

## CHAPTER TEN

### **Local Crafts and Indigenous Technology**

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#### **Introduction**

**L**ocal craft is the traditional manual skill of a community that is synonymous with indigenous technology. They are artworks that could be done with hands or manual skills. Ngumah, Ayoola, Dalhatu, and Samkay (2013), define crafts as manually produced objects (articles) meant to serve a particular purpose or human need. Local craft is also known as handcraft. This is because the process of making the article involves the use of skilled hands. From time immemorial, craftwork has been a source of revenue for many Nigerians, and this has encouraged archaeologists to explore more about the ancient arts and crafts in Nigeria. Traditional arts are practised in towns and villages while most of the works of art designed by craftspeople from across the country are sold in major urban markets. Crafts based on a long-standing tradition of a particular group of people are called local crafts. In many parts of the world, indigenes still practice their local crafts. Some examples are the Japanese tatami mats, banners Sarees from Varanasi, the magic carpets of Kashmir (India), appliques from Orissa, shawls of Kullu, coconut art from

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south India, shells of Goa, pottery wares from Lalejin, Iran and several others.

In Africa, there are also crafts for instance carved wooden Ashanti stools, Moroccan carved wooden soup spoons, Kenyan carved spoons, Zimbabwe grass hats, Ugandan grass baskets, Fon applique banners, Moroccan woven Zaiane cushions, Fulani grass hats and incised calabashes, Kente woven cloth, Kuba raffia cloth weaving, Tutsi basket weaving, Massai beadwork, Zulu beer pots and so many others.



Plate 1: the magic carpets of Kashmir(India). Source: [excitingindia.in/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/tajagrocarnet.jpg](http://excitingindia.in/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/tajagrocarnet.jpg)

In Nigeria, several tribes produce and still practice their local craft till date. They are produced and practised in a local setting such as villages and countryside with local

materials found within the environment. Due to technological advances, some imported materials they feel could go a long way to boost their skills. They require expertise working with hand tools, meaning that the "hand" is the most important aspect of the crafting process. This is because it controls and manipulates both the materials and the basic tools. The person who produces local craft is known as a craft man. The major local crafts in Nigeria will be discussed forthwith;

### **Pottery**

This is one of the most ancient crafts still being practised in Nigeria. The earliest example of pottery in Nigeria was found in Afikpo, Ebonyi state Nigeria. It was dated back to 300 B.C. However a British archaeologist Professor Thurstan – Shaw was known to have excavated some material remains of pottery at Iwo – Eleru in Yoruba land, which was older. As a craft, pottery making is solely a woman's occupation among the Yoruba people and is usually passed from mother to daughter through apprenticeship. They carry out their everyday activity at a specific pottery site known as 'eebu'. According to to explore, an internet blog (2021), one of the major places in Nigeria popularly known for her artistry in pottery is Ilorin, Kwara State. It is an important centre of pottery, producing both red (pupa) and black (dudu) pottery wares. Pottery works are produced in different pottery centres in the

present Ilorin town, Okelele, Dada and Adeta pottery centres are well known for well-finished products.

The raw materials used in producing pottery are clay and water. They are abundant in Nigeria and they are affordable. This enables the potters to produce low-priced domestic vessels for use, both in rural and urban communities. Pottery is a source of utilitarian and aesthetic products.

Explore (2021) observed that decoration on pottery distinguishes one ethnic group from another or one area to another or one potter to the other, to display the culture of the area or tribe. Therefore, the patterns of decoration of pottery at Afikpo in Ebonyi state are different from the patterns of pottery at Ilorin in Kwara State or Gwari in Niger State.

Explore(2021) further mentions that Ladi Kwali the famous female Nigerian potter was born in the village of Kwali in the Gwari region of Northern Nigeria, where pottery was an indigenous occupation among women. As a child, she was taught by her aunt to use the traditional method of coiling. Large pots for use as water jars, cooking pots, bowls, and flasks from coils of clay, beaten from the inside with a flat wooden paddle were some works made by her. Her pots were distinguished for their beauty and decoration, and she was recognized regionally as a gifted and outstanding potter. She was still using the traditional

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open firing method with a herbal shiny surface and her method modified the face of modern pottery around the world.



Plate 2: Ladi Kwali. Source:

<https://www.google.com/search?q=pottery+in+nigeria&cli..>

Most of her works are displayed in well-known places like the National Museum Lagos, the Barbier-Muller Museum Geneva, Switzerland, the National Museum of Natural History, the Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, and the Albert Museum, London.

