

DIVERSIFYING NIGERIA'S ECONOMY THROUGH VISUAL ARTS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

¹Aliyu Mohammed Bisalla, ²Maxwell E. Robert, and ³Josephine Dung Chumo

Department of Art and Industrial Design, School of Environmental Studies
Federal Polytechnic Nasarawa, Nasarawa State. Email: bisalla2003@yahoo.com

Abstract

The idea of economic diversification is now a national issue, no serious-minded economic policy formulators and administrators of modern times can afford to undermine visual art education, in-house economic structure (micro –economy), the arts and the needs for agricultural produce, art and crafts have sustained the Nigeria economy in the past before the advent of oil and gas exploration in Nigeria. Nigeria economy still depend largely on oil and gas sector, but the current administration in its effort to rebrand the economy is trying to shift base to other sectors of the economy. In conformity, series of results of researches have been published, economic submits have been conducted in order to call to attention public and private (business) sector in the economy, professional groups, individuals, academics, economists, researchers, journalists alike, the need for modification of the establishment of the other sectors to revive the whole system in conformity with the needed economic development. This paper is therefore intended to discuss with detail definition and clarification of few vital concepts. Analyze the importance of visual arts and its role in economic development. Conclusively, the paper is of the view that Nigeria has economic human resources, endowed artistic manpower; what the country needs is sustainable and reliable educational programs and the strengthening of the visual art education both the institutional and its practice.

Keywords: *Visual arts, education, economic diversification, sustainable development*

Introduction

The peculiar role that Visual Arts play in the development of Nigerian economy cannot be over emphasised, it is very glaring that the Art as an academic initiative and a professional practice, when designed carefully within the frame work of national development policies will showcase potential that will add value to the micro and macro economy of Nigeria.

Omuaru and Nyah (2014) observed that successive governments of the country have shown lack of intellectual capacity and political will to connect the arts and the economy. This has negatively impacted on the economy and the general aesthetic education in the schools. Every citizen of any country desires the economic resilience of his or her nation; vibrant economy that must attest to the well-being of the citizens. The authors further expressed those very popular economic development indices for an astute professor which might be an esoteric jargon to a villager who possibly lacks a meal on the table. Therefore, a simple explanation of developed economy to an average Nigerian is that there is a job

that provides a daily meal on a family table. This paper explores potential in the arts to aid national economic growth that will reflect on the citizenry.

In a similar submission Oyedemi, (2015) posits that Nigeria has great artistic potential in the visual arts which, when harnessed can contribute to developing our local economy like any other products and even much more after oil. Our perception on economic growth indices is narrow when it comes to art in the face of current economic challenges. For example, the visual arts in developed communities like the US, UK and the Asian nations have made considerable progress beyond what African countries are doing. Nigeria's investments in visual arts still depend largely on foreign powers. We may not appreciate the place of visual arts in economic development until we know our current state, our challenges and what is happening in the art market in other parts of the globe. If the views by the different writers are to base on the contributions of visual arts to an economy, this sector requires urgent attention in the

Nigerian setting to maximize its potentials. The importance of the visual arts for economic vitality as suggested by Aniakor, (1999: 147- 160) and reported by Joe, e'tal, (2010) that if visual arts is well packaged there would be a viable tool for nation building.

The Concept of Art

The Encyclopedia Americana International (1995), in Godwin, (2009) maintained that Art is a difficult concept to define for it has come to have a wider significance. The word “art” derives from “ars”, the Latin word for “skill” that is the exceptional talent manifest in any human endeavour as skill applied to art of imitation and design, painting and architecture. It however, still retains this original meaning for example, “the art of cooking”. Godwin, (2009) further opines that to others, art is a means of formulating our feelings and emotions and giving them tangible expression. It is something more than mere picture making, painting or sculpture and the creation of our environments. It is not only the ability to create an object in its finest form, but a universal language not spoken but in visual form.

One common point in these definitions made by the author is that “Art is a form of expression of feelings usually in visual form”. Art is also considered both as a process as well as a product. As a process, art is a means through which we give sensuous and concrete expression to our ideas and feelings about the world around us. As a product, art includes pictures, images, buildings, food, clothes, utensil, music, dance, drama, etc. Obizue, (2000) argued that there is no single and generally accepted definition of Art, any definition that take care of the activity (process) and the art work (product) could be accepted as a good definition of Art. It is also in that regard that Egonwa, (1988) maintained that art is the result of the manipulative skills applied by man usually a gifted person to express an idea in a chosen medium, which divorced from any uses to which it may be put, that has the sole purpose of growing a rewarding emotional experience.

