

THE PRODUCT CATEGORIES, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF HANDICRAFT PRODUCTION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Artisanal products are those produced by artisans, either completely by hand, or with the help of hand tools or even mechanical means, as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product. Using raw materials from sustainable resources the special nature of artisanal products derives from their distinctive features, which can be utilitarian, aesthetic, creative, culturally attached, decorative, functional, religiously and socially symbolic and significant. Handicrafts, crafts or craft products are synonyms for Artisanal Products, which is a component of Creative Industries. Creative Industries derive their origins from individual creativity, skill and talent that have a potential for job and wealth creation through the generation and exploitation of the individual's intellectual property. Creative Industries encompass the following segments i) Artisanal Products, ii) Visual Arts, iii) Performing Arts, iv) Cinema and Audiovisual Media, v) Multimedia, and vi) Literature, Books and Publishing. These equip the youths with wide range of practical skills which enables them to be self-relevant after leaving school.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has a wide array of handicraft products ranging from basketry, mats, ceramics, beads, pottery, hand textiles and woven products, toys, jewellery, bags, ornaments, leather products, batiks and wood craft among others. These items are produced in almost all the Districts and Regions of Nigeria using locally available raw materials, with limited products differentiation based on culture, history and traditions.

Handicrafts production in Nigeria is cultural, traditional and predominantly a cottage industry, engaged in by rural youth of both gender but largely by women folk, to supplement household incomes. The tradition has been to hand over craftsmanship and skills from generation to generation. This tradition has waned considerably over time. Even though master craftsmen can still be found, their numbers have diminished considerably. Of late, however handicraft production has seen an upswing as the industry

is perceived as a potential business opportunity for sustainable income generation, thus attracting more and more artisans, traders and exporters. The village producers sell their products in either the neighbourhoods or to domestic craft traders, or direct to tourists. The domestic craft traders serve as intermediaries, who sell on the local markets and to exporters or export the items themselves. Tony, E (2010).

However, in their zeal to earn quick money for a living, the artisans produce in fragmented environment, with no appreciation of market requirements, quality, design, standards and systematic organization of markets. Innovations, design and product adaptations are limited, given the low skills and capacity of Nigeria's artisanal producers. David, O, (2010).

The prime objective of this paper is to discuss the product categories and challenges and prospects of handicraft in Nigeria. The frame work of this article was organized as follows: abstract, introduction, the product categories of handicraft, challenges and prospects of handicraft production in Nigeria, recommendations and conclusion.

PRODUCT CATEGORIES OF HANDICRAFT

The different regions and districts of the country produce a large array of handicrafts, depending on the type of available raw material and the indigenous skills of the producers. In this regard, specific products have become largely associated with specific districts. Each production locality has its specific strengths and other attributes, which developed and capitalized on could lead to district or product specialisation, easy sourcing and marketing. Generally, the quality of Nigerian handicrafts is poor with little or no differentiation and innovation in terms of designs, styles and dimensions. Prices are high due to casual and low volume production, poor management and costing skills. Bakari, A (2009).

This section identifies the major categories of handicraft in Nigeria and also analyses their potentials:

Basketry and Mats

Basketry and mats are the most popular craft products in Nigeria. It is common found among the people from the South-East geo-political zone of Nigeria; especially the Igbos. The craft making of baskets and mats is also practiced by Hausa people in the core Northern part of Nigeria; Kano, Sokoto, Bornu state among others. The type, design and price of these depend on type and source of materials used. Colours used are diverse (vegetable dyes, mineral dyes, combination of the two, natural colour of

the materials themselves, among others) but the most preferred colour by the markets is the natural colours. Locally, these products are demanded for traditional functions like marriages and externally in markets like USA, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Canada, Japan, among others for table-top accessories such as table and plate mats, fruit bowls, bread baskets, coasters, beach mats, and floor mats. Each of these markets has its own colour combination preferences, sizes and offer different price ranges even for similar products. The most popular basket is the coiled basket, which is available in different colourways, shapes and sizes. The picture below depicts some finished craft made products and artisans busy making baskets and mats.



