



Harnessing the Informal Sector through Visual Arts in Post COVID-19 Era for Sustainable Economic Development

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Abstract

The World Health Organisation acknowledged COVID-19 a global pandemic on March 11th, 2020. The pandemic was said to have start off from China, and within a very short period spread across the entire globe. As a result of this, the nations of the world began to introduce stringent measures to isolate positive cases so as to bring under control the transmission rate of the COVID-19 virus. These measures have nevertheless plagued the hub of the sustaining stronghold of the world economies. It is against this backdrop that this paper attempt to examine the Informal Sector as a mechanism for sustainable economic development in a Post COVID-19 Era.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19, Visual Arts, Informal Sector, Sustainable Development

Introduction

Corona virus was said to have start off in Wuhan, a City in China. Consequently, Sohrabi et al, (WHO, 2019) stated that in March 11th, 2020, the World Health Organisation recognized the novel Corona virus (known as COVID-19) a global pandemic. Within the space of time, the virus suddenly spread to countries such as United Kingdom, Italy, United States of America, South Korea and Japan as it attain widespread proportion. Shortly after the emergence of the virus, world leaders across nations had

foreseen that the global pandemic would strain the worldwide supply chains thereby generating economic wreckage across national borders. In an attempt to restrain the spread of the virus through isolation of positive cases, nations began to apply rigorous method such as compulsory closures of national borders and national lockdown coupled with strict obedience to COVID-19 Protocols. These measures of border closures and national lockdown put in place by different nation state beset the nucleus of the sustaining stronghold of world economies. Following the official confirmation of the



pandemic, Gopinath, 2020 asserted that substantive economic indicator from different channel indicated the world was moving towards an unparalleled breaking point in our lifetime, if not in human history. Nevertheless, the increasing damage created by the pandemic exceeds human estimation. Currently, the social and economic jolt occasioned by the emergence of the pandemic has eaten deep into the growth and advancement of nation's economy. It is important to recognize that our reliance on global economic growth and sustainable economic development is no longer feasible hence the need to encourage and promote the Informal Sector through the Visual Arts. evidence has shown from all indications that nations are in a most critical period where it has become important for us to begin to think outside the box to sustain the pathway of harnessing the economic potentials of the Informal Sector for sustainable economic development with special focus on Visual Arts.

The Informal Sector

The informal economy is that economic activities that take place outside the accepted labour market. This sector plays a major role in providing jobs to millions of people

thereby removing a large section of the teaming jobless youth from the street. It is that section of the nation's economy that includes a number of economic activities that are not formally registered by the government. In Nigeria, for example, the informal sectors contribute immensely to the growth of the nation's economy and accounts for a significant portion of national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Examples of economic activities in the informal sector include such occupations as barbing salon, welding, art studios such as graphics and painting, auto electricians, road side mechanics, vulcanizing, street vendors, carpentry, hair dressing salon, car wash, photographic studios, and those that render catering services. Others are those providing services for which they are paid in cash on daily basis. Although the informal sector makes up a considerable segment of the economies in developing nations, it provides profitable opportunities for the poor and has been increasing speedily since the 1960s.

According to the International Monetary Fund, (2021), the unregistered domestic enterprises consist of a significant portion of Nigeria's economy, accounting for as high as 65 percent of GDP. The informal sectors



create more than half of the country's overall economic output and accounts for three-quarters of the entire employment. International Monetary Fund stated further that in Sub-Sahara African, up to 90 percent of jobs outside agriculture are in the informal sector, including household enterprises that are not formally registered, like the domestic workers, the taxi drivers and street vendors. The International Labour Organisation, (2020) is of the opinion that informal economy workers often work in the most risky jobs situation across the entire economic sectors. The informal sector engaged predominantly non-waged workers in unstable work process. Newman, et al (2009) opined that only a small portion of Africa's labour force-mainly males has formal wage-paying jobs in the cities. Most of the labour force is employed in subsistence production in rural areas or in the informal sector of the urban economy. They stated further that the latter often involves women and children, and they include petty trade and other urban services such as cleaning, repairs, manual labour and handicrafts while the lowest earnings come from the rural subsistence occupations which generally require basic traditional skills.

