



Role of Handicraft in Tourism Promotion and Economic Empowerment in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

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The paper examined the role of traditional handicraft in tourism promotion and economic empowerment in Nigeria. The paper highlighted concept of handicraft and craftsmanship. The types of Nigerian traditional handicrafts; the cultural significance of arts and handicrafts were highlighted. The potentials of traditional handicrafts in tourism development and economic empowerment such as job creation, revenue generation; and increase in foreign exchange earnings to the country were established based on the revenue literature. Challenges in the development of arts and craft industries in Nigeria and strategies to overcome them were examined. The reviewed literature established that handicrafts are essential parts of tourists' experience in a destination. It was revealed that traditional handicrafts play significant roles in preserving the cultural heritage of a region as it symbolizes cultural identity. The reviewed literature indicated that traditional handicrafts attracts tourists to a destination as they are interested in purchasing crafts with symbolic meanings, as souvenirs to take to their homeland as memory of the place visited. Handicrafts also has the potential for job creation by providing source of income to those who engage in producing them, and also increase the foreign exchange earnings of the country as the foreign tourist purchase them. However, in Nigeria the performance of the arts and handicraft sector is far below its potentials due to the various challenges faced by the sector which among others include: lack of funding and non-financial support if form of policies by the government and its agencies to favor the growth of the sector; lack of collaboration between the handicraft producers and stakeholders in the tourism sector on product design to meet the market demands (needs of the tourists, poor marketing strategies which result in low patronage of arts and craft products; and scarcity strategies to overcome the challenges were also suggested which among others includes: Government granting both financial and non-financial support in form of funding and policies to favor the development of the arts and handicraft sector; collaboration and synergy between the art/craft sector and tourism sector for mutual benefits and promote cultural tourism, development of art/craft centres where artisans of the same trade can network and improve the quality of their products and also form co-operative society to make it easier to approach government for financial and non-financial help; and also develop marketing strategies for quick and profitable sales of their products both locally and globally.

KEYWORDS:

Handicrafts, Tourism, Promotion, Economic, Empowerment, Challenges, Strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Handicrafts are type of items made completely by hand or by using only simple tools, usually the term is applied to traditional means of making items and the items often have cultural or religious significance (Suja, 2014). Idoko (2023)

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opined that, craftsmanship is the art of creating unique items by hands and it represents Nigeria's rich culture as it showcases the country's diverse arts, pottery, textiles, beadwork, carvings and others. Craftsmanship is of both cultural and economic importance. The cultural importance is the preservation of the traditional arts and cultural heritage of the people, its economic importance is the creation of job for those who engage in it.

Idoko (2023) noted that the earliest recorded evidence of craftsmanship in Nigeria dates back to 500BC-200AD Nok culture, which is known for its unique terra-cotta sculpture,

and the Benin Empire (1446-1897), renowned for its bronze casting and Ivory carving. The various handicrafts in Nigeria which includes wood work, metal work, leather work, basket and mat weaving, fabric loom weaving, textile tie and dye, bead work and others are essential aspects of Nigeria's culture, which have potentials for economic empowerment and promote tourism in Nigeria. Craft items attracts tourists to a destination, as they like buying them to take home as souvenir.

Ibadat (2016) asserted that souvenir is considered an important component of tourist's experience, and taking home souvenirs as evidence, holds great symbolic value related to pleasurable travel experiences and memories the owner associates to them. The same researcher also noted that selling souvenir is considered an effective way for host communities to take economic advantage from tourism. Mukherjee et al (2016) opined that, strengthening the handicraft sector will ensure that tourists choose to buy more locally produced handicraft items instead of other common products available in the market. The same researcher also noted that handicraft production can increase diversification of tourism products which includes cultural experiences which will help in promoting responsible tourism in the respective communities. The researcher further noted that supporting and creating partnership between tourism enterprises and handicraft producers can be of much benefits for the development of tourism, also people migrating from the rural areas to the nearest cities in search for jobs can be prevented if effort is made to promote local handicraft in the tourist market, as the handicraft sector is an essential source of employment, which encourages job creation and poverty reduction in the respective host communities when the poor communities see that they are getting tangible benefits from handicraft sales, in areas where their livelihood is dependent on natural resources, they are more likely to value and support the protected areas (Mukherjee et al, 2016). Nyawo and Mubangizi (2015) asserted that the handicraft sector in South Africa has the potential for growth and job creation for the unemployed youths. This could also be said about Nigeria situation. Ahamad and Yasmin (2012) affirmed that the handicraft sector has a great potential to create profitable employment opportunities and also has potentials for economic development of a region.

