

OUR ARTS: Our Wealth and Health

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Abstract



The Arts can be active instrument for meaningfully progressive development in Ghana. It can also be used as 'litmus test' in national economic development to expedite the developmental success stories of Ghana. Can Ghana rethink the place of her art in national development to save her from her titanic economic affliction? The paper attempts to discuss the massive artistic orientation for Ghana in using her arts to accumulate wealth and promote health to her people, and justify how this could be done, supporting this argument with empirical and circumstantial evidences. Based on the findings of this study, further suggestion are given through which wealth creation and health promotion could be maximized so that the arts and craft industry could become the lynchpin of the country's economy.

Introduction

Art, as a form of human expression, mirrors the past, the present and the future. It is a tool for global development. Throughout history, artists have been among the movers and shakers of nations. The Arts form our frame of reference, shape our ways of thinking and our relationships to the past, the present and the future. It is the fixed point about which any meaningful development takes place anytime, anywhere. In the 1980s, China, India and Ghana were low income countries with a per capita income of about US\$200 (constant 2000 US Dollars). In the year 2004 (that is twenty five years later), exports of electronics, machine parts, children's toys and footwear have empowered China to hurriedly leapfrog from a low to a middle income country status and is now one of the leading buoyant economies in the world. According to Hu and Khan

(1997), China's strong artistically-inclined productivity growth upsurge by the 1978 market-oriented reforms, is the primary foundation of China's unparalleled economic performance. India and Malaysia's per capita incomes increased by 100% and Vietnam's by 125% (Chandra & Osorio-Rodarte, 2007). Why has Ghana not become richer with all her rich resources? What is the secret behind the success of those countries? Did the arts contribute, in any way, to their economic independence? These are pertinent mind-boggling questions which are thought-provoking in finding answers to Ghana's economic underdevelopment and instability.

The Arts

The Arts – both visual and performing, continue to animate our lives. Before the invasion of the colonialists, the Ghanaian visual artists (craftsmen) were the inventors, designers and technocrats while the performing artists were the expressive entertainers and orators. However, the consequence of the acculturative process as a result of Eurocentric formal education, religion, economy and other social practices have changed the equation but by no means has it been totally negative. Nketia (1965. p. 1) insists that in “many Ghanaian societies, music, dance and drama are traditionally organized and practised as an integral part of every day [everyday] life.”

Today, Ghana has smart creative artists and scientists who together could produce simple high-tech income enhancing products such as industrial equipment, lightweight motor vehicles, medical equipment and domestic appliances. It must be the responsibility of the government to provide machinery and a productive environment that can push forward the wheels of creative development. In Obama's remarks to Ghana's parliament on July 11, 2009, he stressed that:

From South Korea to Singapore, history shows that countries thrive when they invest in their people and in their infrastructure; when they promote multiple export industries, develop a skilled workforce, and create space for small and medium-sized businesses that create jobs.

The government must create interdisciplinary collaboration between student artists and scientists by establishing a “University of Applied Arts and Science” to put these great talents which have been in abeyance into use. Using this approach will build on Ghana's pre-colonial and post-colonial artistic ingenuity to producing her needs from her bountiful untapped rich resources thereby making contribution to the modern

artworld. Implementing this plan will bring together a team of technical experts in solving Ghana's engineering, designing, production and marketing problems.

Local Ghanaian gunsmiths acquired their gun production skills and techniques from the pre-colonial German settlers in Alarvanyo and its environs in the Volta region of Ghana (B. Sersah, personal communication, April 21, 2012). These gunsmiths who have been in active production have suffered from arrest, persecution and incarceration for the reason of producing local guns (figure 1) and ballistics which constitute over 80% of weapons used in crime perpetration in the country, according to the Ghana Police Service. Instead of stifling their creativity with these police arrests, these local manufacturers should be seasoned and placed under the Special Forces in the Ghana's Army to produce guns for the country to curtail their importation. World Countries News (2012) quotes ECOWAS report that Ghanaian guns are known to be cost-effective, easy to buy, and reliable. If these people with just little apprenticeship have succeeded in producing guns which are patronized by a section of the people, why should the nation not benefit from their ingenuity? Ironically, the president of the republic, John Mahama recently went to South Africa to negotiate the purchase of locally made ballistics.



Figure 1:
Locally produced gun from Ghana.

Arts and Wealth Creation

The Arts and craft have shown unflinching potentials for wealth creation in Ghana. Even though global statistics are difficult to track, many countries have gathered individual statistics because of the relevance of Arts to their economies. Ghana's handicraft exports, which started from the US\$1000 dollars levels in early 1990 s registered impressive performances from US\$2m export earnings in 1995 to US \$15million in 2001 and US\$11million in 2002 (Barbados Investment and Development Corporation,2008; Littrell, Cockram &Strawn, 2005). Apart from its contribution to GDP, many people are employed in this sector, considering the number of people who make a living in the music and film industries art and crafts industries and shops; art galleries and Craft Villages, indeed, it is noteworthy that both industries create employment for a plethora of people. For instance in Winneba alone, small scale businesses such as Ekem Art Pottery, a producer of "Gyapacoalpot" and crucibles, and Mbroh Ceramics Ltd, producers of building materials together gainfully employ about 73 workers. Many of these employees in these businesses are breadwinners of their respective families, and make a living from the emoluments they gain. In this regard, the pronouncement by the Minister of Trade and Industry, Hon. Hannah Tetteh, that Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) including the creative industry form a major part of all establishments in the country, constituting about 90% of all enterprises which generate about 60% of employment, is therefore no exaggeration.

