

ARTICLE ELEVEN

Humanities in Nation Building: The Entrepreneurial Role of Fine and Applied Arts in Nation Building

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Abstract

Of the countless, faceless and numberless artists and artisans at various street corners in Nigerian cities and rural areas are the various creative people have made impact as unsung heroes/ heroines. Their creative dexterity and acumen add to national development by creating employment and their apprentices while enhancing the nation's gross domestic product (GDP). The embellishment of the environment with beautiful paintings, sculptures, billboards and other pleasing designs are attributed to Fine and Applied Arts. For the purpose of discussion, the terms Fine Arts, Arts, and Visual Arts are used interchangeably to mean the same thing, referring to skillful works created for aesthetic and utilitarian purposes. The place of Fine and Applied Arts in nation building and the invaluable role it plays in

nation building cannot be overemphasised. This is because, a good understanding of the place and role, helps to institutionalise the visual arts in the various entrepreneurial programmes of culture and development which are huge local and foreign exchange earners for the nation, and conversely, building the economic potentials of the nation. This paper articulates issues on the visual arts in nation building and how these can be aptly harnessed for job creation among the teeming populace and nip in the bud youth restiveness, conflict situations and other societal vices. The paper concludes on the premise of eulogising the visual arts in nation building and the need to institutionalise same for the financial progress of individuals and the nation.

Introduction

Arts as a generic term is used for various activities in the humanities which harnesses human intellect for creative developmental purposes. It deals with creativity, skillful manipulation of tools and materials to create aesthetically pleasing objects, advancing a particular culture, ideas and ideals within the human society. The arts is further subdivided into the performing/ literary and the visual arts. The performing/ literary arts include music, drama, poetry, agitprop, installation art and several other such performances for passing across messages on issues in the society, either as propaganda or entertainments. The messages imbued in the performing arts are sometimes for

vilification or veneration. On the other hand, the visual arts or plastic arts include paintings, sculpture, ceramics, graphics, textiles, jewelry, photography and other art forms that take two or three dimensional outlooks, sometimes referred to as the plastic or Fine Arts. Landesman (2011: 4) states that, "The arts are central to human development" while Buhari (2015:4) reports that,

The traditional visual arts, or Fine Arts include works of ceramics/pottery, drawing, graphic design, print – making, painting, photography, sculpture, textile design, jewelry design and the like. Today, however, we have other forms of expression regarded as conceptual art/work expressed in installations, performance, new media which include video, film and other forms of the use of technology to create work.

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Visual arts which have contributed immensely to the development of human history and culture, have advanced the development of the humanities

through the uniqueness of the scholarship expressed through innovative creations and inventions to better the lot of humanity. As Buhari (2015:4) mused, technology and new media have helped to advance Fine Arts and indeed helping to make the artists relevant in a technology driven world. The understanding of the arts, especially visual arts, can change the developmental paradigm of the society. Works created by artists in the various studios, steers emotions in the populace and raise issues for advancement and a proactive engagement. Banksy (n.d) avers that, "Art should comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable". The aforementioned statement is apt in a society that is inept due to the understanding of the potency of visual arts. Buhari (2015:5) opines that, "Knowledge is generated when art brings to our notice what we may have failed to see or notice, particularly in an everyday phenomenon". The place of the visual arts in drawing attentions to various human activities, through exhibitions, new media and other innovative presentations, help in no small way in human development and nation building, which usually, is a daily occurrence. The pertinent questions are, how have the visual arts contributed to nation building? How has this "sacrosanct profession" helped curb youth restiveness and actively engage the nation in developing the GDP? These, and other questions, are some issues which this paper looks forward to addressing and to place on a pivotal pedestal the place of visual arts in nation building.

Visual Arts and Nation Building

The development of the creative industry, cultural advancement and the tourist industry is the preserve of the visual arts. Paintings, sculptures, ceramics, graphic billboard designs, festivals, craft industries and souvenirs for tourists, bring in a good income to the nation and help greatly in developing the nation economically. The sales from individuals and art auction houses are in millions of Naira and help to bridge the gap of unemployment and youth restiveness in most cases. People actively engaged in a meaningful venture like the Fine Arts are fully engrossed on better ways of pleasing their clients and other art connoisseurs rather than in crime and other societal vices. This active and productive

lifestyle of the artists, have helped them and the nation to diversify from oil revenues to other viable and equally income generating ventures like the creation of artworks and sales of same. According to Osae-Brown (2015:1):

While the nation's fortunes from its mono product have been shrinking as a result of dipping crude oil prices in the international market, art has been raking in rising revenue from auction sales. For many years, the income from art sales had been on the increase, making a significant contribution to the nation's economy, until lately, when a turn in the economy forced a decline. For the first time in five years, sales in the Nigerian art market nosedived to N224. 8 million in 2014 against N286.6 million and N232 million in 2013 and 2012 respectively, recording a 27 percent drop when compared to the sales in 2013.

