

Studio Art Practice as Panacea to post Covid-19 Socioeconomic Crisis in Nigeria

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Abstract

The COVID-19 outbreak is a global public health crisis that has inspired calls for a coordinated global response to stop the pandemic, mitigate its devastating effects, and thus lay the foundation for long-term recovery. The world still stands in capitulation to the challenge of COVID-19, requiring all hands to be on deck to ameliorate its devastating impact on humanity. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines studio art practice as a way of mitigating the socio-economic crisis brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Data for the study were generated from both primary and secondary sources. Through a qualitative research analysis, the paper discussed the concept of the art studio, textile studio methods, and products as well as its contributions to economic development. It was discovered that textile art contributes indisputably towards creating new jobs and income generation for both government and individuals. It concludes by noting that sound studio practice is a sure way to achieving economic self-reliance after the COVID-19 pandemic. Local textile production requires a boost from the government to discourage importation from the West which is presently suffering from lockdown as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, Socio-economic Crises, Art Studio, Economic Development

Introduction

Many countries across the global community, are facing unprecedented challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nigeria and her people are no exception. It is now, more than ever, that leadership that can unite the spirit of Nigerians and rouses collective action is needed. Nigeria is tested today, as it has been in the past and, it has the ability and opportunity to mobilize its people to turn the tide against the pandemic. But time is of the essence and immediate decisive action is imperative.

The main focus of this paper is that, although the coronavirus outbreak which started in the Wuhan province of China had spilled over its grip and consequent problems in Nigeria, textile studio art can take the edge off the effect. In agreement with this fact, Sunmonu (2008:1) notes that;

“No nation can do without a virile textile industry.” It is this broad understanding of textile studio art practices as veritable means to cushion the aftereffect of COVID-19 in Nigeria that has engaged our primary attention in this paper. However, this paper also provides insight into the activities of textile studios as well as their products and their contributions to economic development in Nigeria”.

Ogunduyile (2003:148) declares that “the study of textiles is the study of mankind”. Bruce Onobrakpeya (2009: XXII) states that “textile design and their use as

dress fashion/cloth occupy a high place and is foremost in the expression of a people's identity". On his part, Ajayi (2002:270) says that "in most countries of the world, clothing has been adjudged an essential aspect of life". Human beings therefore cannot do without involving textiles in their daily existence. Based on the above, it is evident that textiles occupy a high place in the people's worldview as they are exclusive characteristics of humans and featured prominently in all human societies.

COVID-19 and its Socio-Economic Crises in Nigeria

It is pertinent to throw some light on covid-19 to understand how it has affected the economy of Nigeria, nay the world at large. Coronaviruses are zoonotic, meaning they are normally transmitted between animals and people. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is caused by a new strain of coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) that has not been previously identified in humans which symptoms include acute respiratory disorder. The first confirmed case in Nigeria was announced on 27th February 2020, when an Italian citizen in Lagos tested positive for the virus. On the 9th of March, 2020 a second case of the virus was reported in Ewekoro, Ogun State, being a Nigerian citizen who had contact with the Italian citizen.

Economic crises or recessions are often caused by market factors (Hart and Tindall, 2009; Jones, 2016), market failure (Stiglitz, 2008; Chauffour and Farole, 2009; Petrakos, 2014), external trade and price shocks (Ros, 1987; Mendis, 2002; Gomulka and Lane, 1997; Francois and Woertz, 2009). Recessions are not new in Nigeria, but the one being inflicted upon the nation and the world at large by the instrumentality of the COVID-19 pandemic is an exception. During the 2016 recession, the monetary authority in Nigeria defended the local currency from forced devaluation against the dollar and adopted a managed float foreign exchange system, which worked well from 2016 to 2019. In the aftermath of the 2016 recession in Nigeria, it was almost widely believed that an unexpected and sustained decline in oil price was the most important cause of recessions in Nigeria. But in 2020, nobody thought that a public health crisis could trigger an economic crisis in the country. What made the 2020 economic crisis different from other economic crises or recessions in Nigeria was that most economic agents, who should have helped to revive the economy were unable to engage in economic activities due to fear of contracting the COVID-19 disease, while other economic agents did not engage in economic activities when the government imposed and enforced its social distancing policy and movement lockdown in Abuja, Lagos and Ogun states on the 30th March of 2020.