Awodiya (2016) noted that tourism cannot effectively flourish without the cultural components. Ardahaey (2011) opined that tourism is not an industry on its own but a collection of inter-related industries that sell products to tourists in a destination, and the money spent by tourists generates income to the people who engage in the business in the host community. These inter-related industries attract investments, creates more jobs, generate tax revenue and stimulate the economy. Mukherjee et al (2016) stated that handicraft plays a pivotal role in the tourism sector, it does not only attract the tourist but also helps the country to

increase its GDP by the foreign exchange earnings from the sales of the handicrafts.

In Nigeria, the artisan or craftsmanship skills are usually handed down from parents to their children so the skills are transferred from one generation to the next. The artisans' children observing that their parents who engaged in the craft business were poor, because most Nigerians do not place much value on traditional crafts, and the works are priced low, the children are reluctant to take over the business. Most of them abandon the family craft business and go in search of better paying jobs. Moreover, the government and stakeholders in the tourism sector do not promote the production and sales of handicrafts as they may not be aware of their economic and cultural importance. They seem to be unaware of the link between handicrafts and tourism having mutual advantage in promoting and supporting each other. Due to the poor perception of the importance of handicraft in Nigeria, people who engage in its production are very few, unlike in India, Indonesia and other parts of the world where craftsmanship is a lucrative business.

Handicrafts are of particular interest to tourists as they are hand-made, tourists see them as ideal souvenirs because they are uncommon, and they represents the cultural heritage of the tourist destination and also a way of preserving and showcasing the traditional skills which is their indigenous technology and cultural identity.

Ononuju (2015) asserted that the role of arts and crafts in tourism development in Nigeria is of importance to the economy of the country but the neglect of the sector has left the nation in the pitiable bondage. The same researcher stated that the relationship between art/craft sector and tourism industry is poor, and this is hindering tourism development in Nigeria. The neglect by both the government and tourism industry of the art/craft sector, leaving it to the poor artisans alone to manage, is depriving the country of its contribution towards tourism development and other benefits such as job creation and economic growth in the form of increase in foreign exchange.

In the face of the present dwindling economy in Nigeria, there is need for the government to diversify the economy by encouraging partnership by both government and private investors to invest in the craft and art sector to attract more tourists, which will promote the tourism industry for job creation and increase revenue generation. There is now a pressing need for a conference to develop the synergy between handicrafts and tourism, and to raise awareness about the importance of handicraft for tourism development and vice-versa (UNWTO, 2008 cited in Suja, 2014). The contribution of the handicraft sector to cultural heritage and livelihood have not been adequately researched (Oyekunle & Fillis 2016). Upadhyah (2020) noted that there are very few studies on the contributions of handicrafts in promoting tourism. This paper aimed at contributing to the existing knowledge in the field of study, by highlighting the types of Nigerian traditional or indigenous handicrafts; cultural

significance of traditional crafts, potentials of handicrafts in tourism development, potentials of handicrafts in economic empowerment; challenges in the development of arts and handicraft industry in Nigeria and strategies to overcome the challenges in the handicraft industry.

Types of Traditional/Indigenous Handicraft in Nigeria

Craftsmanship has been a way of life in Nigerian communities dating back to centuries. Every ethnic group has its own indigenous arts and crafts as they are essential part of their cultural heritage. Oluigbo (2023) asserted that Edo State especially Benin City, with its rich history and cultural heritage, comprising of bronze casting, coral beads, traditional textiles, dances with colorful costumes, could be said to be the cultural headquarter in West Africa. It is the fortress of culture in Nigeria, renowned with talented blacksmiths, brass/bronze casters, sculptors, beadier, potters and textile weavers (Oluigbo, 2023).

Arts and crafts industry is one of tourists' attractions to Benin City. Some of the handicrafts which make up tourists' products include bronze/brass, casting and wood carvings, iron work (farm tools and household utensils), ceramic (pottery), coral bead work, hand (loom) woven textiles, basket/furniture weaving, and mat weaving.