Challenges of the Informal Sector

The informal sector creates a possibility for a vast percentage of the nation's population to break out from extreme poverty and receive earnings that is reasonable for survival. Despite the overall contributions of the sector to the growth of the nation's economy, a larger percentage of the poor are in the informal sector and this poses a threat to the sustainability of the nation's economy. A shortcoming of the informal businesses is that they lack the technical know-how for growth and survival of the business. Another identified problem is that informal sector has the ability of retaining her workforce in unskilled occupation for an indefinite period. Furthermore, the work-related hazard are compounded by such factors as lack of pension and health insurance scheme, low coverage of social safety measures, unusual working hours, poor living wage, inconsistent earnings, high exposure to danger, and not protected by labour laws, Others include, poor quality living, summarily dismissal of employees, and the ability to make any savings is grossly impossible due to poor remuneration.



The Concept of Visual Arts

Over the years, different authors and scholars have attempted to define and re-define the subject of art. The concept of art has gone through several developmental stages. This is why sometimes, defining the subject has controversy and divergence of interest as to what art truly is. This deliberation came to public domain when in the 20th century people began to exhibit their artistic competence and novel ways of experimentation in art. This creative ability and new ways of experimentation, according to Egonwa (2011) brought about various definitions and redefinitions of art that have made it almost a tradition to start books on art criticisms or art history with inexhaustible devotedness to categorization.

For accurate thoughtfulness of the comprehensive description, it has become indispensable to examine few definitions of art and how it influences life and 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 embraces all segment of human activities, ranging from theatre, engineering, fashion, entertainment, communication, architecture and medicine. It is obvious that the centre of interest in art is aesthetics and functionality. Art focuses on the intellectual development of the individual. Therefore, for creative object of art to be considered as beautiful, it must appeal to our sense of emotion, and its virtues are by no means essential to human race.

The most demanding characteristic in the classification of art lies in the fact that art involve the manipulation of object to accomplish long-lasting result. Uzoagba (2008) asserts that visual arts designate those arts addressed primarily to the sense of vision. 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. Egonwa, (2011) opines that visual arts have their own language like other subjects/disciplines. He stated 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 beneficial business enterprise to humanity while trying to redefine the economy of the nation.

The goal of the National Policy therefore is the acquisition of appropriate skills and the 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. (NPE, 2004). Visual arts as a vocation help to prepare and equip individuals, irrespective of age, race and gender. Investment in the Visual arts can be taken as a short and long-term market investment for both individual and corporate bodies. The areas of investment include printing technology, ceramics, photography, textiles and fashions, graphics, and art gallery. Other areas of investment are craft related occupation such as blacksmithing; cane work, interior and exterior decorations, bead making, mat weaving, etc. When these are appropriately and cautiously exploited, they make the individuals wealth creators thereby contributing to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the nation's economy. Awodiya (2011) affirms that recent discoveries have shown that creative artists are not only geniuses with gifted talents but

also people with psychic drive or instinctual urge to create self-employment opportunities both at the level of originality and diversity. He said further that the explanation of the factors that inspire and drive the artists to their creativity and advancement in self-employment emphasises the inherent value of personal qualities. It is these factors that drive them to develop new ideas, convert the ideas into new products and adopt new course of action to improve on, or change the existing products.

Visual arts is intended to provide specific training in a particular vocation and build up artistic skills of the individual. Visual Arts education is expected to equip the individual with the necessary skills, craftsmanship and competencies that enables the individual become self-reliant and wealth creator. In this period of large-scale economic meltdown, coupled with COVID-19 crises, being without a job and poor quality living poses danger to sustainable economic growth of a nation. Subsequently, Visual arts as a constituent of informal sector remain a mechanism for growing and sustaining the nations economy.



