

## *Full Length Research*

# **Visual Arts: Dependable Path To Sustainable Development In Nigeria**

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**Misplacement of priority is the bane of Nigeria contemporary society. much so that any policy that is not directly related to politics, looting, corruption, terrorism and all that could galvanize underdevelopment are not given due attention. Over dependency on oil may not be the best option, hence the absolute need for diversification of all sectors of the economy to achieve a dependable solution to numerous problems of Nigeria - politically, economically, technologically, culturally and religiously including education. It is in view of this, therefore, that the study considers visual arts as dependable path to sustainable development in Nigeria. Different studies may have been carried out on socio-economic, cultural and political economy of Nigeria but no comprehensive study in this direction hence the study. The study relies strongly on primary and secondary sources of data collation to achieve the objectives of the study. Some of the findings include that Nigeria is in dire need of diversification and restructuring of the economic and political system. Again, Visual arts could serve effectively as dependable path to sustainable development and others. These are followed by conclusion and recommendations.**

**Keywords:** Visual Arts, Development, Nigeria

## **INTRODUCTION**

Oloidi (2010) in one of his lecture series at University of Nigeria, Nsukka asserts that “you don’t wait for someone to make you an Art Historian, rather you make yourself one”. In that direction it stands to suggest that Nigeria does not have to wait for another country like USA, Germany, UK, Russia, France or even Ghana to make her world power, but Nigeria could make herself one. The only way this could be objectively done is by doing the needful, putting proper machinery in place, build strong and viable institutions without bias or fear or favour.

Pathetically, the study observes that since the emergence of Fulani and their quest for power, Nigeria has hardly moved forward in terms of reasonable and sustainable development. What these imply therefore,

are stagnation, retrogression, chaos, anarchy, agitations, corruption, greed, extra-judicial killing, avarice and others. The inciting of destructive passion against other ethnic minorities and geopolitical zones to the extent that true federalism becomes almost an impossibility, is counterproductive and may be unacceptable. They employ divide and rule system of government to enforce leadership of terrorism on the subjects, thereby, neglecting the welfare and effective existence of the people concerned.

The study notes with sympathy and empathy that prior to the advent of colonial administrators, Nigeria, indeed ndigbo have their already established and organized system of existence which hitherto projected and catapulted them into international

scenes. Culture is a significant phenomenon in Igbo communities from prehistoric times to date. Creativity, imagination and artistic creations were major parts of ndigbo as it was and it is now in other parts or ethnic groups in Nigeria like Ife, Ondo, Benin, Nok, Esie in Kwara state, Ijaw, Ibibio and others.

As Ndigbo practiced and excelled in artistic creation, other ethnic groups excelled equally. While ndigbo were practicing Uli or Uri arts – the art of creative body decoration and wall design, the Ibibio, Anang people of present Akwa-Ibom state were also noted extensively for their art of Nsibidi. Today, objectively, Akwa-Ibom, Cross-River and Rivers states are richest in creativity and cultural heritage in Nigeria.

Thurstan Shaw in Gowing (1995:508) acknowledges the excavation of bronze ornaments at Igbo-Ukwu in the present day Anambra state of Nigeria. Benin is nationally and internationally noted for world class bronze casting which beat the imagination of the colonial administrators to date. The 1897 Punitive Expedition of Benin arts is a strong testimony to the artistic prowess of the indigenous people of Benin Kingdom. If one moves from there to Ile-Ife, one discovers the creative and artistic ingenuity of the people of Ife and others within the Yoruba Kingdom. From there to Kwara state where the art of stone carving is in abundance, from there to Benue state and some parts of Niger state which are endowed with creative arts of terracotta. Example – Nok arts, festivals and other cultural activities.

The implications of these therefore, are, Nigeria is highly endowed with creative talents and cultural heritage that could situate her as the richest nation in the world. In all, what do they do with these creative resources and beautiful cultural elements available?. In view of the present situations which are deplorable, retrogressive, contagious and more dangerous than the most dreaded Coronavirus (Covid 19) at the moment. The study considers Nigeria as one of the most ungovernable nations in the world with a long standing history of corruption and terrorism, internationally and nationally. To redeem the image of Nigeria, economically, internationally, culturally and technologically, one may suggest that the country (Nigeria) reconsiders visual arts as dependable path to sustainable development. Again, Nigeria should advance opportunities to create a sustainable economic growth and a high labour content to ensure significant employment generation.