According to Revenue contribution from EITI Nigeria country report (2019), the decline in oil prices by 55 percent between the end of 2019 to March 2020, is one of the most serious economic shocks that Nigeria has faced in its memory, especially as the oil sector contributes 65 percent and 90 percent to government and total export revenues, respectively.

Covid-19 Spillover to the Nigerian economy

There are five main ways through which the Covid-19 pandemic spilled over into Nigeria. One, the Covid-19 pandemic affected borrowers' capacity to service loans, which gave rise to NPLs that depressed banks' earnings and eventually impaired bank soundness and stability. Subsequently, banks were reluctant to lend as more and more

borrowers struggled to repay the loans granted to them before the Covid-19 outbreak. Two, there were oil demand shocks which were reflected in the sharp decline in oil price. The most visible and immediate spillover was the drop in the price of crude oil, which dropped from nearly US\$60 per barrel to as low as US\$30 per barrel in March. During the pandemic, people were no longer travelling and this led to a sustained fall in the demand for aviation fuel and automobile fuel which affected Nigeria's net oil revenue and eventually affected Nigeria's foreign reserve. Three, there were supply shocks in the global supply chain as many importers shut down their factories and closed their borders particularly China. Nigeria was severely affected because Nigeria is an import-dependent country and as a result, Nigeria witnessed a shortage of crucial supplies like pharmaceutical supplies, spare parts, and finished goods from China, including textile materials. Four, the national budget was also affected. The budget was initially planned with an oil price of US\$57 per barrel. The fall in the oil price to US\$30 per barrel meant that the budget became obsolete and a new budget had to be formed that was reprised with the low oil price.

Planning for Post-COVID-19

The question in the minds of national and global leaders during the evolving pandemic is how affected communities will bounce back and in a sustainable manner recover from the crisis. The economic distress associated with the pandemic, health implications to those affected especially most vulnerable in the community, strain on service delivery infrastructure, and the societal cost in terms of well-being could be enormous.

Any post-COVID-19 recovery strategy will need to re-establish the conditions for a quick return to a path of economic growth, improved social contract, and overall human development that can foster more inclusive societies in the future. The survivors and others directly affected by the disease must be assisted to regain their dignity and the affected communities supported to recover their livelihoods. This will require investment in innovative approaches for restoration of health systems; co-creation of culturally sensitive protection and community, peace and cohesion building

Textile Studio Art Practices

This is a space where artists get to reflect, display, research, store, and make art. Within the four walls of this studio, artists are allowed the space to liberate practices of imagination and testing; of attention and alteration (O'Doherty 2007; Wainright 2010, ix). Textile studio methods are grouped under the following sections:

- 1. Weaving studio:** Textile fabrics are commonly woven by the interlacement of two sets of yarns called warp and weft that lie at right angles to each other. In this studio, yarns are converted into fabrics using different types of looms and techniques. Other methods applied in this studio are; macramé, tapestry, knitting, applique, and embroidery. Products of this studio are shown in plate 1 to plate 6.



Plate 1
Hand woven *akwa-ocha*



Plate 2
Hats made from Inkle Loom woven fabric



Plate 3
Embroidery pictorial representation



Plate 4
Embroidery



Plate 5
Rug-making (Foot-mat)



Plate 6
Applique

2. **Resist studio:** in this studio, water repellent materials are used to block some parts of a fabric to create a design. Tie-dye, batik, and starch resists are the major products of this studio as shown in plate 7 to plate 9.



Plate 7
Tie dye polo



Plate 8
Children's wear



Plate 9
Batik

3. Printing studio: in this studio, designs are transferred on fabric using different printing techniques like screen printing technique, hand blocking technique, leaf printing, stencil printing, and spraying technique. The samples of the products are shown in plates 10 to plate 12.



