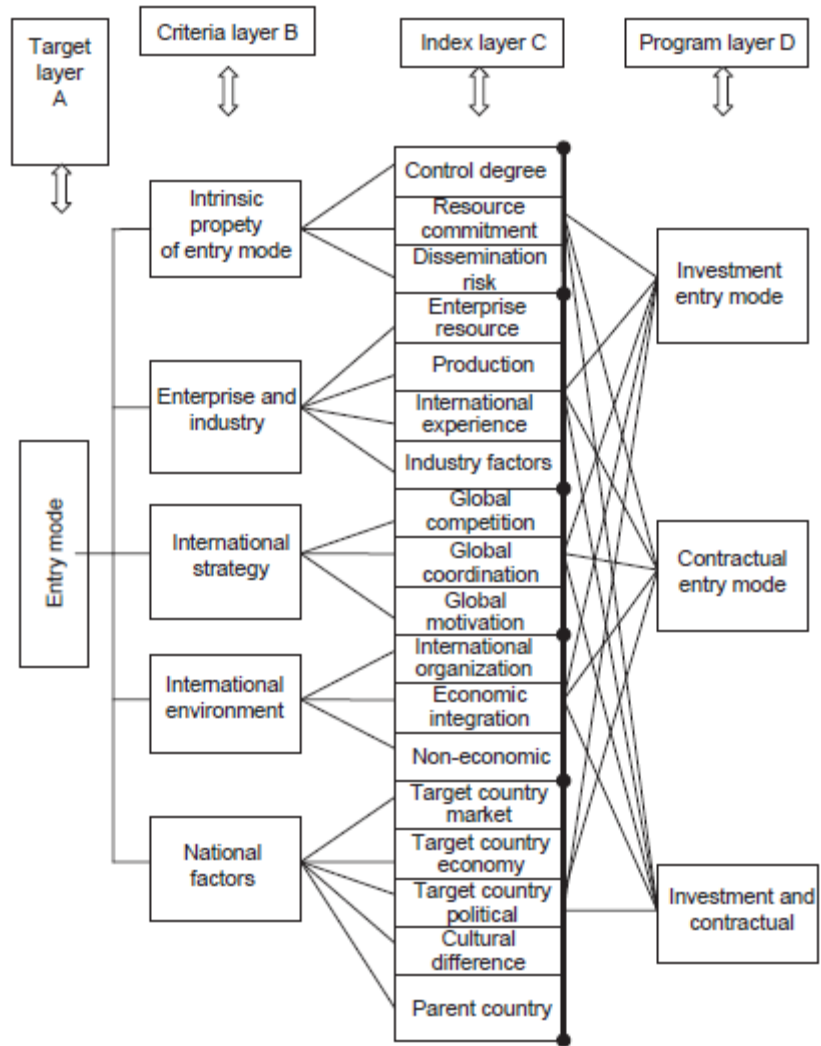


Figure 3: Decision-making Model to Support Entry Mode Selection for a Construction Industry Enterprise into International Markets.  
Source: Li, Jin, Li, Liu, & Skitmore (2013).

## **The Entry Mode Sequencing Model for Emerging International Construction Firms**

Viswanathan and Jha (2020) developed the Entry Mode Sequencing Model for Emerging International Construction Firms. This model outlines a six-level structural relationship between entry modes based on their sequential pattern or stages (Figure 4). The model comprises five stages, with the top-level entry mode representing the final stage and the bottom-level mode indicating the initial stage of an entry mode strategy for engaging with the ICM. These stages are: Stage I – Strategic Alliance (SA) and Local Agent (LA); Stage II – Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) and Joint Venture Project (JVP); Stage III – Sole Venture Project (SVP) and Representative Office (RO); Stage IV – Branch Office (BO) and Joint Venture Company (JVC); and Stage V – Sole Venture Company (SVC).

