

NIGERIAN VISUAL ARTISTS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS.

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Abstract

This paper is principally concerned with the professional Nigerian visual artists who pass through universities without acquiring entrepreneurial skills. Majority of the university graduates in Nigeria lack adequate knowledge of entrepreneurship. As a result those not gifted to pursue interests in the academia may not fare well in the labour market. Few others end up as petty workers to Media or Textile industries without a bright future. This paper examines the knowledge capacity and capability of the visual artist to adapt to the entrepreneurial experience of contemporary society. Challenges and prospects of entrepreneurship are highlighted to educate the general public, government, National Universities Commission and prospective university graduates on the need for entrepreneurial education.

Introduction

One can argue that visual arts and entrepreneurship are inseparable concepts as denoted by their functionality. Visual arts afford one an opportunity to become flexible and confident through expression of one's ideas in a visual language. It is a way to clarify and fix ideas in the mind through visual expression, by strengthening what has been learnt about something, while entrepreneurship is an intention to go on business to seek out investment opportunities in an environment, and be able to establish and run an enterprise successfully, based on identifiable opportunities. This paper is determined to see if visual artists could undertake entrepreneurship as an alternative to a more conceptually orientated career in the academia or studio. The paper also examines challenges and prospects of entrepreneurship in Nigeria and suggests ways forward for visual artists in entrepreneurship.

The word, visual art as described by Booth and Hachiya (2004) is a broad range of forms, genres, and styles concerning the traditional arts of drawing, painting, sculpting, print making, architecture as well as commercial art. While this definition may be seen as essentialist in its attempt to impose a certain hermeneutic closure on unstable subjects, one can still argue that visual artists are individuals that are visually literate, skilful and knowledgeable to understand and investigate images, media and artworks as well as interpret the complex contemporary world. Achebe (1975) also sees visual art as an integral component of everyday life. To Achebe therefore, artists are the ones that create things for the service of humanity. He adds that:

...art is and was always, in the service of man. Our ancestors created their myths and legends and told their stories for human purpose...they made their sculptures in wood and terracotta, stone and bronze to serve the need of their times. The artists of that time lived and moved and had their beings (Achebe 1975: 29).

Mazrui in *World Views* (1997) posits that:

the work produced by visual artists are personal objects that fulfill notions of practicality in human societies and satisfy the human desire to embellish one's environment...the personal and utilitarian objects like bead jewelry, textile designs and product, carpentry, paintings, ceramic designs and products form part of environment that creates a person's feelings of being at home (Mazrui 1997).

Fasua (2006) elaborated the meaning of entrepreneurship as one's willingness and ability to seek out investment opportunities in an environment, and be able to establish and run enterprises successfully, based on identifiable opportunities. An entrepreneur is the person who sees business opportunities and takes advantage of available scarce resources to exploit the opportunities profitably. He or she bears the non-insurable risk in the enterprise, and direct the human and material resources in the business objectives.

Nigerian visual artists and entrepreneurship

Art practice from its historical records may have possessed some entrepreneurial promise. Cave men's attempts to incorporate inscriptions of their hunting expeditions on the caves they lived were earliest vestiges of entrepreneurial spirit among artists. Nigerian visual art precedes colonialism, yet on a broader context, artists such as sculptors, musicians, weavers; dancers were trained informally in a traditional method (apprenticeship system). Mbahi (1990) in support of this view posits:

...Nigerian society had trained artists in a traditional way. Art was usually practiced as a family trade and the techniques and the secrets of the profession were handed over from elders to their offsprings. For instance if a child is born to a woodcarver would start to practice his father's craft as early as when he is six years of age. He first learn the different types of wood, then the tools and the techniques used by his father in carving. By the time he is sixteen (16) or so he would acquire enough skills and confidence to produce good works on his own (pp12-13).

In the entire world, Nigerian art is among the most prominent, and the most sought after. Nigeria's artistic modernity had its origins in the art objects of Nok Culture, Ife Art, Benin Art, among others. The Nigerian visual artists straddle the 'traditional' and 'modern' stylistics. The practice of traditional artists could not flourish because of the influence of the colonial administration. The ideology of Christian missionaries and western education replaced the

indigenous one through formal education. This circumstance had been the long standing stumbling block for years until a group of intellectuals known as pan Africanists founded Mbari Art Club to overcome the general apathy towards art in Nigeria.