Post COVID-19 Era and Sustainable Economic Development

Within a short space of the emergence of the deadly, apprehensive and devastating pandemic, the entire globe was kept hostage. The adverse effect of this deadly disease can be likened to an ill-wind that blows nobody any good. Its consequences are like undomesticated inferno that devours the farmland without special reflection to the possession of the land. COVID-19 with all the attendance consequence has advance alteration in consumers conduct and prompted a focus on self-motivated local producer as a mechanism for healthy economy and job creation. Consequently, the central focus of Visual arts is to initiate a focus for sustainable opportunity and creating a fresh passage for economic development to facilitate a smooth succession to the next level. Nwaimo, (2009), opines that sustainable development is development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their other needs. Without special consideration of intent, visual arts has the potential of creating employment to meet the needs of the present and also cater for the future generation. It is

basically characterised by several qualities such as risk bearing and innovation, foresight, identification of investment opportunities, creativity, hard work, desire for high achievement, desire for high achievement, independence, highly optimistic, and willing to learn. Visual arts play a considerable role in advancing the continental programme of wealth creation and overall economic development. As component of its description, Vocations in the Visual arts have the capability to adjust to difficulties of the current global economic recession occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic. Unemployment and poverty in the perspective of Nigeria economy has become a present-day discuss and a domestic name in the perception of the nation's economy. Visual arts serve as instrument for the developmental approach that is deep-rooted on wealth creation, employment generation and poverty reduction. According to Ebisine (2012), 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. Brickman (2009) emphasised 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. . These skills for employment are embedded in the visual arts. Ulsan (2012) opines that vocational education is charged with the responsibility of training and acquisition of expertise, skills and knowledge that are creative in nature. The NPE (2004) affirms that the goal of the National Policy on 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. The goals of vocational education shall be to give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals who shall be self-reliant economically, advanced craft at technical levels, provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly in art and craft.

In order to remain relevant and tackle the overall economic uncertainty and create a practicable and balanced economy in a Post COVID-19 era, there should be determined efforts to embrace the informal sectors of the economy such as the Visual Arts. The type of vocation that makes up visual arts are diverse, primarily in terms of utilization of technical know-how, capital investment, and

revenue generation. Uzoagba (2008) states that numerous careers for industrious youth are opening up and the financial remunerations are attractive to behold. These careers include fashion and textile technology, commercial art, industrial design, graphic art, production and sales of graphic items, interior decoration, furniture design, printing and publishing, photography, sculpture and painting. Other areas of investment opportunities in this sector include crafts related careers such as leather work, bead making, basketry, casting, metal work, knitting, calabash decoration, weaving, blacksmithing etc. Investments in visual arts in the Post COVID-19 era require a number of ground-breaking and entrepreneurial ability capable of engaging real life investors and market delivery. As a consuming nation, Nigeria is paying the supreme punishment for failing to channel her energy for productive venture. This, of course, is the birth of the dwindling economic growth of the nation coupled with the invariable pressure on the nation's currency exchange rate.



Conclusion

Globally, the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic has further strengthened the rate of poverty and unemployment. The horrifying circumstances have thrown the world into devastating despondency and frustration. However, in order to evade the suffering caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the general public should begin to think of other option as no nation can survive without special consideration to the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills and knowledge development. Visual arts remain an essential apparatus for driving the economy of the nation towards emerging global market. The platform upon which technology thrive is the Visual arts. Interestingly, visual arts offer the training and knowledge for the individuals to acquire scholarly understanding of the intricacy of a global business and manpower for content progression.

Recommendations

Advancing the nation's economy in a Post COVID-19 era entails significant expansion in the activities that create employment to the general public and strengthen domestic production. For nation to legitimately eliminate poverty and create employment for

the teeming populace, it should exploit the following recommendations.

1. Realising that Visual art is an essential constituent of technological progression, a larger section of education expenditure should be dedicated to Visual arts by the three tiers of government.
2. The three tiers of government should have the political will to be consistent in the execution of her economic policies that uphold the informal sectors.
3. The government should, in the long term, organise and coordinate the fiscal policy instruments to support the informal sector, thereby combating the depressing collision created by the pandemic. This will assist to allay some of the damaging effects of COVID-19 pandemic.

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