According to the model, after establishing a Strategic Alliance and engaging a Local Agent, a firm can undertake a JV project in a diverse international environment during the early phase of its entry into the ICM. BOT projects complement the JV project mode in the second stage of this entry structure. JV-type projects are considered an effective mode for emerging firms to enter the international market, as they facilitate the acquisition of host country knowledge with comparatively lower risk (Viswanathan & Jha 2020).

In a Sole Venture (SV) project (Stage III), the executing firm assumes sole responsibility for project control, risks, and revenue. Moreover, unlike JV projects, SV projects do not restrict firms from engaging in external activities that can foster the development of their business network (Viswanathan & Jha 2020). Viswanathan and Jha (2020) also noted that establishing a Representative Office (RO) (Stage III) is relatively straightforward compared to other forms of corporate-level entry and is often used to monitor significant project opportunities on behalf of head offices. The RO enables entrants to perform actions such as contract administration, promotional activities, negotiations, and market research for their parent company. However, ROs are generally prohibited from engaging in profit-generating and direct business dealings (Viswanathan & Jha 2020).

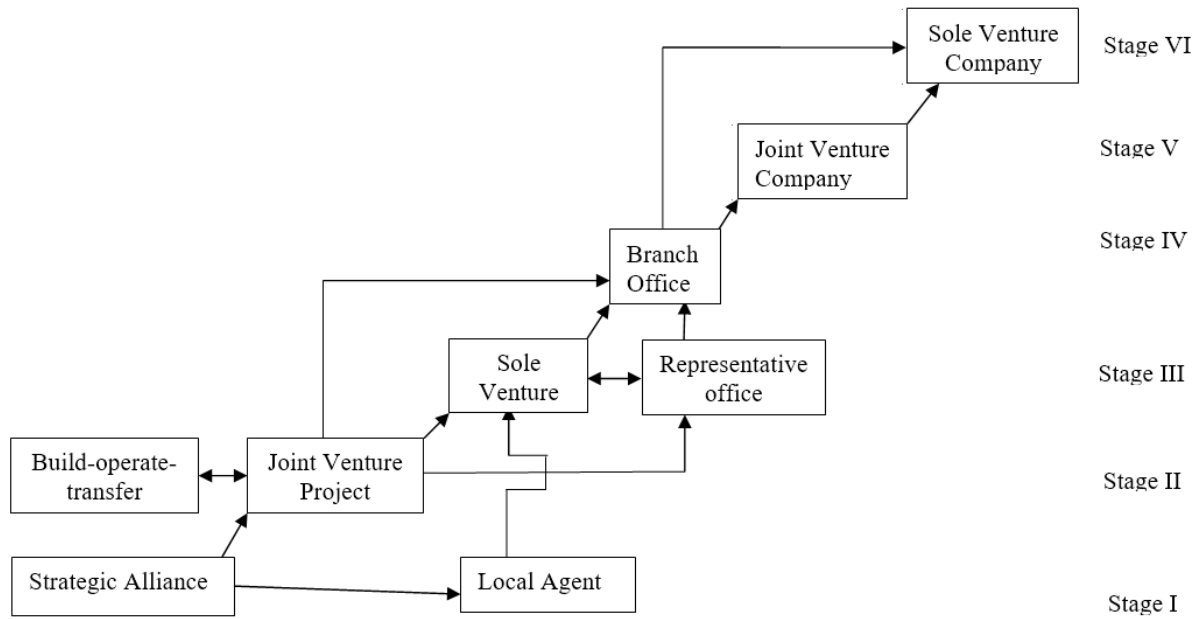


Figure 4: The Entry Mode Sequencing Model for Emerging International Construction Firms  
Source: Viswanathan and Jha (2020).

These considerations imply that for new entrant firms seeking to undertake business transactions and expand their presence in a host country, establishing long-term entities such as Branch Offices (BO), Joint Venture (JV) companies, or Sole Venture (SV) companies is necessary. These permanent and high-investment modes are positioned at the highest levels of the model. Within the model, the SV company mode is placed in the final stage of entry, following other modes. The model also includes another permanent entry mode, the JV company, situated between the Branch Office (BO) and Sole Venture (SV) company stages (Agarwal & Ramaswami 1992).