Plate 1: Coiled baskets produced by artisans in Kano. 2015



Plate 2: Artisans making baskets and mats in Kano. 2015

In order to enrich this sub-group, introduce new styles, and innovative products, there is need to develop 'cross-overs' through materials combination and techniques of crafting. This calls for artisans with wider skills or those that could cluster with artisans in other sub-groups. Onyema, U (2008).

Embroidery and Woven products

Embroidery (both by hand and with the use of sewing machines), as a soft furnishing adornment on clothing, has been in use for a long time. The technique has largely remained under exploited – left only to casual dressing, table cloth, cushion covers and more recently on bags and purses. Although it was claimed by embroiderers in Abeokuta and Akure that the Yorubas had been involved in the art of embroidery earlier, it appears that the Hausas are more into significant production in the number of hand embroiderers in practice.

The bulk of embroidered and woven products with varying quality are consumed locally. Europe is by far the major market for these items – that are mainly sold through Alternative Trading Organizations. Wider application of embroidery methods could be introduced in minimal levels to hand loomed products and leather to create new looks. Edwin, F, (2005).

Hand Textiles and Hand-loomed Products

Under this category, Nigeria is producing a range from bed spreads, towels, cushion covers, wrappers, shawls, rugs, tie and dye materials, casual wear (dresses, shirts and children wear). The warping/construction, surface design and thread types/texture vary widely across the sub-groups. Tourist and foreign residents in Nigeria form part of the local market with Europe (Italy, Germany) as the main export markets for this range of products. The major people that practice this category of Handicraft are the Yorubas; hailed from the south-western part of Nigeria. Abraham, F, (2008). Nupe people from Niger state are also good in this area. The Akwete people are also famous in this practice. The picture below shows some hand textiles and hand-loomed products on display.



Plate 3: Hand Textiles from Akwete, Nigeria. 2013

**Plate 4: Some hand textiles and other products
from Akwete on display, 2013.**

Ceramics and Pottery

It is believed that the first pottery was pressed/formed in a basket to give them the shape, which after drying were fired in an open kiln. By and large, Nigerian pottery is unglazed which could give us an advantage in the market where glazed pottery (ceramics) attracts higher tariffs and health consciousness in addition to high competition from suppliers from the Far East. Ceramics and pottery is commonly practiced in south-western part of the country mainly by Yoruba tribe. There are so many small-scale ceramics industries cited in some south-west states like Oyo, Ondo, Ogun, Lagos, Kwara e.t.c. Kojo, F (2009). The figure below portrays some ceramics and pottery made product displayed for sale.



Plate 5: Ceramic wares displayed for sale in Lagos, 2014

Leather and Leather Products

Green leather alone or in combination with other woven or plaited materials is increasingly employed by Nigerian artisans to make bags, purses, belts, and sandals, among others. Recent interventions in this sub-sector have seen new Nigerian-made leather products replacing the previously sourced products from neighboring countries.



Plate 6: Leather bags made by artisans in Aba, Abia State, 2012



Plate 7: Leather sandals made by artisans in Aba, 2012.

The people of Aba (Enyimba City) in Abia state are popularly known for producing leather bags shoes, sandals, silipon, peca foot wear and any other leather products you can think of. They even export these goods to abroad. Azubuike, K (2010). The figure above shows leather bags and foot wears on display in a shop at Ariaria market Aba in Abia state of Nigeria.

Wood products

Wood as a raw material for making handicrafts in Nigeria has not been at same levels with that of Tanzania or Kenya. Products in this category have remained very traditional with rationalised skills for example carving of wood to form man made gods used for idle worship. Benin indigenes in Edo state mainly indulge in this kind of craft practice. Wood carving is also practiced in some parts of Igbo land. People from Igbo-Ukwu, Nri, Nando, Arondizuogu, Ohofia, Afikpo e.t.c carve woods to make masks for masquerades and Idle worship. Some of these people also carve wood for chairs, tables, domestic materials, among others for sale. John, O (2006).

