

# Impact of Arts on Economic Development: The Nigeria Experience

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## Abstract

No serious minded economic policy formulators and administrators at modern times can afford to undermine education, art education, internal economic structure (micro economy), the arts and the need for diversification. Before the emergence of oil and gas exploration in Nigeria, subsistent farming, export of agricultural produce and multiplicity of human engagements such as crafts have sustained the economy of the Nigerian past. Today, the economy is still domiciled at the frontiers of oil and gas, this situation has caused enormous challenges to the Nigerian nation. Results of researches have been published, economic summits have been conducted in order to call attention to successive governments and the private (business) sector in the economy by Professional groups, individuals, academics, economists and journalists alike; the need for diversification and the strengthening of other sectors to revitalise the whole system in conformity with the needed economic development. This paper is therefore designed to review literature on economy and the arts, analyse the importance of arts, education and economy, the role of studio arts on economic development, the impact of aesthetics on commodities. In order to achieve this, institutional libraries, the print and electronic media were consulted, artists were interviewed and participatory observant capacity was assumed. Conclusively, the paper is of the view, Nigeria possesses enormous human resources, talented and artistic man power; what the country needs is viable and consistent educational programmes and the strengthening of the arts both the institutional and its practice.

**keywords:** The Arts, Art education, Development and Economy.

## 1.1 Introduction

The Art is 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. Unfortunately, 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 buoyancy of his or her nation; vibrant economy that must attest to the well-being of the citizens. The very popular economic development indices for an astute professor might be an esoteric jargon to a villager who possibly lacks a meal on the table. 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.

## 1.2 Literature review

For the purpose of this discourse, this paper adopts the definition of art from the stand point of political economy, which brings to fore the affinity between the two (the Arts and Economics) in the academy and professional practice. Max Weber (1864-1920), defines art from the sociological dimension as Systematic application of knowledge and skill affecting a desired result and an application of skill so acquired and taste developed in production according to aesthetics principles. The economic principle Weber applies in the definition is devoid of ambiguities, he opines that skills, taste or aesthetics should be applied in the production of commodities and other useful products acquired by man. The philosophy of Weber is that products of any kind must possess some pleasing forms, an aesthetic quality applied by skilled person(s) based on the facts that those who acquire the product require certain aesthetic standards.

**1.2.1 Economic development:** for clarity each word is herein defined separately, in view of examination of its combined and contextual meaning. Encarta (2001) explains economy as (1) Thrift, the Prudent managing of resources to avoid extravagant expenditure or waste, in (4), it says, financial affairs, the production and consumption of goods and services of a community regarded as a whole. Hogan (2006) defines economy in sociological terms saying, “economy is the dominant form of economic activities characterising a society”, he adds some examples of economies, which include, collecting and hunting economy, nomadic economy, settled agricultural economy, modern industrial economy.

Two types of definitions of economy are looked at; development is therefore defined by Iwe (1979) as transition from less human conditions to those, which are more human. Iwe, in his definition is concerned about human situations and conditions that have to do with their environment; social, legal, economics, which generate a better environment to live a godly and religious life. Also, Encarta defines development as, event causing change;

an incident that causes a situation to change or progress. This definition simply portends that, the activities of the arts, when guided through the right channel can cause events to change for progressive development.

However, these definitions do not elucidate change and progress in the light of economy and artistic skill. For further explanation on these, let's look at the view of Rodney (1992) who strongly contends that, Development is many sided process, at the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, well-being ....., at the level of social groups, capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships. The concept, which Rodney highlights here transcends the narrow purview of many literary exercises on development, or some classes of Governments officials' understanding of 'development', as building and construction of roads. He is of the broader ideas of the term 'development', indicating that certain characteristics possessed by the individual such as increased skills and capacity, freedom to choose, creativity, self discipline, responsibility to oneself, family and nation and material well-being are indices of development; the lack of these is at variance with the term development.