The authors suggest that this model can provide valuable insights for emerging international construction firms, offering foundational knowledge of potential target markets. Generally, the Entry Mode Sequencing Model posits that aspiring international firms initially adopt temporary and cooperative entry modes or project-based approaches in a specific country. Following the acquisition of local knowledge and a local client base, the firm can transition to more controlled and permanent modes, such as establishing an SV company. In essence, the model implies that construction firms must follow a linear pattern of entry behaviour to achieve sustainable international growth.

However, a key issue with the Entry Mode Sequencing Model is its suggestion that expanding firms (entrant firms) need to establish a physical presence in the host country, become familiar with the target market, provide superior service, and develop a comprehensive understanding of local regulations and client requirements. This perspective has been challenged by scholars such as Lee and Park (2017), Lan and Bai (2011), and Xie, Du, Boadu, and Shi (2018), who argue that some firms, such as Born Global Firms (BGFs), can and do expand into the international construction market upon their initial attempt, without adhering to a phased approach to international expansion.

Furthermore, the Entry Mode Sequencing Model was specifically tailored to suit Malaysian construction firms (Viswanathan & Jha 2020). Given the authors' caution against generalising the findings related to this model, and considering the unique characteristics and peculiarities of NICFs, the model was deemed unsuitable for direct adoption by NICFs for expansion into the ICM.

### **Entry Location, Entry Timing and Entry Mode (ELETEM) Decision Model**

The Entry Location (EL), Entry Timing (ET), and Entry Mode (EM) decision model (Figure 5), proposed by Preece, Mat Isa, Saman, & Ibrahim (2015), aims to facilitate the expansion of construction firms into the international construction market by integrating commonly shared factors known as mutually inclusive and significant factors (MISFs). The model is designed to assist construction firms in making more informed decisions to be in the right place at the right time and to adopt the appropriate mode of entry. This is crucial because firms face three primary entry decisions: which market to enter (entry location (EL) decision), when to enter (entry timing (ET) decision), and how to enter (entry mode (EM) decision) international markets (Gaba et al. 2002).

The MISFs identified include the firm's ability to assess market signals and opportunities, international experience, financial capacity, competencies, and capabilities (project management, specialist expertise, and technology),