The introduction of taxes on handicraft imports from neighbouring countries has created room for Nigeria to develop her own style and range of wooden product. Notable products are top table accessories, animal and human figurines and the two-piece type chairs adopted from neighbouring Cameroon.

Much potential in this category lies in developing better top table accessories such as bowls, napkin holders, chests of varying sizes and utilizing some of our better woods like ebony that could be sourced from Sapele in Delta State as opposed to the light melynna which is commonly used. The weights of wood and natural streaks are some of the factors influencing quality and value of finished items. The Neem tree is also another wood that could offer qualities almost similar to Olive wood for which Kenya

has become Internationally Known. John, O (2006). The figure below shows some wood products sampled for sale at the 3rd African Arts and Crafts Expo (AFAC) 2010 held in Abuja, Federal capital territory, Nigeria.



Plate 8: Wood products by artisans in Abuja. 2010



Plate 9: Wood products in Abuja. 2010

Jewellery and Jewellery Products

Humans have adorned themselves with jewellery as far back as history can tell. In Nigeria, people have used Jewellery derived from animal parts such as bone, horns, feathers, teeth, to stone, seeds, wood, clay and precious metals, etc to adorn themselves. The Yorubas and Igbos are very good in this category of handicraft.

However, in the commercial crafts sector jewellery is relatively new with imported beads as necklaces, bangles, waist beads, among others dominating the local market. Earrings and finger rings are the other items in the sub-group. Tribal inter-marriages afford Nigeria the opportunity to introduce new products to the market. Dele, A (2010). The picture below shows assorted types of jewellery on display

in Ezebuchi cultural center at Edozie street, Uwani, Enugu, Enugu state with some customers patronizing the shop.



Plate 10: Jewelleries on display at Edozie Street, Uwani Enugu. 2012



Plate 11: Jewelleries on display in Enugu with some customers checking for the ones to buy. 2012

Others

As more and more 'cross-over' combination of materials, techniques and functionality is employed, new product groups are likely to emerge. This development should be encouraged. Will not be a mistake at all apart from the difficulties in categorizing the product – in which case describing them is the solution.



Plate 12: Local guitars made by the Hausa and Fulani artisans in Katsina State. 2013



Plate 13: Local hats made by artisans in Kaduna State. 2014

The local guitars and hats depicted above are mainly produced by the Hausa-Fulani natives in Katsina state particularly, and few of them that settled in other parts of Northern Nigeria. Tanimu, D, (2002).

The “cross-overs” with their new looks, will not only extend the lifespan of products but will also enable compliance with trend changes. It could also lead to unique Nigeria styles and brands as established in other exporting countries e.g. the sisal bag (Kyondo/Kikuyu bag) from Kenya, ebony carvings from Tanzania, raffia bags from Madagascar, kente cloth from Ghana, among others.

CHALLENGES OF HANDICRAFT PRODUCTION IN NIGERIA

Handicraft production in Nigeria has been deviled with many challenges. Nigeria’s artisans are constrained by their limited, non-market determined technical, and artistic product design, product

standardization, development and marketing. Capacity building programs are minimal for the sector while market entry approaches are inconsistent and ad hoc, and market distribution networks are inadequate. Costing and pricing is a nightmare for most producers. Scanty official handicraft exports statistics hinder the determination of the production capacity of the sector as well as sector policy analysis and formulation. Bassey, E (2008). These challenges are elaborated below:

- **Lack of adequate infrastructure:** The biggest internal constraint to this sector is infrastructure inadequacy, which is aggravated by the rural location of production bases. Delivery schedules are hampered by poor and often times inaccessible road networks, transport bottlenecks, lack of or unreliable power supply and lack of proper workshops and storage facilities.