Hogan, confirms this when he tackles the issues of developing countries, developing and underdevelopment. Developing country; before we begin with Hogan's definition, Iwe (1979) informs that, an underdeveloped country is conventionally the same as developing country. It is a country still largely in the throes of grave and less human conditions of life. By this statement, developing and underdevelopment are one and the same meaning. From the sociological point of view, though similar with the former, Hogan explains the economic implications of the term and therefore points out that, about 120 nations' economy is based on Low-tech, creating a poor production and distributing system, with strong social ties. This he says is "underdevelopment". He explains that the phrase means, capitalists can solve three problems by controlling the politics of the country; cheaper labour, cheaper raw materials and expanded markets for manufactured goods. He therefore lists the challenges associated with it, such as crimes, class inequality, and juvenile delinquency.

### **1.2.2 Development and underdevelopment:**

to discuss these, Hogan (2006) simply made comparative analysis of the terms by listing out four different factors, these include; industrialisation, commodifying all goods and services and exchange them in a market, discard all traditionally unfavourable structures and replace social status (kinship, ethnically, race or gender) with money as a nexus for the exchange of goods and services. He therefore concludes that, societies, which do not accept these changes are said to be underdeveloped.

Macropaedia (2003) describes economic development as, the simple process whereby, low-income national economies are transformed into modern industrial economies. In continuation it points out that, the term is sometimes synonymous with economic growth, and describes change in a country's economy involving qualitative as well as quantitative improvements. From the above, it is understood that all economies are ambitious, and that they desire the progression from mere simple low-income to improved, Industrialised, with qualitative and quantitative economic growth.

Before delving into the role of arts in the economic development, we need to keep abreast with the causes of underdevelopment. Here is the summary of Macropaedia's concepts of causes of underdevelopment. Agricultural or extractive products form large chunk of national income, low secondary industrial activities marked by poor technology, Surplus labour and un-employment, high population growth and inadequate infrastructures. Also, underdevelopment of human resources (skill and education), weakness of economic and financial institutions are some of the major challenges. However, according to economic theories, the existing differences in income level between the developed and underdeveloped nations are not primarily the results of conditions out of man's control (e.g., natural resources and climate). This is hope inspiring philosophy, which gives all economies even and level grounds; it simply implies that all countries have the potential to achieve their desired statuses. However the task of development may well be, it has the ingenuity to transform these potentials to development. Taking Nigeria into the picture, the country is endowed with enormous natural resources, from agricultural to numerous minerals, land and sea, most essentially intellectually and creatively endowed human beings. The later highlights the roles of education, arts education and the practising arts in the economy for sustainable development.

### **1.2.3 The Importance of Education in National Economic Development:**

Economists are of the view that, five major drawbacks affect underdeveloped economies in the world, out of which three are directly or indirectly related to sustainable and creative education. These are,

- (1) Poor technological development,
- (2) Low level of quality and quantity skilled and trained personnel and
- (3) Inconsistent education policies and implementation.

Education has been noted by people as a pivot for development in every nation. The editorial Nigerian Daily's made bold declaration to assist Nigeria's late President, Yar, Adua's quest to industrialize the Nigerian economy as one of the 20 most successful economies of the world, which of course was inherited by his successor and perceived to have been dropped in recent time.

It notes;

*History shows that the world's leading economies today owe their economic rise to education. Therefore, it is not enough to come out with figures to spend on this and that project. We have heard a lot of such in the past and yet the country is still lagging behind in virtually all developmental indices. The problem of Nigeria is never the lack of good ideas but the political will to see it through*

It therefore suggests that, to make the dream a reality, government must like the Chinese revolutionise the economy with the development of the cultural and agricultural potentials, where education is the foundation. For further evidence Finn (1991), a professor of Vanderbilt University was quoted saying, "I don't think there is any industrialized country right now that's complacent about their educational system".

However, Finn continued, "it seems ridiculous to note that, in spite of these widespread ideas of importance of education to world economies, there are still complaints about laxities in the schools system across the world". Sharon Pickett (1991), a spokes woman for the world conference on education was quoted saying, "there's widespread consensus that schools are not working and that a lack of good education is foundation of economy, social and economic problems". On the basis of this, Newsweek international, news magazine set out to investigate the ten best schools in the world. The aim was to understand the objective behind the country's educational system and relate it to its educational needs in the new world order. It may or may not surprise some that not one of such schools was found in Africa, not to speak of Nigeria.