In recognition of her achievements and hard work, her picture was used to embellish the Nigerian 20 Naira note; at the moment she is the only woman to have such an honour.

## **Wood/ ivory Carving**

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Carving involves cutting or chipping away a shape from a mass of stone, wood, or other hard material. Lawrence (2017) believes that Wood carving has probably been around about as long as man has been on the earth. So the history of wood carving begins at the beginning. Man has always used and manipulated wood. **Adam was probably the first wood carver.** He must have used wood as one of his first tools, maybe for a club or a walking stick. He could have even tied a rock to a stick of wood and used it for a hammer. When he found a way to make an instrument sharp enough to hunt with, an arrowhead or spearhead may have been first but if so the knife couldn't have been far behind. Wood carving traditions grew up in the thickly forested areas of southern Nigeria. for instance, the Yoruba of South-Eastern Nigeria is still practising traditional wood carving to date although there are signs of decline in the practice (Meyerowitz 1943). Both hard and soft kinds of wood can be used for carving. Caving is the art of producing images and other related forms through a subtractive method (Ngumah, Et Al 2013). The two varieties of carving mostly found in Nigeria are utilitarian and decorative products.

Utilitarian Products are essential household demands such as mortars, pestles, stools, spoons, handles for hoes and other farming implements.

Decorative and Figurative Products are for social needs such as masks, statues, used in the worship of various

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duties, door post and doors often decorated to make an impressive entrance to civic buildings and churches, walking sticks, staff of offices etc. The major material for carving is wood other materials are marble, stone, wax, etc. carving tools are knife, saw, mallet, harmer, file etc. Wood carving is an important and long-established traditional artefact industry. It has the potential to improve the livelihoods of millions of households. Wood and ivory carving requires a great deal of skill, creativity and artistry. A picture of a Benin ivory mask is placed below:



Plate 3: Benin Ivory Mask. source:  
<https://www.pinterest.com/charlottecoger/benin-art/>

## **Weaving**

Weaving is a method of textile production in which two distinct sets of yarns or threads are interlaced at right angles to form a fabric or cloth. Some clues show that weaving was already known during the Prehistoric Era, as early as 27,000 years ago. An indistinct textile impression has been found at the Dolní Věstonice site (Hitchcock 2022). According to the find, the weavers of the Upper Paleolithic were manufacturing a variety of cordage types, producing plaited basketry and sophisticated twined and plain woven cloth. It had been thought that the first farmers developed weaving 5,000 to 10,000 years ago. The artefacts include imprints in clay and burned remnants of cloth (BBC News). The types of weaving determine the shapes and materials to be used. The art of weaving can be traced to nature where man draws the inspiration to weave with available material. Birds and insects weave. The act of weaving is an interesting exercise and society cannot do without it as an important craft. There are different types of weaving. They are basket weaving, mat weaving, cane waving, rug weaving, and cloth weaving which is the most vital aspect of weaving. Materials for waving are; paper strips, fibres obtained from local plants, palm front, cane, grasses, ropes from the forest, leather strips from animals, and other flexible materials. Weaving is a form of textile design found in almost all parts of Nigeria. In Nigeria, cloth weaving is universally practised in most urban areas and cities like Abeokuta, Ilorin, Iseyin, Akwete, Okene, Benin, Sokoto, Borno, Kano, Bida and Iseyin area among others.



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Raffia and cotton are most widely used in cloth weaving in Nigeria. Weaving generally is done in the same type of process. That is, the warp and weft stripes are used. The warp is the length-wise flexible material while the weft refers to the crosswise flexible materials. In weaving the warp is the vertical strip while the weft is the horizontal strip. The men's horizontal loom and the women's vertical looms are commonly used in Nigeria to weave.



Plate 4: An Akwete weaver using the women's vertical loom. Source: Chudi-Duru, C.C. (2017).

## **Dyeing**

Dyeing is a popular craft in the early times, people used colouring substances obtained from plants and

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minerals to beautify their bodies and clothes to be more attractive. Dyeing is the process of adding colour (dyes) to a fabric. The most famous of all the dyes produced in Nigeria is the dark-blue dye known as “indigo” which is made from the leaves of a plant belonging to the Indigofera family. Materials used in dyeing are cloth, (fabric), colourant (dyestuff) strings or ropes, raffia, caustic soda, and Hydrosulphate tools used in dyeing are a store, boiler or heater, stirring stick, bucket, etc. Hand-dyed fabrics have a depth and richness of colour that commercial fabrics often lack. Samples of dyed fabrics are placed on the plate below.