It is pertinent to note that, sales from art, even though sometimes on the decline, rates high on the economic scale of national income. For instance, some art pieces by veteran artists raked in huge sums for the artists. Osae-Brown (2015:1) eulogises one of such sales that, "At the April 2014 auction, Bruce Onobrakpeya's 'Dance in the Bush,' sold at the hammer price of N3.65 million, while El Enatsui's untitled piece and Kolade Oshinowo's 'At the Party,' sold at N3.05million and N2.2million, as second and third highest sold works, respectively". The author further states that:

In the second auction that comes (sic) up in November by Arthouse again, Ben Enwonwu's 1957 work, *Fulani Girl*, was sold at the hammer price of N17.05 million, against the estimated price of between N12 million and N15 million. Also, at the auction organised by Terra Kulture and Mydrim Gallery in April 2013, Kolade Oshinowo's 'Royal Procession' was the highest work sold. It sold at N3.9 million.

The sales records have placed the artists on scales of

high preference to national development, as the tax from the sales will add to national development, outside the earnings of the artists. Although it can be argued that such sales is for the elitist society who pays for such works of the more established and veteran artists, notwithstanding, young up-coming artists have set goals and targets to someday, attain the place of fame in sales. This keeps their minds productive and constantly researching on the best way to rise to the top of their profession by constantly being productive. One can also state unequivocally that, Fine and Applied Arts have created utilitarian objects which have served aesthetic and functional purposes. Design of fabric and other textile products, for example, keep evolving on a daily basis, and textile artists create designs for special occasions and also designs reflective of the culture of the people. These textiles like the famous works from the die pits of Kano in the northern part of Nigeria, the tie – dye, batik and indigo dye works from the western parts of Nigeria, and the all - time visual delights of the *Akwetewoven* textiles from the eastern part of Nigeria. All these products which are produced by artists and artisans are shipped in tons to foreign countries which in turn add to the country's GDP. It is however important to note that, the discretionary stance of people to art has to change in order to advance the visual arts. Some people are of the view that, arts is only for the rich, and hence, they are more concerned with daily supplies of food, shelter and clothing and see artworks as luxury items. People, however fail to notice that, art affects everyday life, decision making and aesthetics judgement. These look salient, however sometimes overlooked. The understanding that art is beyond discretionary objects, will place the society in a better position.

Artists in various parts of the country, who operate studios and galleries, display their artistic dexterity for the collection of art lovers, tourists and connoisseurs. The entrepreneurial acumen of the artists, help to alleviate poverty in the nation and adds to the productivity of the practitioners of Art. For instance, ceramic/ pottery products are in use in most homes across the nation, which leads to patronage by various people and foreigners alike. Damden in Akila and Peter (2017:66) praises the

efforts of artists in national development when he reports that, “the efforts made by artists are geared towards assisting the government to impact entrepreneur-ship knowledge and skills acquisition of training manpower through visual arts among Nigerian youths in order to overcome the problem of unemployment and to be self – reliant and sustainable”. In a society where indolent youths throng the streets, the skills in visual arts are helping to reduce unemployment, create sustainable employment and build a virile entrepreneurial diversity in the income of the nation. The sale of branded T- shirts by graphic artists, decorated calabashes, metal designs, sculptures, paintings, Jewelry designs, photography and other industrial product designs and improvements, just to mention a few, have helped national development immensely through skill training and workshops, which in turn bring in some money. In advancing the place of students' hands- on workshop experiences, Onoja (2014:5) posits that:

One of the cardinal objectives of this workshop is to develop entrepreneurial skills among the students to lessen financial burdens on parents and guardians and create room for financial independence. Several students engage in useful ventures through which they eke out a living on campus. Some are into painting, bead making, sculpture, stand-up comedy in Theatres, choreography, textile designs as exemplified in this workshop and a host of other entrepreneurial skills for economic gains.

Giving students and young apprentices the needed exposures through workshops, adds to the knowledge and requisite skills for survival in an economically competitive space in the society, thereby promoting national cohesion and building. Ololdi (2009: XI), buttresses Onoja's position when he states that:

The economic potentialities of art are also clearly reflected among the art undergraduates in the universities and

colleges. It is common knowledge that, for decades, many undergraduate art students have been sponsoring themselves from the funds received from their art commissions and practice. And very unbelievably, particularly in Nigeria, more than half of our art graduates in the higher institutions do not look for jobs; they are self-employed. In fact, many are employers instead of employees, thereby helping the various governments to solve their unemployment problems.

From the foregoing, it becomes clear that the place of the visual arts in adding to the wheel of economic and job employment progress of the nation cannot be over emphasised. Guilds of artists, professional bodies and non- professional artists, all add to the economic prowess of the nation. In a nation where diversification from oil - based revenue is being preached and advanced, visual arts and artists take a pride of place in fitting into the niche of creativity and empowerments which when quantified in monetary terms is in billions of Naira.

The role of Fine Arts in innovative designs and styles of presentations have helped in making life enjoyable and spiced. Without the arts, the monotony of seeing the same things repeatedly can be boring. Osakor (2008:33) avers that:

The role that art will play should be practical in nature. This is so because a nation that desires scientific and technological breakthrough or transfer should as a matter of urgent need seek to adopt, adapt and integrate art into every bit of its productive sector. This will not only stimulate the needed environment for its take off, but will also enable the individual to be empowered even as he enjoys a sustained growth and development.