#### **1.2.4 The Arts, Education and the Economy:**

It thus seems clear to one that, Nigerian economic problems have defied every economic strategies adopted; theories made by erudite economists, tested and proved to work in other economies, yet failed in the Nigerian context. What is therefore the missing link; is it in the policies or its application? In response, it is rather pertinent we begin with Deragon's (2008) philosophy of economic reengineering which says, "Given the crisis state of our economic system rather than fixing broken system may be it is time to replace it with innovation, creativity and knowledge".

Finn and Pickett at different times illustrate that, creativity; education and knowledge are the driving forces of modern business. The viability of education in the lives of human kind has been the reasons for philosophical studies from time past. Its application in today's economic revolution is eminent; more especially creative education will impact on the lives of people. The reflexes of aesthetic education in human elements reflect in every facets of his life, not only to his body, but in a variety of his engagements. It is also natural that man is endowed with artistry and creativity; these inherent qualities when nourished will help in the development of quality, aesthetic and acceptable products. Hence, the arts and its education in Nigeria must gain root in the education of children from the foundation because, as John F. Kennedy (1917-1963) puts it, children are the greatest resource for the world and its best hope for the future.

Agreed, there has been management incompetence, most policies are wrongly interpreted and misdirected poorly or administered: it is worthy to note the advice of United Nations (UN) on the twenty five percent of the total National Budget on science, technology and research, which is never implemented. The arts both in practice and study are not supported by the government and the business world to reap its potential. To the ignorance of many, the arts, science and technology are complementary. However, it is worthy to mention that, at recent times, the encouragement given to the arts by President GoodLuck Jonathan is inspirational. Nonetheless, the conditionality attached to the two hundred million dollars set aside for the arts is speculatively saddled with bureaucratic bottle necks. It is indeed sad to note, that, at present, there's hardly any intellectual forum that brings the various forms of the arts in the country together where issues related to this and others can be discussed. Unfortunately, the visuals arts is worse off in this direction; this is so because, it does not have legal structure, hence have limited or virtually no influence as a pressure group on government and corporate tenders regarding art contracts that concerns the public, and fraudulent activities related to them.

#### **1.2.5 The role of art education in economic development:**

To vast majority of people, 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) 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 quip, *Am I not creative, even though I did not study Fine Arts in the school?* The answer is simple; you would have been more

creative to solve the country's numerous problems, which also includes personal 'refinement'.

When it was advocated in the past, that creative arts be made compulsory, parents and guardians who have limited knowledge of the arts argued and forbade even talented children from arts classes, (Ekong 2000). Those who are sufficiently informed argue, the arts convey knowledge and meaning not learned through the study of other subjects; Boyer says, they deserve to be an integral part of every child's education. ( Idiong, 2000).

The potential of the arts and its benefits can be deduced from the actions of the world major economies and expressions made over these actions. Chapman (1978), and Eisner and Ecker (1966) variously state the American legislative actions, making the study of the arts compulsory for every American child. In the early 1870s, a group of industrialists in Massachusetts pressurised the state legislature to make drawing (art) a compulsory subject in school. The manufacturers recognised that skilled craftsmen and designers would be needed if American products were to compete favourably in the expanding world market, the result of this was America's economic supremacy: before the Asian markets picked up, America was the centre of the world's economy and this was as a result of that action taken from that vision. It is clear as Achebe (1986) points out, *the arts are not the poor relation of the economy of the world, and on the contrary, they are the source of its vitality*. The Americans are quite aware of this fact and utilised it adequately. News week, the international News magazine's (1991) survey of the 10 best schools in the world notes Pittsburgh as the centre for arts training in the world as number one. PROPEL programme, a baby of a psychologist Howard Gardner (1983), Harvard university don expressed heart puzzling theories of the Arts and creativity in his 1983 book "Frames of mind" that, "artistic", "skills" or "talents" are actually separate forms of ... intelligence that should be nurtured in schools along with more traditional subjects. When experimented, students learned to express themselves in various media and solve problems on their own, whether artistic or non artistic. It opines that, these skills and talents developed in the class rooms are very useful for the industry and the emerging world markets.