In Benin City, there are about twelve guilds who produce work of arts and handicrafts, they include wood workers in Owina; Ivory and wood carvers in Igbesanwan; textiles weavers in Owina N'edo; pot makers in Emakho; leather workers in Isohian; bronze/brass casters in Igun Eromwon (Babatunde, 2011). Craftmanship in bronze/brass casting, blacksmith, coral beading, terracotta, pottery and others are pride to the cultural heritage of Edo people. The Igun craft center and the Benin museum are listed as cultural heritage sites by UNESCO. There are also several art workshops and galleries located in Benin City, they include Idubor art gallery, Victor Uwaifo gallery, Ebohon cultural center, Wangboje creative art center.

Among the Yoruba indigenous handicraft is the loom woven textile known as "Aso-Oke". The craft is practiced in Ogbomoso, Iseyin, Owo, Oyo, Ijebu-ode, Ado-Ekiti. Batik tie and dye also called "Adire" is produced by traditional method of creating beautiful patterns on fabrics, using indigo dye. This craft is practiced in Osogbo, Abeokuta and other places in the South-West and in Kano, North-West of Nigeria. A type of woven textile known as "Akwete" is produced in Okene, Benue in North Central, Nigeria and some parts of Edo State in South-South and part of South-Eastern states, Nigeria.

Basket and Mat Weaving

The craft of basket and mat weaving is common in South-West of Nigeria, particularly in Ogatun, parts of Edo State and Northern Nigeria.

Ivory Carving

Apart from Benin City, ivory carving is commonly practiced in Owo and Oyo. Interior decoration items and accessories are produced from ivory.

Pottery Making

The areas that are prominent in pottery craft are Benin, Igbo-Ukwu, Ibibio, Ilorin, Benue and Enugu in Nigeria.

Calabas and Leather Craft

These crafts are common in Northern Nigeria. Calabas is designed with patterns engraved on it and dyed in different colors to beautify it.

Raffia Craft

Raffia handicrafts are produced from the leaves of the raffia palm. The raffia is dyed and woven into various products such as bags, place mats, baskets and hats. Raffia crafts is common in some parts of South-Eastern and South-South States particularly Ikot Ekpene in Akwa-Ibom State in Nigeria.

Cultural Significance of Traditional Craft

Traditional craft or handicrafts play a significant role in shaping cultural identity and preserving cultural heritage (Jonbaily, 2023). The same writer noted that arts and crafts are a tangible link to the past, representing the traditions, beliefs and values of a particular community and that, by keeping traditional crafts alive, we preserve our ancestors' cultural heritage and help ensure that future generations have access to the essential aspects of their cultural heritage. According to Abu (2023), Nigerian traditional arts and crafts are not only to showcase creativity and beauty, they also have great significance in the culture and history of Nigeria, as they represent the people's identity, beliefs, and values. The traditional arts and crafts reflects the people's cultural heritage and play important role in preserving and transforming the culture from one generation to the next. The same writer noted that, Nigerian traditional arts and crafts have influenced modern arts globally, for example the intricate patterns and designs of Benin bronze sculpture have been incorporated into modern arts worldwide, also the Yoruba bead work and indigenous textiles (Aso-oke/Adire) have been incorporated into modern fashion design, inspiring many designers globally.

Potentials of Crafts in Tourism Development

The craft industry has the potential to promote tourism in Nigeria. Handicraft play vital role in the tourism sector as tourists are attracted to a destination to buy them as souvenirs to take memory with them of the places visited while they return home (Mukhrjee et al. 2016). Apart from evoking good memories for tourists, good quality handicrafts arouse the interest of others who see them (when the tourists take them to their countries), to also want to visit the destination (UNWTO, 2018). Partnership between tourism and handicraft producers can be more beneficial for the development of tourism, if attention is given to promoting local handicrafts in the tourists market. The handicraft sector

is an important tourist market which will gainfully engage the citizens, especially the youths who will be producing the crafts on high demands by the tourists. This will reduce poverty and criminality, and other negative impacts on tourism in the host communities as the presence of tourists would be seen as a source of market for their products (which means their source of income), as such, the host communities may be more likely to value and protect the tourist site or destination.

Handicraft production can increase diversification of tourism products which includes cultural experiences, Ibadat (2016) noted that tourists favor symbolic products made in the local areas, and handicrafts that are traditional and have cultural meanings. The same researcher asserted that, taking home souvenir as evidence, holds great symbolic values related to pleasurable travel experiences and memories the owner associates. Bhatta (2016) asserted that arts and culture are a potent force in the life of communities, harnessing them increases the chance of attracting more tourists. Upadhyay (2020) opined that handicraft is an integral part of tourism experience, it represents the local tradition and also symbolizes the places visited by a tourist.

