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THE DYNAMICS OF VISUAL ARTS IN THE CHANGE AGENDA AND DWINDLING ECONOMY

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Introduction

Over the years, there have been conflicting arguments and contentions about the real subject of art and how it affects life and society. In most cases, it has become a subject of debate in the discursive context. Truly speaking, the concept of art cannot be subject to analytical judgment. This contention surfaced in the 20th century when different writers began to exercise their creative ability and new ways of experimentation in art. Art deals with the use of imagination to express ideas and feelings.

Art as an aspect of mental development also refers to the acquisition of skills and knowledge development. Art focuses on aesthetics and functionality and its qualities are by no means important to humanity. From time immemorial, human needs are catered for with the production of visual art objects that serves human functions. Art is a profitable venture in human life which can be used to redefine the economy of the nation. It can be taken as a medium and long-term market investment for both individual and corporate bodies. Visual arts play a crucial role as an alternative investment in a dwindling economy.

Since lack of jobs and production capacity is a threat to economic growth, investment in the visual arts can be one of the greatest assets in the nation's economy as hundreds of investment and rewarding opportunities abounds. Visual arts create an avenue for individuals to identify investment opportunities in different areas and also establish and manage the enterprise. It is all about innovation, prepares people for gainful employment in both formal and informal sectors of the economy. It prepares and equips the individuals for gainful employment in the world of work thereby making them wealth creators and employers of labour.

Concept of Arts

Art means different things to different people at different times. All through the ages, art as a subject has gone through several developmental stages. Each stage depicting the very purpose for which such art was created. This is why different authors, scholars and writers have attempted to define the subject matter in their own way. Sometimes, defining the subject has conflict of interest and controversy as to what art actually is or is not. This controversy came to the front burner since the 20th century when people began to exercise their creative ability and new ways of experimentation in art. This creative ability and new ways of experimentation, according to Egonwa (2011) brought about several definitions and redefinitions of art that have made it almost a tradition to start books on art criticisms or art history with copious devotedness to definitions.

For proper understanding of the entire literature, it has become imperative therefore to examine few definitions of art, visual arts, scope of visual arts, and how it affects the nation's economy positively. Egonwa (2011) affirms that, art is the result of the manipulative skill applied by man, usually a gifted person, to express an idea in a chosen medium. Uzoagba, (2008) defines art as a way of becoming a creative person, and that art is an aspect of mental development which is imaginative, creative and aesthetic. Hornby, (2005), sees art as the use of the imagination to express ideas, or feelings, particularly in painting, drawing or sculpture.

Art as a subject covers all aspect of human activities, ranging from communication, architecture, medicine, fashion, entertainment, theatre and engineering. All the definitions of art are directed towards one goal. In other word, art refers to the acquisition of skills to perform a particular task. An artist is a creative person who uses his skill to express artistic creativity. Art deals with the mental development of an individual. Creativity is the central point that connects the various definitions of art. From all indication, it is strongly believed that art focuses on aesthetics and functionality. It therefore means that for an object to be classified as beautiful, it must appeal to or satisfy our sense of emotion, and its qualities are by no means vital to humanity. The most challenging aspect in the definition of art lies in the fact that art involves the fashioning of object to accomplish human needs. Egonwa, (2011) asserts that visual arts have their own language like other subjects/disciplines. He expresses further that any statement made by the artist outside the accepted tenets of the basic vocabulary of visual arts may not be the artist intended expression. Interestingly, art is a profitable venture to humanity while trying to redefine the economy of the nation. It can be taken as a medium and long-term market investment for both individual and corporate bodies.

Barnes (2008) affirms that the word 'art' can refer to visual arts which includes sculpture, architecture, photography, decorative arts, crafts and other visual works that combine materials and form. Uzoagba (2008) asserts that visual arts designate those arts addressed primarily to the sense of vision. They include both fine and applied arts. From the above discussion, visual arts can be classified into fine art and applied or industrial art. While fine arts include painting, sculpture and architecture, applied arts cover such areas as graphics, textile technology, ceramics and metal works.

Each of these specialized areas is further divided into other units. Areas that are not considered in this classification but are integral part of works of arts include basketry, leather works, embroidery, blacksmithing, knitting, printing etc. When these are properly and carefully exploited and harnessed, they make the individuals wealth creators thereby contributing to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the nation's economy. Visual arts as a career helps to prepare and equip individuals, irrespective of sex, age, race and colour.