Different studies may have been carried out on Nigeria economy, technology, education, culture, visual arts, however, no comprehensive or significant studies have been done in this direction, hence, the study.

## VISUAL ARTS

Visual arts means different thing to different people in the world, as Nigeria as a nation means different thing to different people all over the world. To some, Nigeria may mean a rich oil nation, to some, dubious and most corrupt nation in the world. Naturally, one may see Nigeria as “this” or “that”. However, no matter the perspective anyone decides to look at it, Nigeria is the most populous country in West Africa, with more than 275 ethnic groups as noted by Egonwa (2017:97).

The study observes that Nigeria is rich creatively and artistically as well as culturally endowed including other mineral and human resources available at her disposal, yet they lack the human and natural intelligence as well as creative potential to meaningfully convert these resources to full advantage for the good of all. It is rather unfortunate. Nigeria can boast of more than 10 million Professors across the country, Medical Doctors, Lawyers, Scientists, and Researchers including other skilled and unskilled labourers, oil, stones, coal and other mineral resources, yet one of the poorest countries in the world. Chima (2018:1) describes this type of scenario as a critical situation where there is “*Water, Water Everywhere, But Not Enough*”.

One may consider Nigeria as the world’s 8<sup>th</sup> largest oil producer, but its success has been massively undermined in recent decades by ethnic and religious conflicts, political instability, rampant official greed and corruption including economic sabotage that is part of Nigeria.

On the other hand, visual arts as noted by Adams (1996:1) citing Aristotle, is a route to knowledge. He further asserts that visual arts may be considered as any object or image that is so defined by its maker. According to him, art is object or image not explicitly identified as such, but which strikes the observer as expressive or aesthetically pleasing. Preble and Preble (1994:2) on the other hand, consider visual arts “as quality production or expression of what is beautiful, appealing or of more than ordinary significance”. In furtherance to their views, they assert that a work of art is the aesthetic expression of an idea, or experience formed with skill through the use of a medium or combination of different media. Ayakoroma (2011:4) in his contribution to “arts, culture, language and national integration” opines that visual arts is the use of one’s imagination to create things of aesthetic significance. He remarks that it is a process whereby the creator draws from real life to recreate the impressions he has had about certain situations in life.

However, it must be noted that arts could be classified into the performing arts - drama, music and dance, visual arts - sculpture, graphics, painting, ceramics, textiles, photography and drawing. The literal arts - prose, poetry and creative writing, comedy as well as drama too. All these are components that constitute the arts as fields of human endeavour.

The study believes that the above outlined human endeavours, visual arts and the arts generally if significantly harmonized, integrated and adopted could monumentally boost the economy and the image of the country. For examples, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ben Enweonwu, Aina Onabolu, Dele Jegede, Kola Oshinowo, Yusuf Grillo, Gani Oladokun, Uche Okeke, Ben Ekanem, Ola Oloidi, Best Ochigbo, Pete Edochie, Ola Rotimi, Chika Okpala, and many others who through visual arts and arts have brought fame to Nigeria thereby contributing meaningfully to the growth and development of the economy.

The study is of the view that Arts indeed visual arts constitute inseparable characteristics to human development. For example, visual arts can instill motivation, beautify, entertain, inform, persuade, and heal as well as transform man and society. This is why it becomes necessary that every nation aspiring for growth and development must embrace and fully integrate visual arts and arts into their development agenda for prosperity and technological expansion. It is for this reason also that any reasonable society may not relegate visual arts to the background, because it forms the bedrock of human, industrial and technological development of any organized and established society as noted by Osita (2015:21).

