

## **The Challenges and Prospects of Promoting Visual Arts Education for Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The study discusses the concept of poverty and elucidates the various method of measurement used in evaluating poverty through visual arts in Nigeria. It also shows the table of poverty level from 1950 to projection of 2025 in Nigeria. It further shows the juxtaposition level of poverty in Nigeria based on settlement vis-à-vis rural and urban population between 1958 and 2025 in Nigeria. It was concluded that Visual Art is a subject that can bring gainful employment for the school leaver. Hence, there is need to change the societal attitudes towards this discipline in order to motivate prospective artists and those who may be interested in the discipline to alleviate poverty.*

**Keywords:** *Visual Arts, Poverty Alleviation, education*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria is a rich country with abundance of natural resources most of which have not been exploited and utilized for the people, social and economic development. But poverty in Nigeria remains significant despite high economic growth. Geoffrey Parker (2001) stress that, Nigeria has one of the world's highest economic growth rates (averaging) 7.2% over the last decade, a well-developed economy and plenty of natural resources such as oil, However, It remains a high level of poverty. So the solution toward the reduction of poverty is visual art, As Williams (1964) writes: "the existence of a work of art implies processes outside itself linking it to the life from which it has emerged and whose product it is".

Despite the fact that Nigeria is rich in natural resources, majority of her people are poor .Nigeria is the 20th poorest in the world; the poverty level in Nigeria has reached an alarming stage where 70% of its population lives below the poverty line. The Federal Office of Statistic (FOS) report for the period of 1980-1996, indicates of rural dwellers and urban inhabitants in the core poverty respectively (<https://nigerianfinde.com> poverty alleviation). Nigerians have been unable to transform the

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rich resources into economic development to commensurate to her level of endowment (Vasquez, 2001). Majority of Nigerians suffer in the midst of plenty with more than half of the population living below expectation in terms of social conditions (Obadan, 2018). This allows individuals to reason alongside their various fields of learning as in the visual arts to see how to solve the problems of poverty. Since the economy of the country has not achieved the desired goals, there is need to address the possible alternatives toward solving the problems. The challenges encountered at present include how to manage the economic crisis with emphasis on some subject areas like visual arts to the advantage of a large fraction of Nigeria citizenry.

In an attempt to meet the socio-economic challenges posed by the country, visual arts would be one of the major keys to alleviate the poverty of the people. In view of this, series of questions come to mind such as; What is art?, What is poverty, What are the causes of poverty and how can poverty be alleviated in Nigeria through visual arts? The role of art, as one is prepared for it functions in the society is remarkable.

In education, people learn to grow up as useful members of society. According to Ogunmola (2006), art is often considered as the highest form of human expression, it is of great importance in education and thus helping the individual to fit into society. Considering materials end art provides for the society, art can be used in the most commercial fashion to advertise, promote and sell variety of products. Art plays a meaningful role in developing and changing a dynamic child who becomes increasingly aware of himself and his environment (Ajayi, 1985).

As Lowenfeld (1975) stresses that promoting creative thinking to the individual especial the young ones must be considered, this shows that children were importance as it stated, children in education are being prepared to create and the best preparation for creating is the act of creating itself. Gage as cited in Ajayi (1985) supports the idea when he states that the development of individual creativity is essential to discover new relations to formulate ideas and feelings to device new means'

Ralph (1970) stresses that "art is especially well suited to such growth because it encourages freedom of expression; emphasizes emotional and spiritual values, integrates all human capacities and universalizes human expression". In view of this; one has to real-ize the effect of art in child development as a result of being skillful and creative which results in self-discovery and experimentation with series of art materials found within his environment.

Art education becomes a catalyst for a child-centered education in which the individual and his creative potentialities are placed above subject matter (Ogunmola, 2006). One could therefore realize that art experiences are essential to the fullest development in all fields of general education as well as to alleviate poverty in Nigeria.

It is vital to understand the different definitions of poverty that are employed for two very different kinds of impoverishment. According to the state of the region, poverty is either measured as absolute poverty or as relative poverty.

**Absolute Poverty:** Third world countries that lack the basic amenities necessary for standard living, such as clean water, shelter and food are what constitute the definition of absolute poverty. In developing third world countries, an absolute measurement of poverty is employed because it measures a family's or individual's income and its direct relation to the standard threshold of basic needs that are defined within the whole of that nation. This absolute level is better equipped to relieve and mitigate the social factors that are definitive of underdeveloped nations, such as illiteracy, famine, and the near lack of educational amenities (Brady, 2014).

