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## Nigerian Textiles in Sustainable National Development: Forces of Adversity

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### ABSTRACT

Textiles had reportedly played a significant role in the development of Nigeria like in many other parts of the world. Historical studies confirmed that it flourished at both cottage and industrial levels and have improved the socio-economic structure of the country over the years. Subsequent trend showed a decline in the contribution of textiles to the development of Nigeria and resultantly, threatened its sustainability. Therefore, this paper identified and examined inadequate locally produced raw materials, inadequate manpower development, dependent foreign machinery, low patronage resulting from smuggled and low quality products and unfavourable enabling environment as factors responsible for this ugly development. The paper revealed that consistent production of sufficient local raw materials, adequate manpower development, improved technological know-how to encourage local fabrication of machineries and spare parts, curbing smuggling to reduce foreign imports and production of quality products to increase patronage and providing favourable enabling environment such as good roads, regular power supply, adequate water supply and security of the environment are the solutions to the identified problems. The paper concludes that the textile sector will remain a very strong factor of contribution to the development of Nigeria as well as its sustainability if revitalised and given attention .

**Keywords:** Textiles, Sustainable Ddevelopment, Nigeria, Economy, Industry.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of development has to do with the identification of basic needs of the individuals, families, interest groups, communities as well as their competencies or abilities to meet these needs which are channelled or targeted towards gradual growth (Ogunduyile, 2002). It is also viewed as a process of raising the economic, technological, sociocultural and all other required living standards of a people through exploration and efficient exploitation of natural endowments (Meier, 2018). The concept of sustainable national development implies a total commitment of a nation to its natural policy in environment that stresses a properly managed natural resources in meeting the requirements of both present and future generations (Emaviire, 2016). Development is therefore described as sustainable when it provides for the needs of the people for both present and future generations.



The needs may be human, environmental and or material..

When the development of a nation is being discussed, the factors that contribute to such development are also brought into focus. Suffice it to say that these contributions which might be felt in other areas of growth are directed predominantly towards the stability, advancement and sustainability of the economy of such nation. In other words, developing Nigerian economy will imply tapping and harnessing all resources and factors that can reshape the economy towards a purposeful and directional growth.

Clothing which has been presumed to be the third of man's basic and essential needs; the other two being food and shelter, has been historically identified and adjudged one of the factors that formed the basis of most nations' economy (Ajayi 2002). Omo (1973) reported that the textile industry in all its totality is one of the oldest industries in Nigeria and in the world at large. It is a significant contributor to the nation's economy and a major employer of labour. It is unfortunate that the present state of the nation (Nigeria) has engendered some forces adversely affecting the contributions of textiles to sustainable national development. However, it is pertinent and worthwhile to have a brief look at Nigerian textiles.

### **Nigerian Textiles**

Nigerian textiles are generally classified as traditional cottage textiles and industrial textiles. Although the products of the two are seen and viewed as industrial products, means of bringing out the products are different. While the first involves manual process of production the second involves mechanical process of production. The first one is referred to as cottage because it produces in small scale while the second is termed industrial because it produces in large scale based on its mechanical nature of production.

### **Traditional Cottage Textiles**

The traditional textiles technically referred to as cottage textiles can be classified as woven, non-woven, dyed or patterned and are decorated on the surface or designed structurally. The structurally decorated ones such as "Aso Oke"(Yoruba), "Akwete"(Igbo), "Okene"(Ebira) and "Ashiasha" (Tiv), among others, are produced on both vertical and horizontal looms. They are exclusively handled by women and men respectively, and they have age long qualities such as high durability, unique textures and traditional designs. They are usually meant and used for special occasions such as burial, wedding, naming, house-warning, chieftaincy installation ceremonies among others whereas the surface decorated fabrics produced by colouring the surface of either locally woven or imported fabrics through dyeing, printing and applying other elements unto the surface are usually used as daily wears and recently, as window blind, bed spread, pillow cases, table cover, fashion bags, school bags and the likes.