Unlike Ghana which does not invest much money in the Arts and crafts industry, some industrialized countries grant significant importance to crafts. Hnalow (2009) says in Italy, 24% of national enterprises belong to the crafts sector, and employs 1/5 of the private sector workers, among whom 100,000 perform high quality production. Italian crafts exports represent 17% of the GDP (Noella, 2007). A study conducted by the Thailand Development Research Institute Foundation in March 2000 estimates that total employment is around 30 million people, out of which 20 million are employed in the "informal sector". Hnalow adds that in a government Meeting to Alleviate Poverty, held on November 25, 2001, estimated that the population involved in the crafts sector represented around 10% of the aforementioned figures. This includes fulltime as well as part-time workers, which effectively puts the number of craftspeople around 2 million. Barbados Investment and Development Corporation (2008) says India places premium on its Arts and crafts. It writes that:

India is one country that demonstrates the strong role of the handicrafts sector in social and economic development. Handicraft exports (excluding carpets) registered US\$1.4

billion and US\$1.7 billion in 2001/2 and 2002/3 respectively, an increase of 21%. The country has integrated culture and artisanship in the educational curriculum. There is a National Export Board for almost every export sector including handicrafts. The majority of small-scale businesses in India are engaged in handicrafts. The Government has instituted an entire ministry of Textiles and Handicrafts to serve a sector comprised of some 200 million artisans.

Apart from export of Kente, batik, tie-dye and the production of funeral cloths, the Ghanaian textile industry, according to Kojo Fosu (class lecture, 2011), must diversify into the production of clothing materials that can be used for local production of brasiers, underwears, socks, handkerchiefs, towels, suit and all other apparels that Ghanaian public wear. These products, when of good quality, stand a greater chance of gaining domestic and foreign patronage thereby generating huge income.

Page and Carey (2007) argue that in the UK, total revenues for 2007 in the music industry alone came to £3.2 billion with eighty percent of revenue from the consumer, and the remaining twenty percent from business-to-business. In 2008, UK's share of single track downloads was measured at 9.8%. UK's achievement in revenue mobilisation in the music industry is as a result of good formulation and implementation of effective copyright and patent laws that protect their intellectual properties. What lessons can Ghana learn from this? Until Ghana makes arts laws to address sophisticated legal issues affecting distinct segments of her arts such as copyright, fine art insurance, regulations governing marketing of arts, protective import and export tariffs or restrictions without necessarily being protectionist, development of her arts would remain dormant. Ghana's law enforcement agencies must see to the thorough enforcement of copyright and patent laws to protect the creative intellectual properties of Ghanaian artists and artistes. The liberal tax and hassle-free art market in Malaysia allows prospective art buyers to purchase without checking whether or not they can take them back to their respective countries. This investment minded atmosphere makes Malaysia a good destination for art tourism. Ghana can do same.

The Ministries of Trade and Industry, and Tourism must implement a full marketing and branding campaign to raise awareness of the sector by instituting a tourist craft market at all tourist sites in the country through targeted promotional techniques. It is more profitable furnishing tourist sites with portable but simply sophisticated modern Ghanaian artistic paraphernalia for patronage by tourists.

Improving the finishing of crafts items, wooden products in particular is also essential. Government must see the need to institute a State-owned Export-Import Bank to provide Export Financing and soft loans for the members in the industry as in the case of India. Government's first time provision of a two million Ghana cedis (GH¢2,000,000) package to boost the music industry as indicated in her 2012 financial statement is a step in the right direction but woefully inadequate. Paying attention to developing all the sectors in the creative arts industry in Ghana have the capacity to contribute over 50% to Ghana's economy.

The idea of establishing of National Art Gallery, urban and rural art galleries, and community theatres to serve as venues for the promotion of the arts as documented in the Cultural Policy of Ghana (2004), should be implemented as a matter of urgency due to its magnificent import in leading to "new stride in our cultural development" (Nkrumah, 1963, p. 8) and national economy.

Seminars, worships, refresher courses and skill training should be organised from time to time for artists, artistes and craftpersons in the industry to equip them with first-hand knowledge of the local and foreign market for long-term success. This could help in reducing the traditional distribution channel (artisan/artists through the Exporter, wholesale importer, retailer to the consumer) most artisans/artists work through to direct distribution (from artists/exporter to consumer). In the presence of the current sophisticated technology, ease of communication and more shipping options in the global market, this is a possibility.