Human capital development is an inevitable part of a nation's progress. Artists keep advancing their skills and making life better through product development and aiding the sciences to achieve innovative dreams. Artists with specialisations in

sculpture, dot the landscape with works of relevant historical significance, which invariably serve as landmarks in the nation. Examples of artworks like Welcome to Lagos (Yoruba: Agba Meta or Aro Meta) of the statue of three Lagos white-cap chiefs in Lagos created by Bodun Shodeinde in 1991 stand over 12 feet high on a pedestal. The sculpted three chiefs was built to welcome people coming into Lagos State. The Eyo masquerades at the Murtala Mohammed Square in Lagos, *Sango* at Marina Lagos, The mace sculpture at the national assembly in Abuja and the colossal market woman in Jos, popularly called "Mama Tapgun" in the terminus area of Jos, which was unfortunately destroyed by erstwhile government of *Da Jonah Jang*, all tell of beautiful landmark histories of the places.

Different organisations commission artists to create murals of activities of their organisations and sculptures that have historical antecedents. These works which record the culture of the people and serve as points of historical references in the society, empower the artists financially when given a commission, while also serving the purposes of aesthetics. They document and advance the cultural, social, political and economic profiles of the society in which the artworks are situated. These become points of communication and transmission of societal norms and values. Bakare and Bakare (2009:223) aver that, "Art can be seen as a medium of transferring or communicating practices, faith, beliefs, feelings and ideas from one end to another". Ideas are easily transmitted through the instrumentality of the visual arts, which invariably leads to development of a place. The understanding of the visual arts has helped the nations to reinforce discipline and religious beliefs through works with didactic meanings in the society. Also, the crude technologies practised in traditional societies, were recorded by artists, which serve as referral points for advancement in present day innovations. The Nok culture, for instance, displayed artistic ingenuity in the firing of clay products, maintaining a unique style of expression and creating room for researchers and archaeologists around to delve into the culture and practices of the people of Nok in Nigeria. This has placed their culture on the world time line of

historical prowess and has encouraged tourism and research, thereby adding to the economic development of the nation and giving the country pride of place in rich cultural heritage. Examples abound from the works of Benin, Igbo Ukwu, Tada bronze figures and Ife brass, bronze and terracotta works just to mention but a few. Adeyemi (2009: 236) opines that, "Without doubt, tourism and crafts are the vibrant antidotes that can reduce poverty and unemployment in a developing economy". He further states that, "Crafts and tourism have the capacities for creating benefits such as small and medium- scale business opportunities for the local people. These sectors also have potential possibilities that can push forward the economic realities of a nation struggling with development". The development of any nation starts from the grassroots and progresses upwards. Small – scale industries and private practices have greatly aided in resolving the unemployment issues in the nation, hence, practitioners of visual arts, tourism workers and crafts designers have reduced the burden of the government of the day by being self-employed and self-sustaining, and putting others to work.

Projections for the Future

The place of visual artists, artists' guilds and associations in projecting in nation building cannot be over emphasised. Art exhibitions raise issues on certain aspects of societal inter-relationships and co-existence, bringing monetary gains to the artists' need attention. Encouragement from none – governmental organisations and the government, will make assessment of loans and other incentives easier for greater productivity. This is because, the more viable the productions, the likelihood of increasing the GDP are higher, thus making life better for practitioners of arts crafts and tourism.

It is important to include entrepreneurial studies in the humanities, especially in the Fine and Applied Arts sections. This will train the requisite man power to understand global best practices in order to be self – sustaining. Furthermore, the difficulty of getting white collar jobs after graduation is sometimes remote; hence, creating a means of livelihood will solve the unemployment

scourge in the nation.

Artworks are intellectual properties and should be treated as such. The symbols, icons, aphorisms and allegories in artworks which are sacrosanct to the artists and sometimes related disciplines, can better be harnessed for developmental purposes through art talks, workshops and exhibitions. In this vein, intellectual engagements should be an ongoing exercise as practised across the globe. The appreciation and advancement of the arts, are pointers to the development of any society and no doubt a marker for the innovative creations in science and technology. An anonymous author in *Dictionary of Quotations* (2002: 142) once mused that, "Life without industry is guilt, and industry without art is brutality".

Conclusion

Fine and Applied Arts which is a branch of the humanities, has helped in national development and should be encouraged within and outside the schools. These will generate employment and economic growth. The vast potentials of the arts can be harnessed for foreign exchange earnings and exchange of ideas among nations. Product designs, innovations and graphic communications have advanced science and technology, making the synergy of the humanities and sciences integral parts of a nation's development. The popular saying that a picture speaks more than a thousand words is apt in encapsulating this paper, the simplicity of the visuals to human memory cannot be over emphasised, hence, using visuals to reinforce issues in the society, can go a long way to communicating ideas and ideals in the society, which can transmute to developmental parlance.

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