

NIGERIA DEPRESSED ECONOMY AND THE VISUAL ARTS PANACEA

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ABSTRACT

An opportunity in human and material resources in Visual Arts abounds to contribute massively to Nigeria Gross Domestic Product (GDP) if properly harnessed. Visual Arts appears inadvertently poorly streamlined toward strong market economy. Evidence of this situation is clearly observed in the monolithic economy of Nigeria crude oil. Visual Arts particularly ceramics, textile and graphic art as well as painting and sculpture could form strong industrial base like other allied professions that could provide a vent for the Nigerian ailing economy in contrary to what is currently obtainable in this field. However, there is a paucity of scholastic information that could direct, actionable responses towards the economic benefit of visual arts in Nigeria. It is against this background that the study on the Visual Arts potentials in Nigerian economy's advancement has been attempted.

KEYWORDS: Nigerian economy, Depressed, Visual Arts, Nollywood films, Music

INTRODUCTION

That the Nigerian economy is in recession or perhaps depression is no longer news. What might be a big discovery of a possible panacea for deepest recession in the last 29 years (African Development Bank, 2016 [1]). In 2015, Nigerian economy was declared the fastest growing economy in Africa; with the estimated Gross Domestic Product (GDP) 509.9 billion US dollars as against South Africa's estimated GDP of 370.3 billion US dollars, which is previously known to be the African giant economy in term of development (BBC News, 2016 [2]). In 2016, Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is 405,925 billion US dollars with a growth rate of about -1.5% (countryeconomy.com, 2016 [3]), inflation rate of 18.3% (Nigeria Bureau of Statistics, 2016 [4]) and it is still sliding deeper.

Economic analyst has predicted a full depression of the Nigerian economy if drastic political and economic policies are not put in place. This prediction is more frightened going by the observation of Obiora Ezekwesli, that already the multi-national companies and many foreign investors, who had contributed so much to the Nigerian economy, in the past have in a hurry withdrawn over 80 billion US dollars from the nation's economy, for the fear of possible liquidation of their businesses (financialwatchngr.com, 2016 [5]). So, the malady rages on in the nation's economy, where then is the panacea for poverty, economy servitude frustration, depression and apparent suicide in Nigeria? It is in the public domain that armed bandit, kidnapping, gangsterism and fraud are on the increase for survival reasons. Based on the aforesaid, there is a need for the nation together citizens out of the lock jam with conceptualized diversified economy rather than stay glued to a falling Nigerian monolithic oil economy which its price is not stable in the world market.

The nation's 2017 budget was precipitated on 38 US dollars per barrel projected on the sales of 2.2 million barrels of crude oil per day (nigerianmonitor.com, [6]) but the Niger Delta Militant Groups bombing of pipe lines has once again put the nation's aspirations on the brinks. Nigeria is losing 1.1 million oil barrels per day and about 23.1 millions in 21 days (nationaldailyng.com, 2016 [7]). Much volume of oil is still being wasted in the crises every day. In any case, the budget has been already dead on arrival. This is the reason Nigeria had to borrow from external source to fund her 6.07 trillion Naira budget. If Nigeria will survive from her economic woes, all hands must be on the desk. All stakeholders in the nation's economy must rise up to this enormous challenge, to provide a lasting solution to the nation's economy albeit feasible political solution.

Economic Contributions of Visual Arts

However, visual arts has been proven to be a rich mine for wealth generation since the ancient time; therefore, Nigerian artists, stakeholders in the nation's economy stands a good chance of being a part of providing panacea for the ailing economy. It is a fact, that Nigeria was a great art producing country of the world in the ancient time. The nation was adjudged to have produced about 90% of the art in Africa in the ancient time (Fagg, 1990 [8]). The nation still maintains the lead in the Contemporary African Art. Her artists are highly talented. There are many world class artists, among them who have invented different art styles and appropriate technology to handle their creation. A lot of these artists both in Nigeria and the Diaspora have attracted a wealth to themselves and the nation.

For instance, the Bureau of Labor Statistic observes that employment will increase from about 773,100 jobs in 2014 to about 789,700 jobs in 2024. The estimate was based on steady demand for animation and visual effects in video games, movies, television and on smart phones. Visual arts will continue to be in demand to help create appealing, effective layouts of websites and other media platforms. Other art in Nigeria will also continue to be in demand.

In practical terms, Bruce Onabrakpeya's art is one of the best selling, among the African artists. His works were mostly purchased by the expatriates, foreign institutions and private organizations as well as rich individuals. Nike Art Gallery in Lekki, Lagos at the recent time could boast of a total turnover of several millions of Naira, per annum. So are the many Galleries in Lagos, Abuja and Port Harcourt. Many of the Nigerian artists selling their works in foreign currency, while the Diasporic artists also earned foreign currency in painting, sculpture, fashion design, hairdo, jewelry and other visual art works.