Plate 5: Some samples of dyed fabrics.

Source: Chika Chudi-Duru (2018)

Tie-dye fabrics are very common in Nigeria. Especially among the Yoruba, they produce Adire. Adire (Yoruba: tie and dye) textile is the indigo-dyed cloth made in southwestern Nigeria by Yoruba women, using a variety of resist-dyeing techniques. *Adire*

cloths are cotton cloths resist-dyed with indigo in one of two ways: *adire oniko* (resist dyeing with raffia ties) or *adire alabare* (resist dyeing using stitches). A simple method of tie-dyeing is the formation of patterns of large and small circles in various combinations making use of pebbles, bottle corks, stones and other items, these produce appropriate designs when utilized. According to Gunner (2016), there are an infinite number of ways one can tie, bind, stitch, twist, fold or compress cloth for tie-dye. Each way results in very different patterns. Each method gives a particular result, but each method is also used to work in harmony with the type of cloth used. Therefore, the techniques used in tie-dye depend not only on the desired pattern but the characteristics of the cloth being dyed. Cotton is preferred for practical in the studio because of its characteristics which are good absorbency, colour retention, prints well, machine and hand washable, good strength, drapes, dry cleanable and soft to the touch.

## **Embroidery**

Embroidery is the use of needles and thread to apply a design on the surface of the fabric. It is used to decorate and enrich a fabric in the use of a skilful manner. It is an ancient craft which comprises a lot of history and embroiderers all over the world use the same stitches. She further mentions that design patterns vary from place to place but the techniques of stitching remain the same. The art of embroidery dates to ancient Egypt and China. History

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has it that this needle art developed from the task of mending clothes. As people used their needles on holes and torn seams they found the decorative possibilities of sewing (Chudi-Duru 2019). In Nigeria, some examples are the decorations found on the back and front of Hausa men's robes and caps, Fulani robes and some others. The Hausa of Northern Nigeria have long been well known for their production of voluminous robes known as *babban riga* (Big clothing). They were earlier produced by men but recently some women have taken it up but sold their embroidered wear through the males (Renne, 2002). The Yoruba name for a type of flowing wide-sleeved robe, usually decorated with embroidery is *Agbada*, which is worn in most parts of Nigeria by the higher class, such as kings and chiefs, and for various ceremonies. Some of the old ones are being passed down from father to son as an heirloom and they are much cherished. In the past, these prestigious robes were traded for money. And they are still worn to date but the machine embroidery has almost taken over.



Plate 6:Agbada. Source:

<http://adireafriicantextiles.blogspot.com/2011/02/agbada-embroidered-robe-traditions-in.html>

## **Applique**

Applique is the art of cutting shapes from pieces of cloth and sewing them onto a larger piece of fabric to make designs and patterns. Appliqué has some characteristics; to be bold and graphic. It is less intricate than embroidery because of the cut-and-sew technique. The scale is bigger, thicker, and wider.



Plate 7: Ijele Masquerade. Source:  
<https://www.wikiwand.com/ig/Mmanw...>

Oftentimes, the customer that chooses an appliqué style has a vibrant, decorative aesthetic. It usually looks embossed and fanciful. Appliqué employs several stitches to attach separate fabric pieces onto a single base fabric. The aesthetic of appliqué is often developed further by using a variety of colours to contrast. A typical example of applique is the Igbo maiden masquerade popularly known as “Agbogho Mmonwu”. Another is the Ijele masquerade. According to Cole (1983), *Ijele* is a huge, spectacular mask carried on its dancer's head and comprised of cloth over a

wood or vine armature; miniature stuffed cloth images of humans, animals, and masqueraders: appliqué cloth panels; schematic plants and flowers; all topped with the image of a horseman leader. Some other masquerade costume designers in Igbo land still make use of applique to design and decorate their masquerade wears for some specific festivals.