Change Agenda and Dwindling Economy

The overdependence on the proceeds of the nation's crude oil as revenue generation by the Federal Government has brought misfortune to the entire citizens. The resultant effect is that, when there is a fall in the oil price, it drastically affects the value of our local currency-the Naira. In order to remain relevant and resist the global uncertainty and create a viable and stable economy in this era of globalization, efforts should be made to embrace other sectors of the economy such as Visual Arts (Arts and culture). These include textile technology, commercial art, industrial design, graphic art, interior decoration, furniture design and publishing, photography, sculpture and painting. Other areas of investment opportunities include crafts related careers such as leather work, bead making, basketry, casting, metal work, knitting, calabash decoration, weaving, blacksmithing etc. As

a consuming nation, Nigeria is paying the supreme price for not being able to direct her energy. This brought about the dwindling economic growth and the constant pressure on our currency exchange rate. Since the inception of President Muhammadu Buhari's administration, several discussions on the need to diversify our economy took center stage, with several conclusions and suggestions geared towards adopting the "change agenda".

After independence in 1960, Nigeria had a solid and robust economy coupled with the industries and companies that produced for our local consumption. The nation's economy was stabilized by the manufacturing sectors. These gave rise to employment opportunities while export and agriculture served as sources of foreign exchange earnings for Nigeria. While jubilating in this flamboyant living, Nigeria was trapped with over-dependence on oil as a result of oil boom in the 70s. The undue concentration on oil boom and the consequent neglect of the manufacturing companies, export and agriculture have contributed in no small measure to the present economic meltdown.

Industrialists, political experts and economic analysts have suggested and concluded that for Nigeria to become economically vibrant and come out of the web of a dwindling economy, she must be a producing nation rather than become a consuming nation. As the giant of Africa, Nigeria must have the spirit of self-sufficiency. Remember that all the machinery used in industries and companies are products of the art. Having subjected to the products of laboratory experimentation and analysis, the finished products and packaging are designed by the artist before sending them to the market place through a channel of visual communication (graphic art).

The industries and companies that create employment opportunities for economic growth depend on visual arts. Visual arts must be given priority attention, and skills acquisition centres must be established. Dead and abandoned textile companies must be revived to cater for the unemployed graduates thereby checking the problem of importation of textiles. Visual art is a tool for facilitating science and technology for national development. In this era when the world is driven by science and technology, visual art has become indispensable. Nigeria is a country that is heavily certificated; therefore, emphases should be directed toward the exploitation and exploration of skills resident in the individuals for the development of the economy. Nigeria must be sincere enough to go back to the drawing board and embrace vocation focused on visual arts. It is only then that Nigeria will experience the taste of the change agenda Slogan being orchestrated by the present administration of President Muhammadu Buhari, "change begins with me".

Investment Opportunities in Visual Arts

All through the ages, visual art has been seen as a product of aesthetic values and appreciation, but today, it has metamorphosed into an investment for profit making at both short and medium term for economic sustainability. Today's world is currently facing unemployment crisis. As a result of this unpleasant situation, people have been thrown into debilitating depression, hopelessness and frustration. However, in order to avoid the trauma caused by unemployment, there is need for individuals to look inward and think of other alternative. Interestingly, the scarcity of job is an opportunity for them to maximize their potentials and create their own jobs by acquiring entrepreneurial skills in visual arts which can help bring their vision or dream to life. As far as it can be ascertained, visual arts play a crucial role as an alternative investment in a dwindling economy. Investment in the visual arts can be one of the greatest assets in the nation's economy.

Hundreds of investment and rewarding opportunities abound in the visual arts. Visual arts create an avenue for individuals to identify investment opportunities in different areas and also establish

and manage the enterprise. It is all about innovation that prepares people for gainful employment in both formal and informal sectors of the economy. Visual arts prepare and equip the individuals for gainful employment in the world of work thereby making them wealth creator and employers of labour. This assertion is further supported by Uzoagba (2008) which states that numerous careers or opportunities for industrious youth are opening up and the financial remunerations are attractive to behold. These opportunities, according to Uzoagba are in such areas as textile technology, commercial art, industrial design, graphic art, interior decoration, furniture design and publishing. Other areas of investment opportunities outside the scope of Uzoagba include photography, sculpture and painting. Others include crafts related careers such as leather work, bead making, basketry, casting, metal work, knitting, calabash decoration, weaving, blacksmithing etc.

Visual arts have the potentials of improving the living standards of the people and also help to achieve sustainable economic development. It has become necessary therefore that graduates of Colleges of Education, Polytechnics and Universities who wish to be trained for a specified period in order to acquire visual arts skill and knowledge development can take advantage of this opportunity. In this way, the act of joblessness and social vices such as corruption, insecurity, terrorism, prostitution etc. would be reduced to the barest minimum.