Nigerian artists can also join other stakeholders in the Nigeria economy rescue mission. Nevertheless, we are confronted with the wits and tacts to harness better market opportunities. There is also the issue of individualistic and egocentrism among the artists that require quick interventions in order to move art patronage forward. Apparently, if there is more cooperation, respect and genuine unity and required enthusiasm and patriotism for service among artist groups, than best platform would be guaranteed for the Nigerian artists to improve the nation's GDP. For this reason, perhaps, a comparative examination of artists' counterparts at other art divide, the performing arts and the music industry is necessary.

It is a known fact that Nollywood, the Nigeria's second biggest employer, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is the fastest growing film industry all over the world today (Paxnigeria.com, 2016 [9]). The organization has grown from their major economy of the 80s and 90s into the all time record breaker of 300 million US dollars to about 590 million US dollars per annum in revenue earnings in the recent years as claimed by Robert Onya, MD of Nigeria Export,

Import Bank (Adetokunbo, 2016 [10]). Nollywood rise is unprecedented in Africa. The industry is now second to the India Bollywood in the number of films produced per annum, with about 2000 titles in the three major Nigerian languages every year since 2008, beating the America Hollywood to third position. The Nollywood films may be lacking in high technology and proficiency in production, but it is developing steadily. The Nigerian music industry in the same vein has also generated large export for their products. The foreign earnings from music alone are a staggering 56 million dollars revenue earnings in the sector in 2015. It has also been predicted 8.1 trillion dollars by 2019, making it the fastest expanding major market globally (widerimage.reuters.com [11] and careermusic.com [12]).

Taking cue from the above examples, visual artists should pay utmost attention to membership cohesion for synergy in critical examination of their works. This will advance creativity in art formalistic, stylistic content and material generation and usage for the desired development in the art profession. Good market and service possibilities should also be harnessed for the members. There are many highly talented artists in this country who find it difficult to market their products. Sometimes, the problem, perhaps, may be misplaced priorities in the kind of art produced. Apparently, the general needs of the nation, in terms of utilitarian art products should be critically examined and provided by the artists. Art is not for sake alone, but it is also for life. In this case, industrial art orientation must be improved upon so as to supply the local needs while the art for art's sake can be targeted towards the rich Nigerian art lovers, collectors and international markets.

In the local market, there are should be conscious attempt to capture the youth attention whose population is higher than the other groups of the society, specifically, for market strategy. This group of people has burning desire for certain types of art for recreation. For instance, no matter the level of economic recession or depression in the country, the teeming Nigerian youths still play games imported from oriental and Euro-America countries on smart phones and television set albeit the ones in the cards. Many of the games are too strong in impact and corrupt manners. They negate our belief system and cultural aspirations. In many ways, some of the games induce violence and terrorism. Many of them have even been deliberately produced to indoctrinate unwary, uncanny and fickle minded youth into occultism.

There are Nigerian graphic artists who are highly talented in animation and digital and electronic art whose can use computer art software to create and produce different ethnic folkloric stories. Traditional games of different types Yoruba Ayo olopon, bokoboko, bojuboju and a host of others can be developed electronically, by computer artists and recorded in audio-visual form for home viewing. In fact Ayo alpine, who is more mathematical, shrewdly played with wits and high intelligence will help our youth in their mathematics class. It could also develop their creative thinking and rationalization. For instance, in line with the above, the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Ladoko Akintola university of Technology, Ogbomosho have started working on that. Some computer programs for the folkloric stories and game have been written and successfully produced by the Computer Art by the Department. The University Management has also promised their support in the past, but the bureaucratic nature of our system affected the progress of the project. However, we are of the opinion that we can still tap from these resources and others in the area of communication and graphic advertisement that have not been adequately utilized. The economic problem of Nigeria should challenge graphic, communication, digital and electronic artists to rise up and create wealth for themselves and this nation. This is important particularly at this time when the country needs to save foreign exchange from unnecessary importation of certain art goods and services.

In the area of ceramics, much foreign reserves could also be conserved. Ceramic objects from its simplest archetypes and function is wide and mostly used in every home. However, lack of support from the government and individuals have given wealth that should accrue to the local ceramics in China, Japan and other countries of the West. The tonnage of China kitchen wares and sanitary that are imported to the country annually is overwhelming. The Spaniard and Italian tiles have found great favor in the sight of Nigerian citizens at the detriment of the local industries. Some ceramic industries in Nigeria in the past have striven to develop the nation's economy in some ways. Poor national policy on importation as well as Nigerians' ceramic tastes and demands simply strangled the home grown ceramic industries which cannot favorably compete with ceramic products of other developed nations (Abiodun, Akintonde, and Akinde, 2013 [13]). Granted that Nigerians are highly sophisticated in taste, but the government should have controlled inflow of ceramic objects and other products, that are made in Nigeria to assist the local industry to grow. For instance, 27 million tons of ceramic wares were imported into Nigeria currently (Iyasara, Joseph, Azubuike and Tse 2014 [14]).