Potentials of Handicrafts in Economic Empowerment

Ardahaey (2011) stated that tourism is not an industry on its own but a collection of inter-related industries that sells products to tourists and those industries attracts investments, creates jobs, generates tax revenue and stimulate the economy. This helps the country to increase its GDP by the foreign exchange. The money spent by tourists in purchasing handicrafts as souvenir generates income to the people who engage in the business and also increase government revenue. Oluigbo (2023) stated that, the present governor of Edo State, Godwin Obaseki, having recognized the great economic potential of the art sector, has continued to work assiduously to reposition cultural tourism as a revenue-earner for the State, the goal of the administration is to position Edo State as world-class culture and tourism destination, leveraging on the huge arts/crafts, culture and tourism potentials of the State.

Arts and crafts promotes creativity and innovation in the artisans (crafters). Mukherjee et al. (2016) stated that, when artisans understands that they can sell their products to the tourists at higher value than the prevailing local market value, they will take interest in learning new skills to improve on their products' quality to enhance their business Nyawo and Mubangizi (2015) asserted that the handicraft sector in South Africa has the potential for job creation for unemployed youths. Mustafa (2011) noted that traditional handicraft production generates both income and employment opportunities thereby helping in poverty alleviation.

Challenges in the Development of Arts and Crafts Industry in Nigeria

Artisans (crafters) are faced with a lot of challenges which is hindering the development of craft industry in Nigeria. As a result of the challenges in the industry, many artisans can hardly make enough income from the business, which is now making most of them to abandon the handicraft business in search of better paying jobs. Tijani et al (2012) reported that traditional handicrafts were not being patronized by local clientele as many prefer to buy foreign crafts. Large scale inflow of machine-made craft items at relatively cheaper cost, compete with hand-made craft products, which puts the crafters at a great disadvantage (Mohapatra, 2011 cited in Bhat & Yadav, 2017). Various studies revealed that majority of crafters create their products based on personal inspiration instead of what the market demands (Makhita, 2017; Hay, 2008). In the study conducted by Tijani et al (2012) in Osobgo, Nigeria, the researchers found that though tourists appreciates the craftsmanship and techniques used by local people to work out the wood, stone, leather and other local resources, the tourists finds it difficult to purchase the resulting products either because of their inadequate designs or sizes, poor quality or lack of usefulness. Most handicrafts producers lack the design skills and market intelligence needed to elevate the perceived value and meaning behind hand-made products which can translate into increasing sales (Johnson, 2006 cited in Tijani et al., 2012).

Lack of financial support from government and financial houses hinders the growth of handicraft industry. Due to poor finance the crafters struggle to keep the business afloat, which makes the volume of handicraft production low (Tijani et al, 2012). Aimurie (2013) reported that the Director-General of Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) while speaking at the "Investor's Forum" organized by the National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC), held in Abuja, Nigeria, noted that poor access to affordable finance for players in the sector has led to a situation where craft men and women grapple with inadequate working capital. Craft producers are small informal organizations, there are no policies in place to regulate the market, they are not registered, as they are unregulated by the government, they are excluded from the national economic plan, as such, they cannot receive financial and non-financial support from the government (Peterson, 2011).

Poor marketing strategy is a challenge in the handicraft industry in Nigeria. The crafters have little knowledge of how to make contact with buyers, resulting in lack of access to the market, which causes them to depend on the middlemen to sell their products, and this leads to the exploitation of the crafters. In most cases in Nigeria, crafters sell their products directly to the consumers through street hawking at prevailing local market value which is usually at low rate. This situation makes craft producers earn low profit, they may even struggle to cover cost of production. As such, the craft industry is not

perceived as a means of sustainable livelihood, it is seen by youths as a low status job. This is discouraging them from learning the trade, so there may be no continuity in the family craft business by the younger generations. Din et al (2014) noted that the rising demand for machine-made goods the gradual, extinction of craftsmanship and government negligence is putting the traditional craft industry under threat of decline.

Jena (2010) noted that there is no media coverage of arts and crafts to promote craft producers and their products both locally and internationally, which is necessary to create more awareness of the craft industry. Upadhyay (2020) reported that in Nepal, the handicraft sector have not been explored for its full potentials in the tourism market. The same researcher noted that while traditional handicrafts are displayed in shops in tourists centers, very few of actually promote the process of producing such items, and very little is known on the link between handicrafts and tourist market, and the challenges faced by those engaged in the business of handicrafts production. This situation is similar to that of Nigeria.