Economic Empowerment in a Dwindling Economy

Unemployment has become a topical debate in the nation's discursive context and a threat to the nation's economy. Visual arts can serve as catalyst for the development strategy that is rooted on wealth creation, poverty reduction and employment generation. Skill acquisition and knowledge development are embedded in visual arts. Visual arts lead to skill acquisition and entrepreneurial development. If these skills resident in the individuals are well harnessed, it can produce job creators that will become self-employed and also employ others who will become productive and become useful to themselves and to the society.

Ullman (2012) affirms that vocational education is charged with the responsibility of training and acquisition of expertise, skills and knowledge that are creative in nature. Brickman (2009) asserted that vocational education is an instruction in skill necessary for people who are preparing to enter the labour force or who need training or retraining in the technology of their occupation. Ebisime (2012) opines that it is worrisome to have so many youth who are capable of contributing towards national growth and development but lack both general and specific skills for employment. These skills for employment are embedded in the visual arts.

Visual art is part and parcel of vocational education in which specific skills and knowledge development are acquired by individuals. It creates an avenue for greater number of youth and adults to be gainfully employed in different art professions such as photography, textile and fashion, graphics and advertising, furniture design, production and sales of graphic items blacksmithing, weaving, knitting, jewelleries, cane work etc. Intending youth and adults stand to benefit from visual arts career, having acquired the necessary education and training. Visual arts training require several innovative and entrepreneurial skills capable of engaging the real life investors and market delivery.

According to the National Policy on Education (2004), one of the goals of the education is the acquisition of appropriate skills and development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society. Accordingly, the preparatory aspect of pre-vocational training offered to students at the

junior secondary level is to expose students for career awareness by exploring usable options in the world of work, and to enable the youths to have an intelligent understanding of the increasing complexity of technology. The goals of vocational education shall be to provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly in art and craft, advanced craft at technical levels; give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals who shall be self-reliant economically. Recognizing that vocational education is an integral part of technological development, a greater portion of education expenditure shall continue to be devoted to vocational education at federal and states levels.

As contained in the Economic Transformation Blueprint of 2009, the vision and driving force of the federal government is to attain economic growth by 2020. It was the former president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, late Musa Yar-adua that gave birth to the strategic vision 20:20. It was intended that by 2020, Nigeria will have a very strong, diversified and sustainable economy that is capable of exploiting and harnessing its natural resources for quality standard of living of her citizens. Based on the nation's remarkable potentials, Nigeria would become one of the world's twenty largest economies by 2020. Obiajulu (2011) asserted that the visioning follows from Goldman Sachs's prediction that Nigeria is amongst the eleven countries that have the potentials for attaining global competitiveness in 2020 based on the economic and demographic settings and the foundation for reforms already laid. This laudable vision covers all sectors of Nigeria economy to include small and medium scale enterprise, Agriculture and Food Security, Information and Communication Technology, Rural-Urban development, Business environment and competitiveness etc. All these geared towards visual arts. As attractive as this laudable vision, visual arts, when properly harnessed remains a visible engine for growing the economy to achieve the vision.

As part of effort of the federal government to ensure speedy and accelerated economic delivery and national development, the federal government established the National Council for Arts and Culture established by Decree No. 3 of 1975 and amended by Decree No. 5 of 1987. As an organ of the federal government, National Council for Arts and Culture is charged with the responsibility of coordination, development and promotion of arts and culture of Nigeria and instrument for national unity and integration as well as serve as catalyst for sustainable growth and development of the nation's economy. This robust initiative for Arts and Culture taken by the federal government demonstrates her readiness and recognition of the tremendous role of visual arts in national development and for the achievement of global competitiveness.

Conclusion

Nigeria is a nation with a dwindling economy. In this era of technological advancement, when the entire world has become a global village, no nation can survive completely without paying attention to skill acquisition and knowledge development. Visual arts remain a vital engine for driving the economy towards emerging global market. Visual arts cannot be separated from technology. It is the platform upon which technology thrives. Therefore, visual arts provide the education and training for the individuals to acquire intellectual knowledge of the complexity of a global business and manpower for content development.

Recommendations

1. The three-tiers of government should develop the political will to be consistent in the implementation of her policies that promote Visual Arts.
2. The Nigerian artists should be encouraged, trained and re-trained to meet global standard and competitiveness.

3. There should be grass root sensitization of the vital role of Visual Arts in national development.
4. The Federal Government should introduce research fund to support or assist professional artists who may wish to do advanced research capable of promoting the socio-economic well-being of the citizens.

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