Though about 95% of ceramic materials can be sourced locally as feldspar, kaolin and earthenware clays are spread across different zones of the country, yet these minerals are lying fallow in the ground. Ceramists are also complaining of the high cost of imported materials and their attitudes cannot allow favorable completion with the imported ceramic wares in terms of production in the aspect of quality and marketing. All we need is a formidable research group to evolve a synergy with earth scientists and chemists who could help to locate the mineral and test their chemical constituents respectively. The ceramists can then process the minerals individually and group them in glaze batches for sales, industrial and studio use. Although, it is a known fact, that art, creativity is more individualistic; but marketing and wealth generation through art is more of corporate business. To this end, the artist should synergies among themselves. If they organize themselves into cooperative bodies, they could be a strong body with adequate financial muscle, which could help in developing viable ceramic, textile and metallurgical industries.

The faith that befell ceramic industries also is devilled Nigeria textile industries and other areas of specialization in art. Not too long ago, cotton was a major cash crop in Nigeria. It was cultivated in Northern and some parts of Southwestern Nigeria. The product supplied the Kano and Kaduna textile industries and other local textile industries across the country. Iseyin in Oyo State is a household name in Southwestern Nigeria local textile industry. Hence, this following praise song:

A ran me also, Iseyin Ni o Hun 'so

A ran me also, Iseyin Ni o Hun 'so

Aso ti mo ro, olowo fara mo 'lowo

Ewu ti mo wo, olowo jogun idera

A ran me also, Iseyin Ni o Hun 'so

We sent a child to buy cloth, Iseyin did not weave cloth

We sent a child to buy cloth, Iseyin did not weave cloth

The wrapper that I tied round my waist, the rich flocked with the rich

The cloth that I wore, the rich inherit comfort,

We sent a child to buy cloth, Iseyin did not weave cloth

The above song is an evidence of a high creativity in textile art of Iseyin. For a long period of time, the industry has created wealth for the town.

With cotton plantation, England invented textile machine around 1760 (thoughtco.com [15]). The country began her booming textile industry with humble crude machine assembly and later became the leading textile industry all over the world. In the case of Nigeria, the local textile industry across the country cannot compete favorably with imported textile materials as also of from Iseyin, Ebira renowned Kante and the Ibo akwete never developed into any industry of great repute.

CONCLUSIONS

It is, however evident that it is the artists who could help themselves while the government should create an enabling environment, otherwise, wealth generation for them and the nation through art will continue to be a mirage. An artist in England, China, Japan, Spain, Italy, America, Germany and host of nations hardly waited for their various governments to assist them to establish their art driven industries. There industries were traditionally developed over many centuries individually and collectively before modern economic strategies and favorable government policies assisted them.

Apparently, by Nigerian artists learnt to work together, be well focused and coordinated to achieve desired goals in wealth generation, the visual art potential in this respect will never be realized and deserved respect and honor for the Nigerian artists will continue to be elusive. Further, the Society of Nigerian Artist (SNA), Guild of Professional Fine Artist of Nigeria (GFA), Ceramics Researchers Association of Nigeria (CeRAN), Craft Potter Association of Nigeria (CPAN) and other art bodies should rise up and provide enabling platform in Nigeria economy policy for professional to have a deserved position among the nation's professionals who dictate the economy. The Nollywood leadership evidently has created massive awareness and they genuinely created wealth for this nation; that is why they were always receiving grants and patronage from the Federal Government of Nigeria. For example, Nollywood was able to attract a 200 million US dollars support fund from the Nigerian Government and another 3 billion US dollar grant has also recently been promised them from the same source. The SNA should emulate this idea by institute a level of control on the membership and chart a course for the profession to be among the respectable and noble professions in the country rather than the eccentric stance their members are known for.

Further, in a depressed economy, it should be a duty of the Society of Nigerian Artist (SNA) and other art bodies to organize art fiestas, exhibitions among others for their members both home and abroad to showcase their talents. The SNA is strategically placed to attract grants, or supports from the multinational companies and philanthropists to assist them in organizing such big festivals. African art is in high demand by the western world, individual artist and group should be assisted by SNA through policy statements to repackage their products to attract a better sale from home and abroad. The nation's art should also be repackaged into carnivals, such as renowned Calabar Carnival, which is now attracting large number of tourists. Artists should make their role prominent in such festivals rather than sitting at the background.

Conclusively, it is our candid opinion that visual artists are part of the active participants in Nigerian economy, which could resuscitate the ailing economy of the country. Therefore artists should take up the challenge to commute their hard training into money making ventures in order for the nation to stop expending her low foreign reserves on visual arts products that can be produced successfully in the country. If artists in Nigeria neglect the rich and enviable source of livelihood for themselves and the nation at this trying period, they should also share part of the blame on the neglect of good nation building in Nigeria.

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A reference list **MUST** be included using the following information as a guide. Only cited text references are included. Each reference is referred to in the text by a number enclosed in a square bracket (i.e., [3]). References **must be numbered and ordered according to where they are first mentioned in the paper**, NOT alphabetically.

Examples Follow

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