This attempt was called “experimental art” because it was aimed at finding most suitable forms of expression which can be understood by people. Examining these circumstances of recreating Nigerian art, the vanguards were not all studio artists. They include literary artists such as Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo, Susan Wenger, Ulli Beier and Mphalele and J.P.Clark. They were the prominent figures who, in spite of the effort of by some other groups to revive Nigerian art, for unknown reason marginalized the traditional artists and prioritized artists that have acquired formal education. On the contrary, this sidelining of traditional artists did not satisfy Ulli Beier who was at the vanguard of the establishment of Mbari Mbayo Art School in Oshogbo. This philosophy of this art school foregrounds the rise of local art ideas that thrived in a rather entrepreneurial fashion. Artists were brought under the rubric of a collective and charged to produce works that have both utilitarian and aesthetic values.

On whether visual artists could be able to undertake entrepreneurship there is need to re-examine the opinion of Fasua (2006) which holds that a person could be qualified to be an entrepreneur if the person has the willingness to seek out investment opportunities in an environment, and be able to establish and run an enterprise successfully. For this paper to justify the argument as whether the visual artist can become an entrepreneur and succeed in entrepreneurship, we should look at the definition of visual artist by Uzoagba (2000) which states that the visual artist is flexible, creative and confident person who can create and fix ideas in the mind through reiteration, by strengthening what has been learnt about something.

Therefore, if the visual artist can explore the theories and principles of entrepreneurship through practice, interaction and experience many interested visual artists may become entrepreneurs. To support the entrepreneurship of the visual artists, I advocate that the following should be observed:

Feasibility planning: This entails detailed information of the objective of the business, the nature of the business, and its limitations. The feasibility is just like building plan and starting a business without plan is most unpredictable. Visual artists should regard it as blueprint for business yet to accomplish.

Source of financing the enterprise: Funds are required to transform a business into reality. Without the startup capital, the best business dream remains just that, a dream. The introduction of a business remains largely an idea, until it is financed. Visual artists should know that the financial needs, sources of funds and methods of raising capital, all depends largely on the size of business and form of ownership.

Proper utilization of funds and implementation business: As a matter of fact, most visual artists do not attain the knowledge of Business management. The issue of finance in business is very crucial and visual artists need to understand how to liaise with Small and Medium Enterprises Investment Equity Scheme to further enlighten them about entrepreneurship. The Small and Medium Enterprises Investment and Equity Scheme is a voluntary initiative of the Bankers’ Committee approved at its 246th meeting, held on 21st December, 1999. This initiative was promulgated by Federal Government of the Republic of Nigeria to promote Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) as vehicle for rapid industrialization, sustainable economic

development, and poverty and employment generation. The function of the SME is to register and guide the business firms towards prudent utilization of funds and to keep update records and structures available for inspection by appropriate authorities.

Challenges of entrepreneurship

The challenges faced by entrepreneurship in developing countries are monumental and quite similar. Commonly found among them are unstable and highly bureaucratic business environment. The laws governing private enterprise, especially business registration and taxation systems, are believed to be overly complex and difficult to understand. Contract and private property laws are often designed and enforced (Kisunko, et al, 1999; Mambula and Kiggundu, 2002).

The study of Kiggundu and Mambula revealed that most challenges faced by Nigerian Entrepreneurs were as follows:

- a. Poor infrastructure which include bad roads, inadequate water supply, erratic electric power supply, difficulty of accessing bank credits and other financial institutions.
- b. Centralization of Small and Medium Investment and Equity Scheme.
- c. Entrepreneurial Education is limited Business, Management and
- d. Accounting Curriculum.

Prospects of entrepreneurship

Several scholarly studies have shown that most of the developing countries faced the problems of unemployment as a result of individuals' dependence on government. The prospects of entrepreneurship included independence, growth and satisfaction, increase of income, boosting of the economy through revenue, enhancement of national development through local manufacture and reduction of importation. The findings of the study of Kara and Benzing (2007) support this view and add that: "micro and small scale enterprises are leading force in the development of African countries. They are essential for economic growth in many developing countries. They added that entrepreneurship create independence, satisfaction and growth economically" (pp1-2).

Manu and Thorpe (1998) clarified that entrepreneurship does not only improve nation's economy by the reduction of importation but also help individual entrepreneurs make money and become business owners because of autonomy, freedom and independence.

Conclusion

Since Visual Artists are flexible and confident people through saying, telling, designing, printing, sculpting and painting ideas in a visual language, entrepreneurship is suitable for Nigerian visual artists. Based on the principles of entrepreneurship, visual artists can be entrepreneurs as long as they adhere to the theories of business and Small and Medium Entrepreneurial Scheme. The education of entrepreneurship should be unlimited to all universities in Nigeria. It should be incorporated into general studies courses across the levels of undergraduate degree programmes.

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