Plate 14: Some artisans working with few available tools in a studio in Awka, Anambra State 2016

- **Lack of formal producer groupings:** Artisans are scattered and work individually in unstructured production systems, rather than in organised groups. This makes it difficult to reach out to them with support programmes and inputs.
- **Limited commercialization of craft production activity:** Many craft makers in rural locations make handicrafts as a past-time activity and not a specialized commercial activity for income generation. They engage in time conflicting activities, which render their supply volumes low, inconsistent and very sporadic.
- **Lack of market sensitivity:** Most producers are ignorant of the seasonality and trendiness of handicrafts, as well as the socio-environmental requirements of the markets.
- **Middle persons in the distribution channel:** There are a lot of middlemen in the marketing chain whose activities affect the profitability of producers.
- **Lack of technical know-how:** Results in poor design skills, specialization, inconsistent product standardization, poor finishing which among others detract from product quality upgrade.
- **Poor packaging:** Inadequate attention is paid to the need for appropriate packaging to the detriment of product preservation, durability and quality.
- **Lack of micro finance:** Unavailability of credit for this sector prevents bulk and voluminous production by the artisans.
- **Health and Environmental Regulations:** There is a rising concern on environment protection with consumers demanding environmentally sound products. EU and USA have banned the use of toxic substances such as cadmium and azo dyes in the production processes due to health reasons. These markets require exporters to satisfy the Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary standards of their products as well

as traceability requirements. Artisans find it difficult to comply and conform with these regulations because cadmium and azo dyes are some of their major raw material, and so many of them have not yet find an alternative substance to replace these materials. Bassey, E (2008)

- **Fair trade practices:** is intended to offer protection for small-scale developing country producers against unfair pricing and market practices. A Fair Trade label tag opens specific markets. Unfortunately, fair trade is not adequately practiced in Nigeria. This problem has frustrated the efforts of artisans to wax stronger in their activities.

- **Absence of a National Sector Development Strategy:** The absence of a national sector development strategy has led to the marginalization of the handicraft sector in the national development agenda.

- **Lack of vibrant Product and National Exporters Associations:** Product associations, either at the production, marketing or joint levels facilitate outreach programmes to address sector inadequacies. These associations also perform focal point functions including serving as umbrella organisations or pressure groups for lobbying and articulating sector issues. Such groups are conspicuously absent in the sector or whichever ones exist are woefully ineffective. There is need to reorganise the existing ones or barring that to establish functional and effective sector representative associations. Sunday, O (2007).

- **Inadequate market information and dissemination:** Market information is recognized as an important ingredient for all business decisions. Despite its plentiful availability especially made possible by ICT advances, it has not readily and sufficiently percolated down to the producers and marketers in the handicraft sector. Trade Promotion Organizations especially the Nigeria Exporting Council (NEC), are insufficiently resourced for market intelligence, information sourcing, dissemination and outreach activities. There is high prevalence of poor Internet connectivity and limited e-commerce competencies at the enterprise level in the sector thus frustrating the limited attempts by NEC to make market related

information available to the sector operatives. Trade Promotion Organizations such as Nigeria Exporting Council (NEC) and sector associations, should be supported to conduct timely and informative market research, subscribe to market information sources and disseminate such market intelligence to the export community on the opportunities, production and market trends as well as market access requirements. This will evenly facilitate the export of Made in Nigeria Handicraft products to different parts of the world.

- **Inadequate support for marketing and promotion:** By and large much of the promotion in this sector is done at the firm level with little or no coordinated support from the Government's trade promotion organisations. Promotional costs for brochure development, website and other advertisements, participation in local, regional and international fairs, are prohibitive for the small-scale operatives in the handicraft sector. There is a critical need to enhance direct government support and promotion of handicrafts in the identified areas.

- **High freight charges:** Compared to other regional sources Nigeria's freight rates are uncompetitive. Consolidated bulk shipments and guaranteed volumes and frequency of exports should lead to negotiated competitive rates.

- **Low capacity building programmes:** Capacity enhancement is critical to sustain markets. This can be achieved by supply chain development through training of handicraft producers and exporters in their respective skills requirements in production and export marketing. Sunday, O (2007)



Plate 15: A Kerosene firing ceramic kiln (built with locally sourced materials), by Okonkwo Ivan, Department of Fine and Applied Arts. Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. 2016

•**Lack of Technology Transfer and Innovations:** Transfer of Technology and innovation should be prioritised with the aim of sustaining and accelerating efforts currently underway in Nigeria to strengthen, promote, and develop export competitiveness and productivity in Nigeria. Unfortunately, there is lack of technology transfer and innovations in this part of the world. There is need to pay attention to the coordination and strengthening of an effective sector specific industrial support system of services for the Handicraft Industry.