### **Bead Work**

Beadwork is the use of beads of varying sizes, shapes, and colours to produce necklaces, wall hangings, pictures, bracelets, armlets, and other articles meant for human use. Beads are quite significant in indigenous Nigerian communities. They are playing an integral role in strengthening and repairing the cultural ties and spiritual beliefs of Indigenous artists. Beadwork has been and will continue to be significant in representing Indigenous resiliency as well as highlighting the individual cultural value of ethnic peoples. Beads are used as a sign of social status among the chiefs and kings. For many decades, beads have been used in Nigeria by people of various ethnic groups. In the olden days, little girls wore nothing but waist beads known as "Jigida" until their age of puberty. Beads are used in various traditional costumes such as crowns, veils etc. The main materials include beads and thread. Some people trade on stringed beads as a means of livelihood. Beads are produced from shells, plastic, wood, and clay. Beadworks can be found everywhere in Nigeria especially in Bida,

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among the Nupe people. Most women in Nigeria like wearing beads to accentuate their beauty and uniqueness, especially on special occasions like weddings. Men also wear expensive beads on their wedding day.



Plate 8: traditional brides adorned with beads. Source:  
<https://www.bellanaijaweddings.com/white-coral-beads-look-2019/>

## Calabash Decoration





Plate 9: Modern calabash decoration.

Source: [vanguardnewsngr.com](http://vanguardnewsngr.com)

The name, calabash is a derivative of the French word, ‘Calebasse’. It is defined as a tropical American tree (*Crescentia cujete*) of the bignonia family or its large gourd-like fruits. Calabash and gourd are often used interchangeably. The calabash is simply the dried hollow shell of a gourd used for household utensils (Oziogu, 2012). However, calabash decoration is the application of beautiful patterns on calabashes through the method of carving, scraping, scorching, engraving, and decorating with extraneous materials. Decoration of the surface of a calabash is attained using design elements Ngumah, Et Al (2013). The major medium for calabash decoration is the gourd, which belongs to the family of pumpkins or cucumbers. The gourds grow in different shapes and sizes.

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The major materials for designing the calabash are chalk and dye and its tools are a knife, cutter, scrapers, saw and engraving and carving tools of various sizes and shapes. The Ogun, Oyo, Ijebu and Fulanis are known for calabash decoration.

**Brass Ornamentation**



Plate 10: Bida brass works. Source: <http://my-imani.blogspot.com/2016/08/a-couple-of-months-ago-i-went-on-road.html>

This is also one of the major crafts in Nigeria, though found in Bida, Ogbomoso, Kano, and Maiduguri Ngumah, Et Al (2013). According to him, some brass work is cast, that is, reduced to the molten metal before being formed into shapes. The properties and design of the solidified

elements are then adjusted through a series of controlled operations to produce an end 'Brass Stock' product. Brass – an alloy of copper and zinc – is one of the most widely used alloys. Known for its decorative attributes and bright gold appearance, brass also exhibits durability, corrosion resistance, and high electrical conductivity. Its tools and equipment are the same as metalwork tools. It is a craft that dates back centuries.

### **Bronze Casting**

Bronze casting is the reproduction of some articles/images in brome metal. The archaeology of Igbo-Ukwu revealed bronze artefacts dated to the 9th century A.D. which were initially discovered by Isiah Anozie in 1939 while digging a well in his compound in Igbo-Ukwu, an Igbo town in Anambra State, Nigeria. According to Alice (2001), as a result of these finds, three archaeological sites were excavated in 1959 and 1964 by Charles Thurstan Shaw which revealed more than 700 high-quality artefacts of copper, bronze and iron, as well as about 165000 glass, carnelian and stone beads, pottery, textiles and ivory.



Plate 11: Bronze ceremonial vessel in form of a snail shell; 9th century. Source: Nigerian National Museum.

She further mentioned that they are the oldest bronze artefacts known in West Africa and were manufactured centuries before the emergence of other known bronze-producing centres such as those of Ife and Benin. The bronzes include numerous ritual vessels, pendants, crowns, breastplates, staff ornaments, swords, and fly-whisk handles (Alice, 2001). As a craft, bronze casting is also associated with the people of Benin and Ife. The major material for bronze casting is bronze which is an alloy of copper and tin, wax, brushes etc. Its technique is called *cire perdue*, which is the lost wax method. The tools and equipment include a hammer, mallet, container, and a furnace for heating the bronze into liquid.

## Leather Work



Plate 12: leather puffs. Source:

<https://www.google.com/search?q=leather+works+in+nigeria&client.....>

The decoration of hides and skin by appliqué technique and the shaving and printing of designs and patterns on them is a craft for which the Northern States of Nigeria are well known. They are: Naraguta in Jos, Sokoto, Kano, Katsina, Adamawa, Oyo and Maiduguri areas are well-known centres for leather craft. Nigeria is one of the highest producers of leather and finished leather products in Africa. The craft of leatherwork is prominent in parts of Nigeria where decorative art is popular and abundant. The city of Kano in Northern Nigeria is the largest commercial hub for the leather industry. The tannery factories in Kano are always busy with activities. Good examples of leather

works are leather shoes, bags, slippers, purses, horses, furniture, leather sheets for making drums for music and many others.