Difficulty in getting raw materials for production is also hindering the growth of the craft industry in Nigeria. Due to the restriction place on tree felling by the government, as a way to curb deforestation, the wood carvers do not have sufficient raw materials for large scale production.

Strategies to Overcome the Challenges in the Development of the Handicraft Industry

Makhita (2017) suggested that one of the strategies to overcome the financial challenges by crafters is to form a cooperative society, which can approach government or its agencies for funding their craft business. The same researcher is of the opinion that cooperatives are needed to create a marketing strategy for their products' supply chain to effectively market their products. Cooperative society can help improve the production capabilities and link its members with a wide array of markets, improve production efficiency and product quality, and reduce production costs. It is necessary for crafters or artisans to find ways that government and its agencies, and private business sectors can support them to develop products that meet the needs of the market, help them to gain access to market and also support them with finance to expand their business. Government and its agencies could create channels of distribution for craft producers to make the products available such as craft market, where the crafters can sell their products. The ministry of commerce, trade and industry should organize trade fairs for handicrafts exhibition, to increase awareness and open up opportunities for craft producers to access both local and global markets.

Hay (2008) opined that, for craft producers to derive an economic benefit, they need to have an understanding of the market, they need to take cognizance of the local and the global trends affecting the craft industry and identify opportunities that might exist, and then adapt their products

and marketing strategies accordingly. To attract tourists to purchase their products, crafters should create designs that reflect the culture of the region as studies have revealed that tourists favour and appreciate handicrafts that are traditional and have cultural meanings.

The government should support the establishment of craft centres where majority of craft producers could connect or network with others in the same trade, or receive support to market their products. The concentration of skilled crafters of the same trade in specific areas which includes: Igun, Igbesanwan and Owina areas in Benin City, Nigeria, creates competition in the craft sector and motivates better skilled work force that produce high quality craft products. Perreira et al. (2006) noted that, craft producers with unique products face less competition and are able to sell their products in high quantities. Nwankunor (2019) noted that, the British had no problem finding buyers for the Benin bronze crafts and other craft work they looted from the ancient Benin Kingdom because of their high quality.

The concentration of arts and crafts businesses in particular centres will facilitate marketing the products and also encourage government and private investors' participation in the craft industry. The presence of arts and crafts centres and galleries has the potential to contribute to the State and local government revenues generation. A well-organized craft industry could promote tourism development and generate employment opportunities for the region.

CONCLUSIONS

The various reviewed literature established that good quality traditional handicrafts have the potentials to promote tourism and economic empowerment. Monuments or natural attractions in a destination are not the only things that entice tourists, good quality handicrafts that reflects or symbolizes the culture of the region, that is, have cultural meanings, is one of the important factors that attracts tourists to a place. Traditional handicrafts have the potentials for cultural identity and sustainability. Handicrafts also have the potentials for economic empowerment by creating jobs for individuals and also a source of foreign currency to the country as international tourists purchase the crafts products. Craft producers face a lot of challenges which include: lack of capital to finance the business; poor marketing strategies which results to low patronage; shortage of raw materials for large scale production; lack of financial and non-financial support in form of policies regulating the industry by the government; and lack of synergy between the handicraft and tourism sector. Unless these challenges are overcome by the government and other stake holders in the tourism sector, Nigeria will continue to be deprived of the huge contributions of the handicraft sector towards tourism development and economic empowerment by job creation and increase in foreign exchange earnings.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Government should grant financial support to artisans (crafters) to develop the handicraft industry.
2. There should be collaborations and synergy between the tourism sector and the craft sector for effective tourism development.
3. Banks should make it easy for artisans to obtain loan to expand their trade.
4. Government should make policies to favour the development of arts and crafts sector.
5. Crafters should research into the global trend in their trade and create high quality designs of marketable products that meet the needs of the tourist' market.
6. Government agencies such as Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry, should organize regular trade fair for the exhibition of traditional handicrafts, with wide media coverage of the events to create awareness and open up market opportunities for craft products both locally and globally.
7. Governments should sponsor skilled crafters to international exhibitions to enhance their creativity.
8. Government should establish arts and crafts centres so that crafters can connect with others in the same trade, this will encourage competition among crafters to produce high quality designs.
9. Crafters should form cooperative societies to make it easy for them to approach banks, investors and government for funding and also create marketing strategies for their products.

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