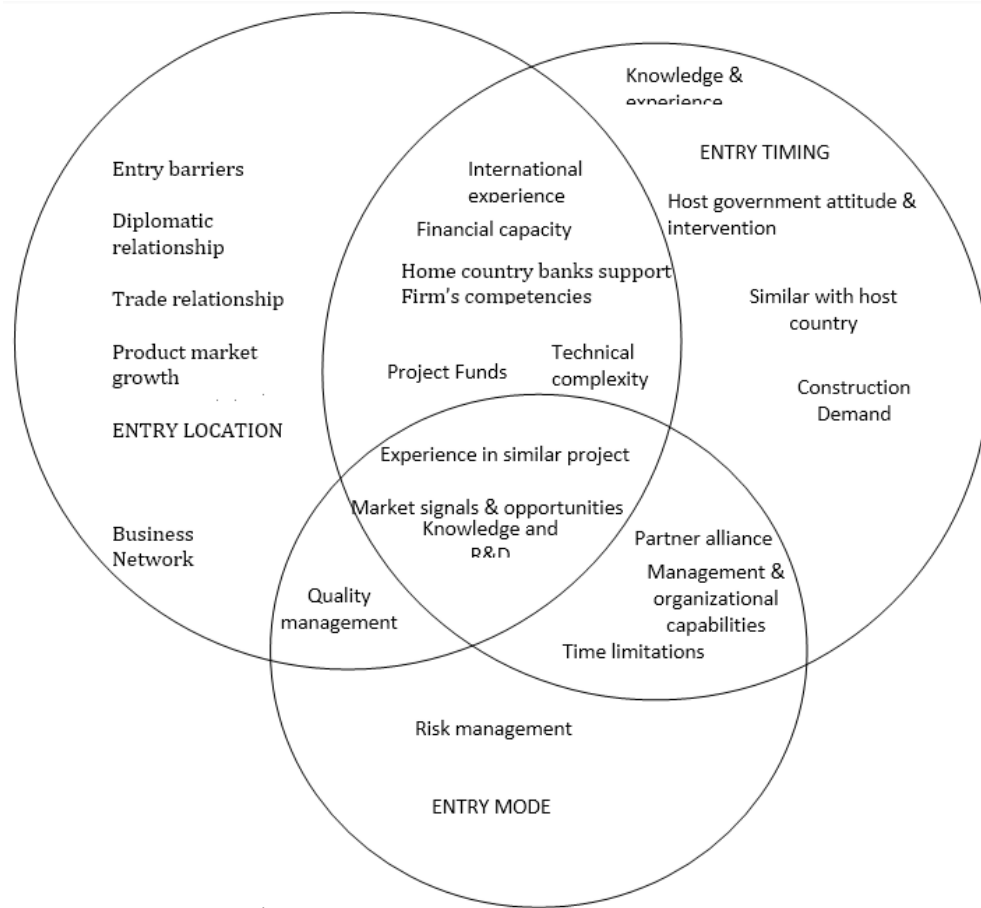


Figure 5: Integrated ELETEM Decision Model for Construction Firms in International Markets.  
Source: Preece, Mat Isa, Saman, & Ibrahim (2015).

resources (level of knowledge based on research and development), experience in similar projects, financial support from home country banks, technical complexities of projects, and the availability of project funding. The proponents of the model have observed that these factors are linked to the firm's strategic planning to capitalise on foreign market opportunities and the firm's resource capabilities, which are enhanced by its research and development intensity and prior experience in both domestic and international projects. capitalise on foreign market opportunities and the firm's resource capabilities, which are enhanced by its research and development intensity and prior experience in both domestic and international projects.

Preece et al. (2015) argue that most previous studies have examined entry location, entry timing, and entry mode (ELETEM) decisions in isolation, considering only one or a combination of these dimensions. This model is valuable for guiding construction firms already operating in international markets on how to access new markets based on their existing international experience. It is particularly beneficial for construction firms in the early stages of internationalisation (Preece et al. 2015). The model is presented as generic and is based on a comprehensive review of existing global construction literature. Furthermore, Preece et al. (2015) recommended that the ELETEM decision model be operationalised using case studies to guide construction firms in their internationalisation strategies in future research, suggesting the need for model validation before practical application. This also implies that the ELETEM decision model may not be suitable for direct adaptation or adoption by NICFs for internationalisation for two key reasons, as evidenced by the Engineering News Record (ENR 2022) ranking of international contractors: NICFs have yet to accumulate prior experience in the ICM, and it has not been established whether NICFs are indeed at an early stage of internationalisation, which are prerequisites for the effective use of the ELETEM decision model.

### **A Conceptual Learning and Knowledge-based Business Development Model: “The Spiral Model”**

Cheong (2010) developed a conceptual model of overseas business development in Hong Kong. This model, termed the “spiral model,” illustrates the increasing breadth and depth of knowledge and learning related to overseas business development over time (Figure 6). The spiral visually represents the accumulating knowledge acquired by a company throughout various stages of its international expansion. As time progresses, the knowledge gained expands both in scope (width) and profundity (depth), mirroring the shape of a spiral. The central core of the model symbolizes the company's fundamental capacity, which is considered constant. All acquired knowledge elements contribute to the formation of the spiral, with the understanding of these elements growing in width and depth proportionally to the time invested in further investigation and learning about overseas business development by the organisation (Cheong 2010).