These surfaced decorated fabrics come out in a variety of soothing, complimentary, cool, warm, harmonious and contrasting colours with designs sourced from local environment (Aguiyi, Ukaoha, Onyegbulam & Nwakwo, 2011) Today, the range of design in traditional weaving has widened. Many complicated weaving that take after diamond, sateen, twills etc wider strips of "Aso Oke" produced from cottage foot powered looms are also in vogue. Also, colours of different shades are skilfully used in their production. This is an advancement from the limitation to the use of indigo and its shades earlier practised.

These developments might not be unconnected with Nigeria's contact with foreign culture and materials in her developmental history. Sharing similar view, Okeke (2003) noted that: The traditional methods of fabric manufacture practised by the different ethnic groups in Nigeria before contacts with foreign made clothes brought in by European slave traders and missionaries through the Atlantic trade from the South and those brought from the middle and far eastern countries through the trans-Saharan caravan trades in the north, became gradually influenced by those foreign textiles.

### **Industrial Textiles**

These are manufactured textile materials which have been in practice since the 9th century AD (Okeke 2000). The geographical climate in Northern Nigeria, particularly in Sokoto, Kano, Kaduna, Bauchi, etc. is favourable to the growth of cotton. Cotton material which is comfortable to wear as a result of its high moisture absorbency is also readily available in commercial quantities and comparatively cheaper than other local textile fibres. The economic relevance of cotton had become known outside her borders by the 16th century when native cotton clothes from Nigeria were exported to Europe (Okeke, 1986). According to Battacharya (1980), the first textile mill in Nigeria was established in 1956. Between 1960s and 1970s, the country had witnessed a fast growth of the industry as a result of her rich stable economy arising from her petroleum (oil) boom. Contrarily, the oil boom halted the gradual growth and hopeful shining feature of Nigerian economy as other aspects that could boost the economy such as Agriculture, Textiles, Arts and Crafts were technically neglected through insufficient funding. In particular, the Nigerian Textile Industry which was assessed as the third largest in Africa after Egypt and South Africa, started experiencing a decline in production in the early 1990s and it is yet to recuperate till date (Kayode, Ojo and Adiji, 2020).



**Fig 1: Nigerian Textile**

Source: <https://www.entrepreneurs.ng/central-bank-of-nigeria-plans-to-revive-the-nigerian-textile-industry/>



This ugly development has made the present state of Nigeria's economy hardly sustainable hence Nigeria is still tagged a developing nation (Akintayo, 2020). Resultantly, most textile industries in Nigeria have folded up and a few surviving ones are dying gradually. The surface decoration on mechanized textile products has been studied to also have foreign influence (motifs) particularly from Java, Indonesia and India. For instance, covering the hole surface of a fabric with dominating patterns of flowers, plants, leaves etc is associated with Java and today Nigerian markets are flooded with some of these designs whereas in the African (print) style, there is always the main or major motif behind the traditional fabrics. The other type of print produced mechanically is usually called dress print. It is a design with small shapes taking appearance of floral motifs randomly distributed. Other prints produced by the industry include super print, real wax, brocade and other weaves from jacquard loom, off-loom weaves such as baby lace, cupion lace, voile, shirting and suiting materials.

## **2. FORCES OF IMPEDIMENT TOWARDS NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS.**

### **Inadequate Locally Produced Raw Materials**

Availability of raw materials is the first factor of consideration when proposing the establishment of a venture. The basic raw materials for effective production of textile products such as cotton, silk, dyestuff, chemicals, among others, are not readily available. Where available, the quality is inadequate and not commensurate with the industries' (full) products such as polymers, dyes and other synthetic material (which were later introduced and are being used in Nigeria) are far from being reached despite the fact that Nigeria is a big oil producing nation. My recent (research) visit to Hong-Kong Textile Company, Ota, Lagos revealed that in most textile industries raw materials are imported due to their inability to produce same as claimed by the company's production manager. At this juncture it should be noted that when raw materials are being imported to produce finished products the disadvantages are many the prices of the finished products will go high, unemployment market will increase, the country's level of skilled manpower will be reduced and the country's socio-economic status will be adversely affected. This, in other words, will be narrowing down the country's course of development.