• **Value Addition:** The emphasis on technology is aimed at enhancing value addition in the crafts sector in the areas of quality management, product design and standardization and improved packing standards. Quality assurance systems and environmental conformity and soundness are keys for the sector value chain and export market sustainability. Unfortunately, this concept is not applicable in Nigeria.

- **Scanty capturing of official handicraft exports:** As stated earlier the vast majorities of Nigeria's handicrafts are not adequately captured by product classification and/or trade codes (Harmonized System). Sector policy analysis and strategy formulation is thus undermined considerably by the very scanty official capture of handicraft export trade statistics. Ogugua, M (2010).

PROSPECTS OF HANDICRAFT PRODUCTION IN NIGERIA

The most significant resources or “raw materials” for the accelerated development of any country are its people, not necessarily in terms of numerical strength but the quality of products generated through their labour. Education, formal or informal is also an important factor in the task of equipping the people for nation building. During the pre-colonial period, Africa and its teeming population had embraced education which equipped them with adequate technique for survival as demanded by the new dispensation. Nigeria, a West African country with a crafts production and industry, esteems the role of education in relation to the quality of products from its teeming populace as vital in its development process. The country practices the 6-3-3-4 system of education. The system embraces four distinct cycles of six years at primary school level, three at the junior secondary and also three at the senior secondary level, and finally four at the University. Among the several subjects introduced right from the primary level is the study and production of arts and crafts (Fine and Applied Arts) to equip the youths with wide range of practical skills which enables them to be self-reliant at different stages of education. It also affords the average Nigerian a positive response to the socio-economic needs of the Country.



Ceramics wares comprising of a traditional pot, flower vase stool, wine and water set produced by Ohimai John, a 400 level student o

Bags, Hat and necklaces produced by 200 level students (2015/2016 session) of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State.

The rationale behind the study of production of arts and crafts is the urgent need to find answers to the problems of graduate unemployment as only a small percentage of graduates are able to secure formal employment after their studies in school. A graduate who has acquired practical skills such as furniture making, dress weaving, pottery, jewellery and leather making among several others can be self employed after school. Jewellery for instance has been adornments mostly for women. They represent one of the earliest forms of fashion and the cost depended on the value of a particular jewel. Jewellery adds beauty as well as complements the dressing of a woman. As fashion changes, so it goes with the wearing of jewels. Jewellery, particularly to most African women is seen as a good asset, whose value includes complimenting their look as well as being a source of economic gains. The material for jewellery making are good beads, ivory, brass, among others and these materials are in most Nigerian towns and cities such as Bida, Igbo-Ukwu, Awka, Ife, Benin and Oyo. In Bida, and several cities in Nigeria, the products of brass smiting are found as decorative items, and sometimes used for storage and working. For the more adventurous tourists and visitors, items such as earrings, bangles, rings, trays, brass toys are purchased as souvenir products.

In his life-time, particularly as an active politician, the late Owelle of Onitsha, and Nigeria's first post-independence President, the Right Honourable Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe's sartorial attire was never complete without the famous long traditional neck bead. The bead has come to represent the symbol of authority of the traditional office of the "Owelle". In similar

circumstances, when clad in full traditional regalia, the Oba of Benin in Edo State, Nigeria would be adorned with several traditional neck beads too numerous to be counted.

In the Eastern and Western parts of Nigeria, the use of beads transcends the frontiers of fashion. In the east in particular, it is one of the sacred ingredients and requirement during conferment of traditional chieftaincy titles. In some cases it represents the sole symbol of authority for the wearer.

With regards to fashion, the beads have a credible ally in the army of young maidens mostly in the southern parts of Nigeria. The beads are used on the waist, on the ankle, and sometimes special colours are selected for the neckbeads for a complete traditional attire.



