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**Textile Designs and Fashion as Strategic Resource Tools for  
Economic Development in Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

Textile designs and fashion no doubt should be a part of the culture and economy of the development of a nation like Nigeria. There is no gainsaying the fact that all of the instruments of advancement of any nation, economy is predominant. The economic drive of any nation is majorly routed on generation of income from any possible source, be it internal or external. However, as Nigeria operates a somewhat monogamous economy based on oil exportation, textile and fashion should be considered as an alternate and veritable non-oil commodity for economic development. Growing out of the above illustration, this paper explores a number of ways and ideas by which untapped economic potentials of textile design and fashion can be in other to improve the economy. The qualitative and analytical approaches were employed in this study. For there to be a more sustainable economic development, textile design and fashion in their formal and esthetic richness are hitherto the cannons to explore. The paper concludes that international channels in particular should be provided for the distribution of textile design and fashion as commodities which will earn the country foreign exchange mostly required for economic development.

**Key Words:** Textile designs and fashion, Economic drive, Sustainable economy, International channels and Foreign exchange

### **Introduction**

There are many definitions of academic explanations of the term economic development. Orji kalu (2014) referred to as the quantitative and qualitative changes identified in the economy. Suffice it to say that for any implementation strategies in the area of economic development of a nation like Nigeria, one must also be considering or making references to factors that can bring such development to bear. In fact, Ohene Boi (2002:199) explains that the economic development of a nation is predicated upon the overall development of national resources both human, environment and material required for the total national well being at present and for reassuring growth in the future. One can say therefore that the impact of the factors required for a nation's economic development and careful understanding of the operating machineries underlying such development in socio-economic context or platform is very necessary. With regards to Nigeria, the most important factor is the readiness of the nation to recognize and explore other sectors that can enrich the economy in other to compliment our mono-casual economy rooted on oil exportation. This recognition should be purposeful in other that nothing will encumber other complementing sectors from being a part of the mainstay of the economy.

It is worthy to note that the development of Nigeria's economy will require a strong mobilization of other sectors such as textile design and fashion in other to achieve a virile economic destiny. And the process to be involved in actualizing this goal must be purposeful and deliberate, not happening by chance or accidental and not planned. Purposeful drive in harnessing the economic potentials of textile design and fashion in the above context must not only be strategic, it should also target at definite achievement that is well formulated.

Presently, the world over is moving towards a global textile and fashion consciousness and an awareness in the sense that they have become part of the mainstream and considered a universal commodity that can transform the economy to sustain life and better environment. One can therefore say that in terms of economic development, the impact of textile design and fashion can be considered immeasurable. In fact, Sunmonu (2008:1) notes that no nation can do without a virile textile industry. It is this broad understanding of textile design and fashion as veritable tools towards economic development in Nigeria that have engaged my primary attention in this paper.

Textile design and fashion as well as their associated activities whether modeling, economic, religions, social, or cultural or political values have their history. However, this paper provides a little insight into the historical development of textile design and fashion. The weaving and designing of cloth and by extension its use as

fashion has been very significant to mankind. Famuyide (1998) notes that fashion and textiles are inseparable. Ogunduyile (2003:148) informs that it has been noted that the study of fashion and textiles is the study of mankind. Bruce Onobrakpeya (2009: XXII) states that textile design and their use as dress fashion / cloth occupy a high place and is foremost in the expression of a people's identity. On his part Ajayi (2002:270) says that in most countries of the world, clothing has been adjudged an essential aspect of life. Human beings therefore cannot do without involving textiles and fashion in their daily existence. Based on the above, it is evident that textiles and fashion occupy a high place in the people's world view as they are exclusive characteristic to human and featured prominently in human societies. However, it is not known when human imbibed the culture of producing textiles and wearing clothes. Chukueggu and Cyril-Egware (2009:6) are of the view that textile is one of the earliest forms of human artistic expressions and reflects man's environment, his society as well as community. Also the believe of anthropologists is that due to harsh weather conditions such as heat, cold and rain, human adapted animal skins and vegetation as covering for protection as they move from one place to another. It is also observed that covering may have been invented first for other purposes such as magic, decoration, cult or prestige and later found to be practical as well (Wikipedia, History of Clothing and Textile).