Nevertheless, art means the visual arts as it is generally used today, those areas of artistic creativity that seek to communicate primarily through the eye. Consequently, art can be divided into three main categories – performing arts, Liberal arts and visual arts. Performing arts comprise music, dance and drama. While the liberal arts are

made up of history, philosophy, poetry and literature, whereas visual arts is subdivided into Fine Arts and Applied arts. Fine arts, which include drawing, painting and sculpture, while applied arts comprise graphic design, textiles design, metal design, architecture and ceramics, creative activities, are the most natural means of developing the creative talent of the individual and for observing and catering for one's emotional needs. Edesi, (2014) in similar submission upheld that the visual arts are very practically oriented courses beside the theory. They embrace the fine arts-painting, drawing, sculpture and architecture and the applied arts-ceramics, textiles, photography, as well as graphics, interior design, metal design and furniture which today stand between the duo in contemporary practice. There are other related courses like the performing arts, which are; music; film and video arts dance these courses are very practical and can be easily accessed by nearly everyone to a reasonable extent depending on your exposure.

The Role of Art Education in Economic Development

A country's visual environment is an important part of its survival and what we see influences on Man-made object is shaped by the visual skills of a 'designer' – whether it is an architect, a Landscape, Fashion, graphic or industrial designer, an illustrator, a fine artist, a craft maker or a Photographer, the visual arts embrace all these highly diverse disciplines and each need Individual study, their combined effect on jobs and income generation is much greater than generally familiar, with strong economic impact. Thus, majority of people always think that, the need to study the visual arts is to become a professional artist; this is far from being true, of course its knowledge and experiences will transform the citizens to a creative people in whatever field they feature, be it architecture, engineering, medicine and many more.

Blakeslee, (1994) as reported by Omuaru and Nyah, (2014) points out; *we know from long experience that no one can claim to be truly educated who lacks basic knowledge and skills in the arts*. However, Blakeslee expresses American experience, in Nigeria there are marked differences, it may not be far from the truth that majority of the opinion leaders and influential persons may not have been

adequately exposed to arts in the school, and show disdain for it in some peculiar manner, yet get involved in the use of its products or act in some manner that is artistic. They openly express phobia and superstitions, hypersensitive on issues concerning religion and the arts, and brand it 'juju', 'fetish' and class it 'incognito'. Majority of them who act in this manner could be psychotic; experience phobia from childhood when presented with toys and artworks, which ultimately leads to superstition. Pastors and religious leaders ignorantly mislead their followers; they virtually live behind the time and carry along the psyche of the past. Some people could possibly retort, *Am I not creative, even though I did not study Fine Arts in the school?* The answer is simple; you would have been more.

In the light of the above, Ajakeye,(1982) in Enamhe, (2004) lamented that Art in the past was not recognized as an important subject in schools, Parents continue to discourage their wards from studying art insinuating that art is for lazy people and for those who cannot do well in life. Bisalla and Adeyemi, (2016) still maintained that the significance of Visual art education in economic diversification cannot be over emphasized, therefore visual arts education is the ingredient of socio-economic and political stability of a nation and its economic survival. For quiet sometime now Nigerians have adopted education as an official component for achieving socio- economic stabilities and political survival, Visual art education is expected to create a true democratic Nigerian society and a spring board for economic diversification.

Oyedemi (2015) lamented those visual Arts especially paintings has been an article of great investment and is becoming more in the 21st century even with higher stake than ever. He further argued that there is a paradigm shift from looking at just one area of income for a country such as Nigeria to a multifaceted one. Therefore, it is of interest to identify the enormous economic potentials in the present direction of investment in the visual arts with emphasis on paintings. It is worth to note that some paintings of the great artist like Picasso were auction for 300million dollars today.

Omuaru and Nyah, (2014) sees Art as an academic enterprise and a professional practice, when designed diligently within the frame work of

national development policies will showcase potential that will add value to the micro and macro economy of Nigeria. Regrettably, successive governments of the country have shown lack of intellectual capacity and political will to connect the arts and the economy.