Ikwuegbu (2010:143) agreeing with Okereke and Ekpe (2002:3) observes that;

*Development is more than just the acquisition of industries, but includes such ideals of modernization as rise in productivity, social and economic equalization, modern technical know-how, improved institutions and attitudes as well as rationally coordinated policy approaches.*

Diversification of the economy, resources, value and cultural ideals, imagination, research institution, education, and others may be result oriented and galvanize the much needed economic and sustainable development in Nigeria.

However, diversification and creatively integrating visual arts into Nigeria's development agenda and school curricula could massively inspire sustainable development against the backdrop of over dependency on oil which may be counterproductive in the long run. In support of this view, Ikwuegbu (2010:151) asserts that Nigeria cannot achieve sustainable development without the arts, aided by creativity, imagination and aesthetic awareness that boost sustainable development.

The importance of arts in the development of the economy may not be overemphasized, apart from developing the creative mind of the individuals, arts has numerous functions to the society. Architecture is an essential part of visual arts which plays a massive role in the development of the society and the economy. Visual arts and the arts generally bring about healing and therapeutic functions, it entertains, provides jobs for individuals, provides avenue for technological advancement and the sources of creative explorations that may inspire sustainable development.

Figures 1 – 4 are good examples;



**Figure 1:** Artist: Obadan Chris  
Title: Family II  
Medium: Metal  
Size: 135cm x 30cm  
Year: 2008



**Figure 2:** Artist: Chris Afuba  
Title: Mbo Agu (The Tiger Asleep)  
Medium: Wood and Metal  
Year: 2008



**Figure. 3:** Artist: Okay Ikenegbu  
Title:Ikenga  
Medium: Metal  
Size: 50cm h  
. Year: 2009



**Figure 4:** Artist: Maraina Akeem  
Title: Akintola –Taku (No Push Over)  
Medium: Metal  
Size: 47 x 66 cm  
Year: 2002

In a country where there is massive unemployment, visual arts and the arts provide sustainable and suitable playgrounds for entrepreneurial and inter personal skill development which may in the long run boost the economy.

Sculpture as an integral part of visual arts may be used in adorning the communities and cities which may be a huge source of attraction to the numerous tourists. It also provides a platform for the creation of sculpture gardens which provide a relaxation place for those who are emotionally and psychologically troubled. Mere viewing the art works in the sculpture gardens with their formalistic rendition provides joy and upliftment of the spirit to create and recreate.

Other areas of the visual arts and that could boost any country's economy are photography, painting, ceramics, textiles and fashion designing, drawing and illustration including animation. Others include drama or the theatre arts – Nollywood examples soap opera, and other forms of entertainment that may improve lives and the society. Poetry and literature are essential aspects of the arts that could massively boost the economy and gain the country international recognition. Relegating visual arts and the arts to the background may impact negatively on the growth and development of the economy.

Conclusively, art is life and may be pivotal in construction and reconstruction of knowledge and the economy. It may be seen as a base for technological incubation and advancement, thereby creating a platform for sustainable development.

However, Europe, America, Asia, and all the powers today are where they are today only with effective combination of creativity, imagination, aesthetics, which are all embedded in visual arts and the arts generally to achieve a great height in the world.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that visual arts and the other arts should be encouraged in the schools ranging from primary, secondary and tertiary institutions throughout the country. History, music, visual arts, literature, drama should be encouraged in the various institutions.

Policy makers should include visual art culture in the development agenda, so as to tap from the numerous benefits emanating from visual art culture.

Centres for skill acquisition should be built and developed to cater for the needs of the teeming

population of the youths seeking jobs to be trained in the areas of visual arts which include Sculpture, Welding and Fabrication, Photography, Textile designing and Craft making like beads, bags and others.

Awareness campaign should be made to draw the attention of the youths and to encourage them to be industrious and creative thereby reducing crimes, rituals, and get rich quick syndrome which have hampered the progress of sustainable development in Nigeria. In the opinion of Adams (1996:5) Aristotle is of the view that art may improve on nature by various means such as idealization and stylization. To him, art could be a route to knowledge. Based on these, therefore, visual arts may be considered a dependable path to sustainable development in Nigeria should the needful be done.

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