(A Publication of the Augustinian Institute)

Plate 17: Tie-dye and batik made into Boubou. Textiles section of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts. Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. 2015



Plate 18: Little Miss Dunukofia (Chibudom Okeke) decorated with jewellery made with traditional coral beads. Courtesy: O'star Yowamca, Awka. 2016



Plate 19: Little Miss Aguata (Chinaza Obidiegwu) decorated with jewellery made with traditional coral beads. Courtesy: O'star Yowamca, Awka. 2016

Plate 20: Little Miss Onitsha South (Maryjane Umejiesi) decorated with jewellery made with traditional coral beads. Courtesy: O'star Yowamca, Awka. 2016

The Nigerian government should build training centres in these places, the centres are expected to boost crafts as a means of cultural diplomacy, relations and exchange of aesthetics and motifs. In addition to this, the centres are expected to encourage tourism, earn foreign

exchange for Nigeria as well as ensure regular source of employment and livelihood for the practitioners.



Plate 21: A traditional (craft) curtain and some craft products produced by students of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Anambra State. 2015.

The schools are further expected to undertake the training of Nigerian youths on various skills like furniture, leather, textiles, fashion and related crafts such skills will help curb the current high rate of unemployment as well as signal the beginning of a chain of Vocational Training Centres to be established in other places in Nigeria in order to consolidate awareness of crafts as tools for improved cultural life. The ultimate aim, therefore, is to use crafts to improve the standard of living in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To strengthen and sustain handicraft production in Nigeria, there is need to attract financial support for both production and marketing components of the trade. The Export finance schemes run by some Nigeria banks should be made easily accessible, affordable and timely for the small- and medium-scale operatives in the handicraft export business. The operatives should be made aware of existing export incentives and tax exemptions provided by Government to exporters. A direct linkage of the sector with a target bank or financial institution should enable targeted export finance to the sector while goading the sector operatives to do business with the bank(s).



Plate 22: Leather sandal produced by Victor Benedict of O'star Yowamca, Awka, Anambra State. A school's choice sandal which he supplied to the school as a major contract, 2016.

The federal government should identify these artisans, mobilise and organise them under Export Production Village (EPV) Schemes like their counterparts in Sri Lanka and Ghana. The Government should link them up with serious and established Exporters, Agents or Buyers. It should resource and facilitate them by providing central or common working sheds with facilities for raw material storage, work in progress, finished products storage and equipped with basic infrastructure (electricity or generator where necessary), benches, tools of trade, etc.

The ministry of labour and productivity should organize a raw material supply systems for them. It should Provide skills training/enhancement through technical assistance from business support organizations, provide market information, trade brochures and samples. It should consistently sensitize group on product standards to meet market requirements.

Artisans should assist in price negotiations with exporter (s) or market agents. The ministry of labour and productivity should collaborate her sister ministry of commerce and industry to organise annual District/Regional/National Art and Craft Exhibitions to unearth craftsmen, determine District/Regional product specialisation and identify exportable products. They are to also organise internal or external study tours for group leaders and master craftsmen. The Government should come up with a scheme that will enable potential artisans to become self-standing merchant producers.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria is the most populous black nation in the world. Her citizenry are endowed with so many talents. They are proficient, especially in the area of handicraft production. People from different parts of the country are known to be very good in one category of handicraft production or the other. Handicraft making is common among rural dwellers across the nation. It helps them to become self-reliant and financially independent. It is from this business most of them earn living apart from farming

activities. They make so many handicraft products which are good and suitable for both local and international consumption.

Handicraft production in Nigeria has witnessed some challenges since its inception. This has negatively affected the activities of craft men and women/artisans in their bid to work and earn living through this business. These challenges have also been a source of worry to the federal government of Nigeria because it is frustrating its effort to encourage and promote production of home made commodities, especially handicraft products as well as ensure regular source of employment and livelihood for many youths and graduates as only a few can secure formal employment. The government should therefore map out some modalities to remedy this situation. . It should give artisans an enabling environment and conducive atmospheres to enable them attain success in their work. The government should also encourage and support these artisans in all ramifications.

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