In view of the above, this paper is suggesting that all hands must be on deck to ensure that consistent and meaningful efforts and machineries are put in place to see to the establishment of a virile production of raw materials at home. Cotton and silk should be concentrated upon. After all, it is on recorded that the defunct textile development scheme by the colonial Federal Government in the 1940s that invariably set up hand-loom weaving training centres at Ado Ekiti in 1946 and later at Oyo, Auchi, Ilorin, Aba, Kano and Sokoto between 1946 and 1949.

Silk is another material that its production locally, should be emphasized in an attempt to enrich the nation's economy. It is an historical textile material that put some important nations of the world like Italy and France into fame and prosperity (Carlano, 1985). No wonder, while stressing the role of agriculture in Nigerian economy cannot be over emphasized. Silk is an important raw material for the country's textiles and clothing industry. Apart from its natural high luster, silk has been regarded as "queen of fibres" and could contribute immensely to fashion and clothing. Silk is a vital raw material for Nigeria textile industry as well as being a source of foreign exchange earner. In addition, the industry could provide not only silk material for the Nigerian markets but also in terms of import substitution.



The production of silk starts from the cultivation of the mulberry trees for the feeding of the silk worms before other processes follow. This and the growth of cotton only will reduce the unemployment market while their exportation will improve the country's economy. These are additional employment opportunities to fabric manufacturing and designing.

### **Inadequate Manpower Development and Underutilisation of Trained Manpower**

During the colonial era in Nigeria when textile industries were being established, employees were usually trained on the job to satisfy the principle of manpower development. Expatriates were usually brought to Nigeria to man the strategic sections of the industry. Some of the (University and Polytechnics) trained graduates were unemployed. and where employed, will have their freedom of interaction with the entire industry curtailed by restricting or confining them to just particular sections of the industry that required less skills. Again, instead of employing and encouraging designers in the studio section of the industry, they would collect applicants' (designers) works under the guise of employment, only to get these works scanned in their computer for later reproduction. All these acts are detrimental to national development.

Textile industry has a complex set-up that should be handled with utmost care. Most of its units are independent and so require different skilled personnel to handle different units and have the whole units integrated as one. Such skilled personnel will include, designers, spinners, engineers, technologists, chemists and marketing experts. When these are adequately employed and given intermittent on-the-job training to update their knowledge in respect of latest development in their respective sections, the industry will witness growth.

They should be given attractive remunerations too as an attempt to get the best out of them as the productive rate of Nigerian workers has been described as low when compared with their foreign counterparts who are better remunerated (Obembe, 1996).

### **Dependence on Foreign Machinery**

Nigerian textile mills depend largely on foreign made machines and accessories. This practice becomes problematic and costly to the nations economy when the cost of importation, non-availability of spare parts with poor maintenance culture (arising from inadequate knowledge of their components) are grossly considered (Ohiorhehuan 2001). Often times, these machines wear out with use and age and unserviceable ones are cannibalized to put the serviceable ones into good shape. This will invariably affect production rate and quality of products which normally lead to importation of foreign made products. Efforts need to be intensified in Nigeria's technological development with special focus to the needs in the industrial sector. Meanwhile concentration and emphasis could be put on the fabrication of spare-parts and modification of the existing machines.

### **Low Patronage Resulting from Smuggled and Low Quality Products**

Investigations in and outside Nigerian markets have revealed that an average Nigerian prefers imported textiles to locally produced ones. Price and quality have been observed to be the determining factors for consumers choice of good (Okeke, 2002). The problems earlier identified as militating against the roles of textiles in the nations economy such as lack of locally produced materials resulting in importation and others like high electricity tariff usually result to high price of some of the locally produced textile goods.