The Practicing Arts and Economic Development Product Design

This fact remains crystal clear that from the prehistoric times the artist is an inventor, a product designer and a producer of innovative ideas in theory and practice. In today's free market the creativity of the artist is effectively exploited by the industrialists. The products are fashioned with the intention to appeal to the public sense of beauty. Buser, (2006) reported that one of the early high renaissance artists, Leonardo Da Vinci in his “resume”, he emphasized his skill at inventing instruments of war such as fabricated bridges, siege machines, explosives, mortars, armored boats and mining techniques, primitive tanks, catapults, guns, and other firearms. Today, the artistic and intellectual capabilities of the artist are adopted for the manufacture of variety of products, such as cars, aircrafts, ships, as well as household objects.

Omuaru and Nyah, (2014) maintained that many industrial and manufacturing companies have design/creative departments, where creativity flows to impact on the company. The automobiles are seemingly devoid of popular aesthetic form, or artistry, its popularity is more of utility than aesthetics. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the artists' visual impression begets the engineers and technician's ingenuity. That notwithstanding, the aestheticians craft cannot be avoided when one views the interior.

Importance of Economic Diversification

It is clear therefore that the adverse consequences of over dependency on oil trade heightened the need and call to diversify Nigerian economy away from oil towards the direction of non-oil export trade. Proponents of this increased proportion of non-oil export argue that the non-oil trade has great potentials to propel Nigerian economy to the desired growth and development. In that regard Onwualu (2012) in Esu (2015) upholds that “the value chain approach to agriculture has the potentials to open up the economy and generate

various activities, which are capable of creating jobs and enhancing industrialization and thus makes the non-oil sub-sector to hold the champions for future Nigeria's sustainable economic growth". Thus the successive Nigerian governments have made efforts over the years to grow the non-oil export trade by establishing supportive policies, some of these policies recorded varying degrees of successes, for example, the policy of industrialization in the 1960s, trade liberalization policy (this took the form of Structural Adjustment Programme) of the mid 1980s and export promotion policy of 1990s, which was executed through intensified policy support to Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs) which were made to enhance productivity and consequently, export of local products.

Abdullahi, (2018) opines that "the way forward to economic diversification, sustainable growth and development that any successful diversification of the Nigerian economy would require complete fiscal and monetary policy reorientation" Which in so doing there should be a strategic shift by targeting massive investments that transform the lives of the people and qualities of the resources of our nation can be achieved. The author further states that Nigerians must imbibe a mindset that is patriotic, progressive and willing to make hard choices and sacrifices in life styles and consumption habits.

The foremost multi-billionaire businessman and investor, Aliko Dangote, correctly understood the imperatives of growth when he remarked while talking to a group of businessmen that "...what made Nigeria go into a recession was lack of growth. Unless growth is happening in different sectors of the economy, it would be difficult for the economy to sustain itself." The author identified further the types of growths that is expected in a successful economic growth and development; demographic (natural population increases and migration) and economic (per capita output). Only the latter accounts for improvements in living standards, if it outpaces the former, Growth therefore, requires massive investments in physical and human capital.

To catch up with the rich countries and attain higher standards of living and quality of life for our people, we must strive to develop our national resources and attain a high level of technological know-how, skills

and education. No nation has developed waiting for other people to come and invest in its country. Foreign investment in the economy is relatively small at just over \$5billion for all of 2016. This cannot by itself stimulate the kind of growth required to transform a large economy like Nigeria's. Hence, we cannot rely on foreign investments to revitalize growth. To achieve take-off into real sustainable growth we must mobilize massive local financing and create transparent institutions that encourage large-scale investments in agriculture, manufacture, education, healthcare and training of our population. We must establish a dependable legal and security architecture and framework, (including good and transparent corporate governance) that various economic actors can rely and count upon. The author further suggested that there is a need to identify our areas of strength and growth poles that can drive the development process and invest massively and consciously in them at the same time diversify in such a way that we end our total reliance on a single exhaustible commodity-oil.

Conclusion

For a country to attain growth and development, its economy has to be diversified. Therefore, visual art education is a valued benefit in building a new socio-economic demand. The developing nations must give serious thought to visual art education. This high-quality is essential since it will add immeasurably to the structure that will lead to the general socio-economic recovery and development. Therefore prominence should be placed on visual art activities from pre-primary through secondary level education as it will equip the youths with the occupational skills to guarantee a meaningful living regardless of the preferred profession that they have chosen to undertake as diversification does not occur in a vacuum, and mono-economy needs to give way to the productive development of various sectors of the economy especially in the area of visual arts, for example developed economy like Germany, Japan, China and Switzerland have placed top priority in skill acquisition to enhance sustainable growth and development.

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