**Relative poverty:** Is when an individual or family lacks the financial ability to maintain the average standard of living for that society. The very nature of this relative poverty is flexible in that it changes as a society fluctuates. A relative measurement of poverty is better endowed to alleviate poverty in industrial nations due to the fact that the underlying issues propagating poverty and poor education in developed countries are dependent on location, and are not as extreme as the conditions of absolute poverty.

Poverty has always had several not entirely separable meanings and is always defined according to the conventions of the society in which it occurs. One can view poverty in three different perspectives as related to human being: social poverty, pauperism and moral poverty (Abdullahi 1998). Social poverty refers to merely economic inequality in terms of property, income, living standards and so on, which lead to inferiority, dependence or exploitation while pauperism describes a category of people who unable to maintain themselves. Also moral poverty defines the place of poverty in the value system of social or of its sub groups and institution. It prevents whether poverty is morally acceptable and what status it confers? So it prevents the poor man from enjoying his life (Abdullahi 1998).

### **The Origin of Poverty**

Available data reveal that the population of Nigeria has been increasing at an alarming rate. Our towns and cities are growing rapidly. In 1921, the population of Nigeria was only 18.72 million (table 1 & 2 ) In 1952 it rose to 30.4 million and in 1931, less than 7 percent of Nigerians lived in Urban centers ,that is settlements with populations of 20,000 and above .The population rose to 10 percent in 1952 and 19.2 percent in 1963 but reliable estimate sited 1984 and 1991to 1995,there are seven cities with



over 500,000 people ; 36cities with over 200,000people ;and 78cities with over 100,000 and 5,050 towns with over 20,000 people (Onibokun, 1987a,1989;1990a).

**Table 1: The Population of Nigeria, 1921-2020**

Year	Total population000	Total urban population	Percentage of population			
No of cities with population 100,000			No of cities with population 200,000and above			
No of cities with population 500,000						
1921	18,720	890	4.8	–	10	–
1931	20056	1,343	6.74	2	24	–
1952	30402	3701	10.2	7	54	–
1963	55670	10,702	19.2	24	185	–
1972	78,924	19832	25.1	38	302	3
1984	96,684	31900	33.0	62	356	14
2020	160,000	–	68.0	132	680	36

**Source:** Federal Office of Statistics (1952, 1963) and projections by Onibokun based on 5% annual growth rate for urban areas, 2.5% for rural areas, and 10% for state capitals.

**Table 2: Nigeria’s Rural and Urban Population, 1950-2025**

Year	Rural Population	Urban Population	Urban Population as % of Total
1950	29,595,000	3,340,000	10.1
1955	32,605,000	4,489,000	12.1
1960	36,220,000	6,058,000	14.3
1965	40,396,000	8,280,000	17.0
1970	45,252,000	11,319,000	20.0
1975	50,835,000	15,511,000	23.4
1980	57,188,000	21,242,000	27.1
1985	63,448,000	28,568,000	30.9
1990	70,383,000	38,159,000	35.2
1995	77,533,000	50,16200	39.3
2000	84,853,000	64,768,000	43.3
2005	91,960,000	82,347,000	47.2
2010	98,435,000	102,831,000	51.1
2015	103,411,000	125,343,000	54.8
2020	106,458,000	148,935,000	58.3
2025	107,758,000	173,135,000	61.6



The social category of the poor arises in stratified societies in which the upper and - lower strata have direct experience of each other. Poverty may adequately define the lower strata as in medieval legal terminology and German proverbs (1998) whatever problem that can be encountered, the joy of human being presently in Nigeria can be derived through active participation in visual arts.

### **The Measurement of Poverty in Society**

There are various relevance data that cause disuniformity in social strata such as income, cost of living, unemployment, consumer expenditure, housing, interest of the people towards arts, lack of confidence and competency among others (Abdullahi, 1998). These have paved way for poverty in society. Even though, those who have real knowledge of art do not have enough capital to establish on their own in order to employ and train the younger ones (Ajayi, 1985). The lukewarm attitude of government to the subject affected many parents who thought visual arts are for the talented ones. Nowadays, the knowledge of people has been widened to realize the value of visual arts and its socio-economic importance especially in alleviating poverty in Nigeria (Ogunmola, 2006).

**Employment:** Since visual arts spread its tentacles to all subjects and disciplines in the school system; it is valuable in alleviating poverty in many ways (Ogunmola, 2006). Those who involve in visual arts derive their value in terms of employment. Some of the students who study arts after their training establish on their own and also they employ some people to assist them in their various studios and galleries, thereby creating means of livelihood to those who would have been in a complete state of abject poverty (Ogunmola, 2006).