The problem of age and mismanaged machinery coupled with non-innovative designs arising from industries refusal to employ trained designers have also resulted in low quality products especially when compared with the imported (smuggled) goods. Smuggling thrives in Nigeria and has almost become a “boom industry” due to the reasons just mentioned. All these put together have resulted in low patronage of Nigerian textiles when compared with the foreign ones and this is seriously affecting the nation’s economy.

To redress this ugly situation, all the aforementioned suggestions need to be upheld and in addition, government should make and enforce laws to support and promote the use of Nigerian textiles through leadership examples (President Obasanjo is really showing this leadership example by wearing made in Nigeria textiles in most of his outings). Government should also provide fund for approved institutions to enable them run relevant educational programmes, grow and process raw materials, fabricate (machines) spare parts etc.

#### **Unfavourable Enabling Environment**

For any business set-up to thrive well in any location, the environment must be favourable to make the set objectives of the business achievable. What constitutes a favourable enabling environment are many. Prominent among them are good roads, adequate power supply, adequate continuous flow of water where needed, other transportation facilities, communication network, and security of life and properties. Nigerian roads are generally bad and not industrial friendly thereby making it practically difficult for vehicle to pass. This is adversely affecting the process of successful industrialisation in Nigeria. The epileptic power supply in Nigeria is another cankerworm in the growth as well as sustainability of the textiles sector. As it is affecting textiles, it is also affecting other sectors that are contributing to the Nigeria economy and such development is not healthy for a growing nation like Nigeria. Its privatisation notwithstanding, many textile industries have relocated to other African countries like Ghana, Cameroon and Benin Republic (Yusuf, 2018) Also, inadequate supply of water to where needed in textile sector and the malfunctioning nature of some of the available water facilities are noticeable factors hindering the contribution of textiles to national development. Other transportation facilities that are comparatively cheap and can ease transportation problems and also propel the wheel of progress in textile sector such as trains and railroads are grossly inadequate and some of the available ones are not functioning well.

Poor communication network is not also helping matters. Information is life and there is no gainsaying the fact that any organisation without proper and functioning communication network is susceptible to negative output. The problem of insecurity of life and properties has worsened the imbroglio. For more than two decades now, people have been living and travelling in fear and properties are not safe; kidnapping, vandalisation of pipelines, incessant burning of houses, offices, companies, places of worship, looting, and other vices now trend. Having identified the problems above, Nigerian government should do the needful by ensuring the provision of adequate required infrastructures such as good and motorable roads, steady and uninterrupted power supply, constant flow of water, adequate and functioning transportation facilities, functioning communication network with vast area of coverage and adequate and appropriate security network for life and properties to make the environment favourable for textiles to thrive and contribute significantly to the development of Nigeria and also ensure the sustainability of the development.



### 3. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The Nigerian textile sector is potentially capable to make the nation grow if given proper handling and attention. Both traditional cottage textiles and machine made industrial textiles are essential to national growth. The current quest for technological development should not be allowed to overshadow the need for our indigenous technology which is paramount to the provision of our traditional needs. The two are of values that can withstand international competitions in the world of textiles. In other words, their established and continued existence and promotion should be well entrenched in the schools syllabus at different strata so as to their importance in nation building enhance their academic eminence.

Now that oil is no more booming as it used to because of its global competition and its proposed gradual functional replacement by other items such as gas, electricity and solar energy, government should shift its focus on non-oil sectors, particularly textiles to boost the country's economy to ensure sustainable national development. To ensure the workability of the above, it is advisable and suggested that all the factors militating against the survival of the textile sector identified earlier should be addressed and given appropriate solutions. Also, appropriate and effective workable policies to ensure the growth and contribution of textiles towards sustainable national development should be formulated.

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