Arts and Health Promotion

It is an established fact that the health of the people is the wealth of the nation, as Benjamin Disraeli, once a British prime minister and writer puts it, "The health of the people is really the foundation upon which all their happiness and all their powers as a State depend." Health has very broad concept far more than the absence of disease. According to Working Group on Integrated Health Systems (1998, p.7), health is the "maximal attainment of physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being." The Ghanaian Arts have not relented on its effort in health promotion. Health promotion is defined by the American Journal of Health Promotion (2003) as "the science and art of helping people change their lifestyle to move toward a state of optimal health". The World Health Organization (1998) defines health promotion simply as "the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve their health." Various activities in the arts help in exercising the body for improving its normal functions.

The Arts promote health through music, films, advertisements as well as the physical manipulation of materials with tools and equipment. Music is highly therapeutic. It appeals to virtually the full range of human emotions. It soothes, excites, uplifts, inspires, comforts, creates ecstasy, reduces tears and heals loneliness. The Ghanaian music continue to preach against prostitution, drug abuse, unprotected sex and the dangers of HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Art therapy has been used in a variety of clinical settings and populations. Nainis, Paice, Ratner, Wirth, Lai and Shott, (2006, p.166) in their study into the efficacy of art therapy in cancer treatment, report that art therapy is effective in “reducing a broad spectrum of symptoms in a diverse sample of cancer inpatients.” Art therapy has been used with a variety of pediatric medical populations, including cancer, kidney disease, juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, chronic pain, and severe burns (Malchiodi, 1999). A recent research report reveals that women with breast cancer receiving radiation treatment experienced improved mental health, physical health, and an overall higher quality of life after five sessions of art therapy (Cancer & Art therapy, 2012).

The Nsawam Orthopaedic Centre established in 1961 with the primary purpose of rehabilitating the physically challenged in the country, continues to manufacture orthopedic shoes, shoe prostheses, leg braces, artificial legs and arms, and splints for the over 6000 patients yearly. Prosthetics, which involves designing, producing, and using of artificial body parts, require sculptural knowledge and that of leatherworks. The Mobile Unit of the Centre continues to provide or repair orthopedic appliances as well as create many opportunities for them to develop physically, emotionally and spiritually (Nsawam Orthopaedic Centre, Ghana).

Maximizing Wealth and Health through the Arts

Several countries have taken giant steps in developing their Arts and craft largely by implementing strategic initiatives to unearth and harness talented individuals, improve their skills, and provide support for the various sectors in the industry. The industry is not the preserve of only developed economies as Hnatow (2009, p.3) observes:

Developing countries have a leading position in this sector because of their local resources, rich cultural traditions and indigenous designs and products. The trend in the market continues to grow in their favor as consumers and retailers are increasingly demanding handmade, ethically sourced products that are differentiated from mass-production.

Artisans have an enormous opportunity to leverage their culture as an asset for economic growth. Efforts to grow this sector will not only foster economic development, but also preserve cultural identity.

Antubam adds that Ghana has a “burning obligation to place her distinctive contributions to the varied field of the arts at the disposal of the rest of the world” (Antubam, 1965, p.189). Making use of this brilliant opportunity is tantamount to marketing Ghana to the outside world, creating employment, wealth and promoting the health of its people. A platform for identifying, exposing and supporting young artisans, artists/artistes should be created at the district/municipal levels. Private establishments such as like TV3, which promotes talented kids should be given more public support to attract other organizations to follow suit.

Conclusion

It is clear now that Ghana needs to diversify from the mere contentment with the accumulation of knowledge about her arts to creative researches and industrial production of plastic arts that contribute tremendously to development of the arts. In other words, the study of her arts must stimulate creativity and be tied to globally marketable modern industrial productions. Ghana must rethink about her arts and put lots of emphasis on its creative industry for its capacity in enhancing entrepreneurship among its people especially the rural population, empowering rural women, generating income and reducing poverty. Undoubtedly, the industry is a significant source of foreign exchange earnings.

Ghana must pay more attention to her arts and craft to match its claim that the “arts and crafts continue to influence national development” (Coordinated Programme of Economic and Social Development Policies, 2010 – 2016, p.27). Ghana must explore the dialectical relationships between modern and traditional practices of her arts, find the missing linking in the arts curriculum from basic to university level of education, adjust and reorientate her attitudes and thoughts towards the Arts and crafts industry, exploit it fully to contribute substantially to the other sectors of the national economy to fully enjoy its additional positive effects such as wealth creation and health promotion. It behooves on Ghana to marshal necessary resources and appropriate strategies for the betterment of the Arts and crafts industry. This needs a collaborative effort from the government, National Association of Handicraft Exporters (NAHE), NGOs, Civil Society Organizations and other stakeholders.

Deeply rooted in the study of the Arts and Science for nearly four decades, it is time for Ghana to process and repackage her bountiful raw materials through her arts for global trade rather than exporting them in less profitable raw state. Ghana's failure to do so will be a stinging indictment on the proficiency and cost-effectiveness of her Arts and Science education.

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