Textile design and fashion which no doubt are a part of important commodities available in x-raying human history also reflects part of the civilization and the later involvement of local and modern technologies in producing it. Ogunduyile (ibid: 148) says that as the society became more complex, discoveries were made in weaving, embroidery indigo dyeing and in various resist techniques which further enhanced the emergence of classes. Although the Encyclopedia of textile (1960) says that textile takes its origin from the Latin word "texere" (to weave) from fibres, but today the term is encompassing as it accommodates different techniques such as felting or spin fibres made into yarn and by extension netting, knit or weaving to produce fabrics. Oguntona (1986) explains that textiles are signifying the production of coloured pattern by various methods on various fabrics. Sieber (1972) opines that textile is a woven and dyed material. On his part Chukwunyere (1996) enumerates the production of textile to include mat, mosquito net, rope and all items produced through the weaving technique. However, it is pertinent to note that giving diverse ways by which textile design and fashion are produced as well as their history based on available literature of which there might be gaps, their local production and later transformation into various mechanized modern forms, productions and uses can be explored in economic development and human empowerment.

However, the origin of raw material and development of mechanized textile production of which have enriched many countries cannot be reasonably credited to any particular region or nation as there are various accounts. Firstly, Andrew (1980) explains that wool one of the major commodity for the production of mechanized

textiles for fashion was the basis for the prosperity achieved by the most important city-states in Italy and Flanders. Ajayi (2002) citing Bridburg says that cotton was a major source of trading activities of the Hanseatic League as well as the foundation for the rise of England as a commercial nation. He further notes that studies have also revealed that more recently; wool has been the mainstay of the economy of Australia. Ajayi (ibid:270) is of the view that silk has a long history which adds glamour to dressing and that it ranked with the jewels and spices as the most covered imports from the East since the days of the Roman Empire. It has also been noted that in the city of China and India, silk and mostly cotton were tended by hands which were stored away as a national secret. In fact, cotton served as cloth to both the ancient people of China and India. Ajayi (Op cit: 271) quoting Carlano indicates that it is of great to note that France and Italy became famous of their silk trade as France in particular, their property rested solely on silk to the extent that when diseases attacked her stock of silk-moth, her economy was threatened.

More so, if the above statements hold truth one can say that cotton also spread across European countries and America of which formed a part of their early development and history. It is also not surprising therefore that the availability of this particular raw material in large quantity in most European countries must have contributed in rapid strengthening of their economy. In Africa archeological evidences show that Egypt with her rich civilization particularly in agriculture, cotton from early periods has been cultivated, spun and woven. This statement holds true in the sense that the colour and texture of early Peruvian and Mexican textiles resemble those found in Egypt (Wikipedia)

However, a synthesis of literature on textile raw materials and with the mechanized textile production in place of which have been used to transform the numerous textile raw materials into end products as textiles and by extension fashion, much need to be desired. The strong desire to produce textile and fashion and it's quickly, cheaply and in large quantities was one of the major causes of the industrial revolution (Tunde Ajayi, 2002:271). Textiles, Fashion and its accessories were also seen as a part of the effect of industrial revolution. This development necessitated various mechanized ways by which textile design, fashion and its accessories are being produced today. Nigeria also embraced this modern method of textile production through the various textile industries established in various parts of the country. This is not to say that the indigenous way of textile production such as tie-dye, weaving, batik, wax and starch resist have been jettisoned. Wax resist technique in particular has been in use in some African countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Sierra-Leone and the Republic of Benin (Polakoff 1980:4). In fact, Ajayi (opcit: 272) argues that the indigenous methods are an important aspects of the history of textile and clothing (fashion) because they have informed and enhanced the economic, social, cultural as well as the political status of many nations including Nigeria.

Having sketched the historical aspect of textile, its raw material as well as fashion based on available literature of which one can say that there are gaps because textile design and fashion are broad in nature, hence difficult to sustain their history. But for the purpose of this discussion and also of great importance is the various ways that the economic potentials of textile design and fashion can be fully explored since any possible legal sources of revenue generation can be the bedrock of a nation's economy. Some countries of which textile and fashion have helped in strengthening their economy include India, France, China, Japan and Indonesia and Italy among others. Suffice it to say that for Nigeria to tap the full economic potentials of textile design and fashion, she has to follow the examples of the aforementioned countries which have not only invested massively in textiles and fashion, but has made these commodities one of the mainstays of their economy. More so, if the formal richness and depth of textile design and fashion in Nigeria will be fully developed; they consequently will give the economy a unique advantage over some others. Since textile design and fashion are considered both visible and invisible export their economic viability cannot be over emphasized. This is an advantage if they are advanced as continuous trade which of course can boost the economy. Below are propositions on how the economic potentials of textile design and fashion can be harnessed which is very central to this paper.