Cheong (2010) argued that this model is applicable to a wide range of companies, including Hong Kong contractors who possess significant experience competing with international construction companies within their domestic markets but may lack the necessary experience to compete effectively with the international players in foreign markets. The model posits that a company needs to progressively develop its breadth and depth of knowledge



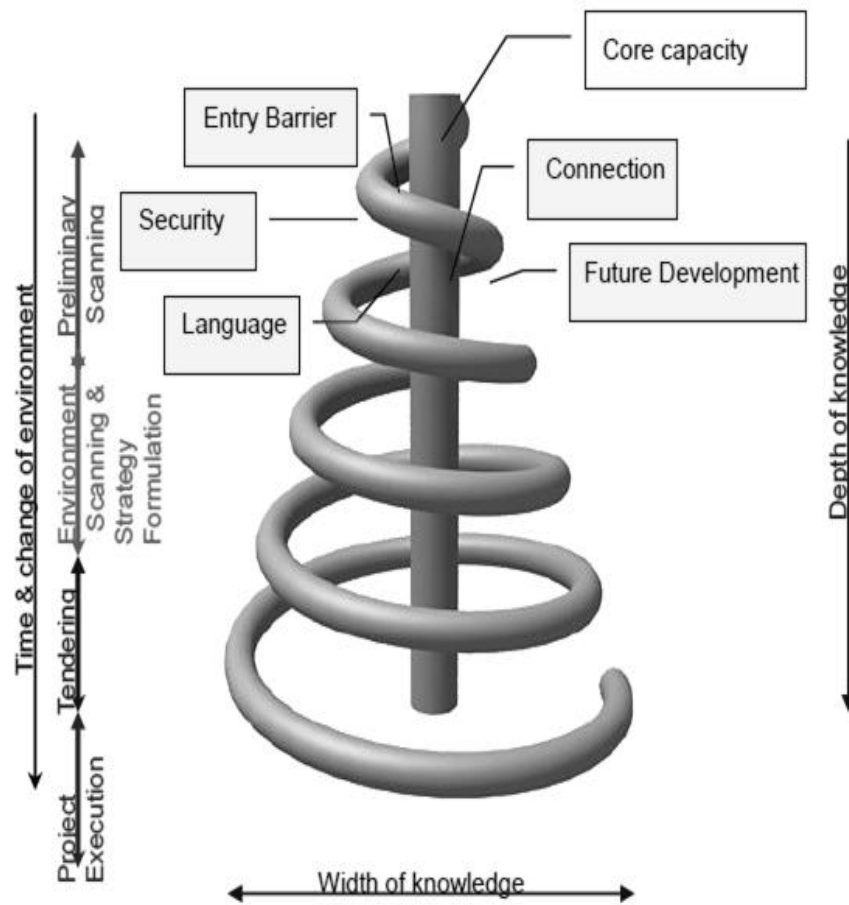


Figure 6: Spiral Model: A learning & knowledge based business development Model. Source: Cheong (2010).

concerning the target nation over a period. This implies that the requisite knowledge encompasses preliminary entry selection, strategic planning for entry and implementation phases, including market entry, tendering processes, and subsequent operational activities.

All these aspects are deemed critical for successful overseas business development (Cheong 2010). The model suggests that the speed of knowledge acquisition and learning is particularly rapid during the preliminary entry selection and tendering stages. However, this rate of knowledge acquisition is likely to decrease over time as the company becomes more established and operational within the target market, potentially causing the spiral's shape to flatten out (Cheong 2010).

The Spiral Model highlights that the rapid pace of knowledge acquisition necessitates frequent monitoring and review of overseas business development management. Consequently, the decision-making process must align with the speed of learning and knowledge accumulation. Therefore, managing overseas development cannot solely rely on conventional management practices (Cheong 2010). The Spiral Model was specifically developed and tailored for Hong Kong contractors' international business development at the pre-contract (tender) stage.