**Income:** Arts could also be seen as a means of income generation in that most of the works being carried out by an artist are sold to the people for beautification, religious purposes and culture as well as other purposes (Ogunmola, 2006). According to Agbo (1993), urban sculpture has often complemented man's effort in environmental beautification in many years. Ever since man has been living and congregating in urban clusters, towns and cities, he has used sculpture to commemorate important civic events and glorify worthy personalities (Agbo, 1993). One could realize that this serves as a means of income to the artist who engages in production of the various sculptural works of arts.



***Creativity and Imaginative Reasoning:*** Individual's power of imagination helps in alleviating poverty in the field of arts. Aremu (1993) stresses the importance of art as a means of reasoning and creativity. Art involves a great deal of reasoning, artistic activities; pass judgments on the relevance of a theme or subject-matter without consciously knowing why. The idea of reasoning and skillful execution of art works can alleviate poverty by making the audience to develop quality taste in the aesthetic value that are embedded in works of art through creative potentials or abilities of the individual artist. This gives room for patronage and economic revival.

***Exhibition:*** Exhibition could be organized by artists to alleviate poverty. By this means, an individual artist can sell his products to buyers or art collectors. Also the community can benefit from this in that those who are selling snacks and other items could be around at the exhibition ground to sell their commodities for those who are around to watch the exhibition. This is a way of projecting individual artists and making them to get more exposure to the public. (Ogunmola, 2006) Hence, many commissioned works are won through this avenue and consequently increasing the business link of the people.

***Organizing Workshop Centres:*** As a means of alleviating poverty, artist can group themselves to organize workshop centers to train the younger ones. Haggery (1940-1965) cited in Ajayi (1985) states that creative arts are essential to a balanced programme of education which is to develop the social orientation of youth and realization of all constructive potentialities of the individual which can lead to alleviating poverty.

***Creativity of the Artist:*** All artists are creative people but there are a lot of jobs that are not visual arts related that calls for mere technical skills which fetch the practioners some money for their living. However, Lowenfeld and Britain (1975) observed that creativity is thought of as being a constructive, productive behaviour that can be seen in action or accomplish. It does not have to be a unique phenomenon in the world, but it does have to be basically a contribution from the individual ( Lowenfeld and Britain 1975). Creative gift is an act of innovation which can help to arouse the interest of the people toward the creative value of the art objects (Agbo,1993).For instance, ceramics is one of the useful arts developed by man and it has remained important ever since . An excellent vocation can be made in ceramics provided that the artist has the requisite skill, imagination and artistic vision (Ogunmola, 2006). Artists whoever acquired this creative gift may be absorbed into one of the ceramic industries springing up in the country or he may better still, work in a freelance capacity. The ceramic medium (clay) has rich potential, it is "one of the few materials which has no apparent value of its own in a raw state, yet can be made into valuable objects" (Adejumo, 1986.)



**Loans:** The government can help to alleviate poverty by giving out loans directly to the artists to set up and run workshop centers and studios where people could be trained. An example of this is the scheme introduced by the Federal Government under the auspice of National Directorate of Employment (NDE). The loan granted the artist could be used to produce works of art with a view to selling them. This can encourage those who are artistically talented but have no money to set up a business. The artist too can alleviate poverty by joining co-operative societies where he can borrow money for important projects to fetch him some amount in return.

**Monumental Projects:** The artist can work towards the production of monumental projects for the society as well as for the government which can later be launched and thus derive his own income from them. This would serve as a means of alleviating poverty and gaining self-recognition for the artist.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Parents should encourage their children right from youth to develop interest in the field of visual arts so as to allow them to be self-reliant. The teaching of Arts in various schools at all levels must be encouraged by the government, the school authorities and society at large. It is pertinent to note that Art is a subject that can bring gainful employment for the school leavers, there is need to change the societal attitudes towards this discipline in order to motivate the artists and those who may be interested in the discipline. There has never been dearth of plans and programmes designed to address the issue of poverty alleviation, yet it is sad to note that little has been done in practical terms. Above all, the poor perception, short-sightedness, non-implementation of policies whatsoever, mass corruption, despotic and non-committed regimes are responsible for the plight of the poor. Unless fundamental structural changes are made both at the policy and management levels, which implies inter alia taken into consideration of the ideological and social imperatives, vis-a-vis overhauling the whole planning and implementation machinery, situation may not change for better (islamicmarkets.com. 2018).

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