#### **1.2.6 The practising arts and economic development Product design:**

From antiquities, we are informed, the artist is an inventor, a product designer and a producer of novel ideas in theory and practice. In today's free market the creativity of the artist is adequately exploited by the industrialists. The products are fashioned with the intention to appeal to the public sense of beauty. One of the early renaissance artists, Leonardo Da Vinci is known for his prodigious designs, from architecture to aviation, (Bacc, 1978). 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.

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 technicians ingenuity. That notwithstanding, the aestheticians craft cannot be avoided when one views the interior.

#### **1.2.7 Aesthetic application to products:**

Max Weber defines art as systematic application of knowledge and skill affecting a desired result and an application of skill so acquired and taste developed in production according to aesthetic principles. The economic and aesthetic principles Weber applies in his definition is noteworthy, his opinion confirms man's unique desires and applications of skills, taste or aesthetics in the production of commodities and other useful products demanded in the markets. The philosophy of Weber is that products of any kind must possess some pleasing forms, an aesthetic quality applied by skilled persons based on the facts that those who acquire the product require certain aesthetic standard.

The aesthetic application to productive goods to boost the economy has driven several nations to take stern decision on the inclusion of Fine arts in the school's curriculum; examples are United States of America and Britain, (Eisner and Ecker, 1966). A good number of people are attracted to several goods as a result of several variables, such as colour, designs patterns and form or motif before making decision on functionality and durability.

Therefore, the need for the artist in this direction to boost commerce in any developing economy is necessary and vital. There is no commodity of repute found in the store that the graphic or the commercial artist has not created a design for its label or advertisement, in other words, without the artist a product is incomplete.

The current knowledge in information technology and its application in world's economy cannot be over emphasised, however, its potentials are less explored and advantages under-utilized in Nigeria, nonetheless abused. The information technology is multibillion dollars industry, which involves various businesses. International businesses, culture, the visual arts, performing arts, and academic resources are packaged through this medium. To succeed in the envisaged economic process Nigeria so desires;(demands not only the knowledge of operating the system), but partnership in developing a technology that can produce systems that will be Nigerian culture friendly in order to attract pan African preferential appeal and markets.

No one can sincerely fault the ingenuity of the Aba productive prowess, and the technology of the Awka people, but the challenges of this viable economic sector are funding and aesthetic education. Learning or



education has no age or time limit, to meet the standards set by the Standards Organization of Nigeria; this can be bridged with seminars and workshops. A programme can be developed to train these technicians at their workshops, when actual production is going on, possibly before, during and after. The training will improve their aesthetic knowledge, affect their product, and at the long run widen the market beyond the shores of Nigeria. This is because beauty or aesthetics is a universal product, taking cue from Max Weber's.....*taste developed in production according to aesthetic principles*, implies that, people who acquire these products require some aesthetic qualities. Therefore as a matter of urgency, the Ministry of Education in concert with Ministry of Trades and Industry and the business community should understand these principles and act accordingly.

### 1.3 Conclusion

The Nigerian economy has waited too long for the needed diversification and improvement of the natural resources and harnessing the inherent talents of the citizens (human resources), in order to put into proper utilization for sustainable development.

The Arts is nature's heritage, a gift and talent that have made the people unique and sophisticated. The combination of the two resources can no doubt be a strong factor in modern economy. Micropaedia (2003) points out the factors of unemployment of which the arts address. Also, Deregon (2008) suggests that, for a refresher, it is good to address the problem with a fresh outlook, with innovation, creativity and knowledge. From the Nigerian home video to the music industry, a new vista of business has begun that extends beyond the African frontiers: so are the creative and cultural arts have formidable foundation with inherent economic potentials, so are the natural physical wonders of the country at strategic places in the country for tourism, and the literary arts that have won accolades and laureates attract multibillion dollars. When these are packaged, with appropriate legislations, business incentives and wider propaganda will impact on the Nigerian economy and bring about sustainable development. Denial and lip service cannot ameliorate the situation; rather technical committees could be set up with the view to assess the economic values the arts can bring to the Nigerian economy. Conclusively, the paper is of the view, Nigeria possesses enormous human resources, talented and artistic man power; what the country needs is viable and sustainable educational programmes and the strengthening of the arts both the institutional and its practice.

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