Furthermore, the methodology employed was action participant approach/research, which has inherent limitations, including potential researcher bias, and the model has not undergone formal validation by the author (Cheong 2010). These factors suggest that the model may not be directly adequate for adaptation or adoption by NICFs for international expansion due to its relatively narrow focus on pre-contract activities and the unique characteristics of the Nigerian construction industry and the specific strengths and weaknesses of NICFs, as identified in existing literature.

## **CONCLUSION**

Employing a literature review approach (supported by illustrations), this paper has critically examined existing international expansion models/entry mode strategies proposed by various scholars to build a case for the expansion and integration of NICFs into the ICM. The findings reveal several pertinent insights and important lessons for NICFs, alongside highlighting the potential benefits for firms successfully expanding into the ICM. Notably, most of the reviewed models were developed primarily for application by firms from advanced economies, with fewer models addressing the specific context of developing country firms' international expansion. This implies that the existing models were largely developed without considering the unique characteristics and challenges of NICFs and the specific nature of the Nigerian construction industry.

The paper also highlighted the need to ensure sustainability and sustainable developments in all efforts geared towards expansion and integration of NICFs into the ICM with a view to build a future that is prosperous, just, and secure as posited by The World Commission on Environment and Development (1987). In addition, it is imperative for all countries to adopt the objective of sustainable development as a directing principle of company policy and a

measure of national policy and international co-operation (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

Furthermore, this paper has demonstrated that the level of understanding and sophistication of international expansion models varies across countries. Additionally, differing infrastructure needs necessitate that each country adopts a tailored approach to developing internationalisation models that address its specific requirements.

This paper has limitations. First, there is scarcity of research on NICFs international expansion. Second, the narrow focus on selected models of market entry strategies from different country. For these reasons, the generalisation of these results has limitation. Third, as suggested by Singh, Murty, Gupta, and Dikshit (2012) and Welsch (2005), there are prospects for additional research in the area of sustainability in project management and promoting field researches exploring these concepts (sustainability and sustainable development) in case studies of NICFs should be interesting, considering that NICFs from a developing country (Nigeria) would render such research even more essential and therefore compelling.

Finally, this paper posits that a composite framework integrating the International Expansion Decision (IED) model (Gunhan & Ardit 2005b) and the Market Expansion Ability Approach (MEA) model (Yang et al. 1992) is a suitable basis for adaptation in the development of theoretical or conceptual model(s) for the expansion of NICFs into the ICM.

Based on these findings, the paper offers the following recommendations:

- a) *Adoption of Sustainability and sustainable development:* Construction firms (NICFs inclusive) considering market entry strategies needs to incorporate the objectives of sustainable development, social equity, economic efficiency, and environmental performance into their operational practices and projects.
- b) *Adaptation of a Composite Model:* A composite framework combining the International Expansion Decision (IED) model and the Market Expansion Ability Approach (MEA) model should be adapted for the development of theoretical or conceptual model(s) specifically tailored for the expansion of NICFs into the ICM.
- c) *Public Awareness Campaigns:* Public enlightenment campaigns and programmes should be implemented to raise awareness about the opportunities and benefits associated with the international expansion of NICFs within Nigeria, given the current scarcity of research in this area.
- d) *Government Policy and Support:* The Nigerian government should consider formulating a specific policy on the international expansion of NICFs and provide targeted support to enable NICFs to achieve this objective.
- e) *Future research:* Focusing on characteristics of NICFs with regards to their propensity for expansion into the ICM would be useful. Moreover, other surveys exploring the drivers and barriers to expansion of NICFs into the ICM could be performed. Another interesting research could be to take into account the concept of internationalisation with a view to develop a framework/model for expansion and integration of NICFs into the ICM. Finally, promoting field research exploring these concepts (sustainability and sustainable development in case studies of NICFs should be interesting.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Mohammed Isa Yusuf: Department of Building, Faculty of Environmental Sciences, Modibbo Adama University, Yola, Adamawa state (Nigeria).

Natalia, A. Anigbogu and Audu Ibrahim Isa Dakas: Department of Building, Faculty of Environmental Sciences University of Jos, Plateau State (Nigeria).