## **Metal Work**

The knowledge and practice of metalwork in Nigeria date back more than 1000 years. The oldest smelting furnace in Nigeria was found in Taruga, Niger State. Obinelo (2010) rightly admits that blacksmithing in Nigeria is an age-long occupation as it is visibly practised across all tribes in Nigeria. It is mostly practised by men and the skills are transferred from generation to generation. He further mentioned that these blacksmiths have been the source of technology towards making farm implements, bush traps, hunting guns, and arrows. They have also been the source of smelting of precious stones like brass, bronze, and gold. All these improved the sectors in Nigeria. Bicycle repairers, and everyone benefits from the blacksmithing industry.

Blacksmithing has evolved over the years and has been adjusting towards the needs of the Nigerian public. In the earliest times, it provided farming implements and bows and arrows for protection. In the industrial era, it served as means of supplementing the automotive industries across Nigeria, during the Nigeria Biafra war it was a source of weaponry to the Biafran warfare and now in Nigeria, it has tremendously evolved into many sections. Blacksmiths now serve as welders, and some of them provide spare parts for bicycles, motorcars and even tricycles because these men

and women have ingeniously been adapting to the new trends and are cohesively contributing to the metallurgical needs of Nigeria (Obinelo 2010). The blacksmiths at Awka, Anambra State were the most skilful and famous in the country. However, the practice of blacksmithing in Makera Assad makes the area to be recognized as the home of blacksmithing. The area was known for its smithing since the establishment of Sokoto town.

### **Mat-Making and Basketry**

Mat-making is an age-long craft. The various ethnic groups in Nigeria engage in the production of the mat in one form or another, using materials available to them in their localities. Some of these materials are raffia, bamboo, palm fronds, grass and straw. The mat has various uses in Nigeria: it serves as material for seating, praying and sleeping. Though synthetic fibre mats are dominating the market, making the natural ones appear old-fashioned, yet, some Nigerians are making money from weaving different sizes and colours of this traditional sleeping material (Awa, 2016).



Plate 13: Mat weaver. Photo credit: Ayodele Adeniran. Source: <https://guardian.ng/business-services/mat-weaving-engaging-craft-boosting-local-economy/>

The uses of Mat cannot be over-emphasized. Ogotun community in the Ekiti South West Local Government Area of Ekiti State is renowned for weaving mats. The weaving process involves a cotton warp with individual strands of grass inserted by hand. This is the traditional style of weaving the mat, done on a simple frame. A flat piece of wood is used to pack it in place. The grass is dampened to make it supple before inserting it in the weft. Mat is used for covering floors, seating, fencing etc.

## **Basketry**



Basketry is one of the oldest crafts known today, however, its origin is unknown and cannot be tracked. The oldest known basket dates as far back as 10,000 and 12,000 years old. In the Middle East, other baskets were later discovered 7000 years ago (Admin 2021).

Basketry (also known as basket weaving or basket making) is the process of weaving elastic materials like cane, palm frond, rubber, and metal wires among others into a basket (a container made of interwoven strips of cane or wire for holding or carrying things). It can be made from any material that is flexible or weak provided the material could be bent easily. A basket could be round, oval and horizontal. In some cases, the weaver will fill in the sides of the basket while some parts of the basket, become the base, the sidewalls and the rim respectively. A basket may also have a lid or handle depending on its usage (Admin 2021).

They come in various sizes and achieve several functions. Baskets are useful objects, therefore in one's everyday life, one finds oneself making use of these different types of baskets for one's daily needs. It is one of the world crafts that have remained aesthetically and functionally acceptable in the modern world despite technologically manufactured products. Grass, bamboo, reeds, vines, cane and honeysuckle plants are the best materials for weaving baskets. There are three main weaving techniques in basket weaving, namely: coiling, plaiting and twining

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The art of basket weaving in Sokoto is passed from one generation to the next. People in Shuni, Dange-Shuni local government area of Sokoto are renowned for basket making. The Igbo of south Eastern Nigeria uses mostly palm stems to weave their baskets while those from Ikot-Ekpene wove mostly with canes.

### **Questions**

1. Define the term local craft
2. State five (5) types of local crafts.
3. List five (5) vital materials used in wood carving.
4. List five (5) places where local craft can be found.

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