Plate 10
Screen print



Plate 11
Roller print



Plate 12
Block print

Contributions of textile art to economic development in Nigeria

The economic potentials of textile studio products as exhibited in various cultural festivals abound in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. It is a fact that every society has its economic value. To this end, the diverse colourful, and rich cultural festivals in Nigeria that exhibit her rich fount of textiles can be considered as a veritable source of foreign exchange earner. In Nigeria, many festivals attract a panoramic display/array of royal costumes and garments in their rich variety which attracts both local and foreign interest. These festivals have gone a long way to enhance the socio-cultural image of Nigeria both locally and internationally. However, tourists that are attracted by these cultural festivals in other to witness these display of prosperous dress culture or fashion arrives in the country, exchanges their country's currency for the local currency in other to take care of all his dealing, one can say that all his transactions while in the country from the day he arrives and changes his country's currency and starts spending them mean additional income in the economy.

Staging modern fashion shows regularly will showcase the country's ingenuity in textile design at both local and international platforms and arenas and also serve as unique avenues if properly explored that can be a panacea to enrich and sustain the economy. The showcasing of these artistic fashion resources and heritage no doubt will improve the creativity of the local designers in the sense that they will be exposed to other design possibilities for improvement. These shows will attract tourists of which some of them may be designers. There is no doubt that fashion shows which exhibit works of Nigerian textile designers enjoy international recognition and patronage. The uses of locally woven or produced fabrics which have indigenouse touch and are artistically creative in tailoring modern wear have been the penchant or favourite of many foreigners and even Nigerians. The foreigners in particular not only purchase some of these wears but catalogues and even pay the indigenouse designers in other to learn their production techniques and styles.

This development will not only provide an awakening to the local designer but honour, prestige and enhance the image of Nigeria. More so, it will bring foreign

earnings from the sales as aforementioned as well as business contacts that will bring about stability and expansion. There is no gainsaying that the financial gains for staging fashion shows is very viable. If the government can fully harness its potentials for economic growth by continuously provide the necessary machinery and enabling environment required organizing a fashion show of international standard of which will create more awareness for values inherent in textile design and fashion as the number of people who will appreciate these commodities will increase.

Apart from regular shows, an exhibition of textile commodities periodically both at local and international venues is a good way to create more awareness and advertise the Nigerian textile sector as this will attract income to the designers, bring progress to the society by enriching the economy from income which such exhibition will attract. More so, exhibition forum not only provides the opportunity for creating awareness and appreciation for the exhibits as well as recognition to the designers, other benefits include an exchange of ideas for growth and continuous trade and business. The significance of textile and fashion exhibitions in national economic growth will manifest positive results if encouraged. The government, therefore, needs to play its part by exploring the economic gains of sponsoring exhibitions of textile design and fashion commodities, also supporting the designers in several ways such as providing adequate space, massive finance, and other logistics.

The textile sector has the potentials to stimulate entrepreneurship that will be purpose-oriented and bring economic benefits. Textile design business no doubt is a profession with good prospects as it provides a diverse way for one to generate economy. "Fashion trend changes as new styles are introduced periodically which means the commodity will be in constant demand. Textile design production in most cases require little income to start and the business enlarges in a short while because the dress is a living culture of everyday life and activity" (Aniakor, 1999, p. 152) hence the high demand for it as earlier mentioned. As this outfit grows, it no doubt accommodates more people and generates more income which will bring about high cash flow to take care of their economic situation and help in checking the lopsided economic trend usually witnessed in Nigeria. More so, textile design production or business offers a more stable prospect for economic growth since the sector does not witness economic fluctuations such as found in other sectors such as oil, banking, and exportation of agro-based products. Since Nigeria operates an economic system based on the exportation of primary products, which have created a gap by contributing immensely to the unhealthy trade imbalance, more people particularly the vast majority of youths graduating out of school instead of looking for white-collar jobs could be encouraged to take up textile studio design and fashion business in other to check this trend. It is a fact that economically textile design and fashion business is not a single market, but a whole family of markets with different prices, can be located anywhere and attracts several different buyers and clients.

Textile design can also be used in the stimulation of the local economy through job creation. Nigeria due to its mono-economy which depends largely on oil export as earlier mentioned has brought about a battered economy, unemployment, and underemployment because the oil sector cannot absorb the teeming unemployed population. One of the most reasonable ways to check unemployment and economic expansion can be massive investment in both private and government-driven textile

activities that can accommodate a large number of persons. With adequate government support, textile studio sector can be a veritable source that can trigger economic development through the employment of talented and skilled personnel, such as tailors, textile technologists, and artists. With these developments in place, more people will acquire the product, more income will be generated and circulated within the localities, and new businesses and markets can spring up.

There is no gainsaying that textile studio art practices create a sustainable business link for the growth of the economy. Since textile studio artists depend largely on local sources for raw material other to sustain their business, they have to engage the services or get in contact with the local farmer who cultivates and provides the primary raw material required in their production process.

Among the ethnic groups in Nigeria, locally made fabrics are produced by several organized cottages and on the verandas of some entrepreneurs. Locally produced fabrics are still in high demand and valued commodity. Stella Akinrujono (2002:p. 266) is of the view that locally made fabrics still have high prestige over the industrial ones and that they are highly valued compared with industrial ones. Some of the available valuable locally made fabrics include *akwete* cloth provided by pockets of cottages in Ndoni area of Igbo land and *akwa-ocha* handwoven cloth by the Aniocha people also in Igbo land. Among the Yoruba are the popular *aso-oke* as well as *sanya*, *alarin* and *etu*. Among the Tiv, traditional weavers produce *tugudu*, *anger*, *ashisha* and *gherave*. The cottages in Epira produce varieties of local fabrics known as *Okene* cloths done in vertical looms. These aforementioned weaving traditions can go a long way to generate high income for the local weavers, as well as enhance the social and economic status of Nigeria both at local and international levels.

The government therefore should fully be aware of the need to sustain these local fabric productions in other to enjoy their full economic values. To this end, the full cooperation of the government is required in other to encourage and accelerate the growth of these local cloths weaving outlets not only making sufficient standard facilities available but also providing avenues or channels particularly international markets, for the sale of their commodities.

Conclusion

Nigerians are yet to know how bad the increasing spread of Covid-19 will be in Nigeria in the coming months if not years, but what we do know is that whatever happens to the economy at the height of the crisis and whatever damage is done, would show that we have to use this crisis as an opportunity to reconstruct the country and its economy. The economy shut down and the overloaded public healthcare systems show that the entire public healthcare system and the economic system need to be reinvigorated. We should not waste this opportunity to rebuild the country's infrastructure, but if we do not get our house in order then we will be severely punished in the months and years ahead when the next crisis comes. At the national level, the President needs to implement a reconstruction, and development program for the country. At the individual level, citizens should not waste this crisis period. This is a time for us to enrich our physical, spiritual, and emotional health, and not just focusing on avoiding the coronavirus. Create a new normal daily routine by eating well, exercise, and gaining sufficient rest. Enriching the mind by reading some great books, learning a new skill, visualize and document your long-term goals, and plan to pursue those goals with

passion when the Covid-19 pandemic is over. Above all, textile production offers a great opportunity for Nigerians to engage in a meaningful vocation that will not only put food on our tables but also earn a good livelihood for textile practitioners because clothing is a basic necessity.

In this paper, attempts have been made to grapple with the conceptual attributes of and economic potentials of textile design and fashion in the economic development of Nigeria. Against this background, the paper highlights various ways by which these commodities can be explored for the country's economic growth. In examining the economic potentials of textile design and fashion as export commodities for both local and foreign exchange earnings, it recommends effective implementation strategies through which they will be packaged especially for export trade that will bring positive results. The result of the entire picture is that textile design and fashion are not only good viable sources of income for the producers but also have enormous potentials for the country's economic advancement. Since textile art offers a window to mitigate poverty and economic downturn, sound studio practice is a sure way to achieving economic self-reliance during and after the pandemic. Local textile production requires a boost from the government to discourage importation from the West which is also presently suffering from lockdown brought about by the pandemic.

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