(a) Economic Potentials of Textile and fashion (dress costume) as exhibited in various cultural festivals abound in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. It is a fact that every society has its own economic value. To this end, the diverse colourful and rich cultural festivals in Nigeria that exhibit her rich fount of textiles and fashion can be considered as veritable source of foreign exchange earner. In Nigeria, there are many festivals that attract a panoramic display/array of royal costumes and garments in their rich variety which attracts both local and foreign interest. These festivals have gone a long way to enhance the socio-cultural image of Nigeria both locally and internationally. The custodians of these festivals such as the Emirs, Kings, Chiefs, Obis, Obas and other title holders and their personages adorn themselves in rich royal costumes and other paraphernalia associated with that ethnic group. These costume repertoires are used sparingly only on special periods such as festivals and other important occasions. Dress culture display of riches in costume during these festivals have no doubt bequeathed to the nation a renown textile and dress culture which are without exaggeration is unique and compete favourably with any such tradition elsewhere within Africa continent. And in fact due to the prestigious and exquisite nature of this costume, they have continued to attract foreign attention. However, tourists that are attracted by these cultural festivals in other to witness these display of rich and highly prosperous dress culture or fashion arrives in the country, exchanges their country's currency for the local currency in other to take care of all his dealing including accommodation, feeding and local transportation among others. As he

prepares to leave, he buys a few items especially artifacts including some of the costumes that he fancies that are available for sale and of course fly with them using the nation's aircraft or national carrier. Economically, one can say that all his transactions while in the country from the day he arrives and changes his country's currency and starts spending them mean additional income in the economy.

**(b)** Modern staging of fashion shows regularly that will exhibit the country's ingenuity in textile design and fashion at both local and international platforms and arena are unique avenues if properly explored that can be a panacea to enrich and sustain the economy. The showcasing of these artistic fashion resources and heritage no doubt will improve on the creativity of the local designers in the sense that they will be exposed to other design possibilities for improvement. In fact, these shows will attract tourists of which some of them can be designers. There is no doubt that fashion shows which exhibit works of Nigeria designers enjoy international recognition and patronage. The uses of locally woven or produced fabrics which have indigenous touch and artistically creative in tailoring modern wears have been the penchant or favourite of many foreigners and even Nigerians. The foreigners in particular not only purchase some of these wears, but catalogues and even pay the indigenous designers in order to learn their creation techniques and styles. This development will not only provide an awakening to the local designer, but honour, prestige and enhance the image of Nigeria. More so, it will bring foreign earning from the sales as aforementioned as well as business contacts that will bring about stability and expansion. There is no gainsaying that the financial gains for staging fashion shows is very viable. If government can fully harness its potentials for economic growth by continuously provide the necessary machinery and enabling environment required organizing a fashion show of international standard of which will create more awareness for values inherent in textile design and fashion as number of people who will appreciate these commodities will increase.

**(c)** Apart from regular shows, an exhibition of textile and fashion commodities periodically both at local and international venues is a good way to create more awareness and advertise Nigerian textile and fashion sector as this will attract income to the designers, bring progress to the society by enriching the economy from income such exhibition will attract. More so, exhibition forum not only provides the opportunity for creating awareness and appreciation to the exhibits as well as recognition to the designers, but exchange of ideas for growth and continuous trade and business. The significance of textile and fashion exhibition in national economic growth will manifest positive result if encouraged. Government therefore needs to play its part by exploring the economic gains of sponsoring exhibitions of textile design and fashion commodities by supporting the designers in several ways such as providing adequate space, massive finance and other logistics.

(d) Textile and fashion have the potentials to stimulate entrepreneurship that will be purpose oriented and bring economic benefits. Textile design and fashion business no doubt are profession with good prospects as it provides divers way for one to generate economy. Fashion trend changes as new styles are introduced periodically which means the commodity will be in constant demand. Textile design and fashion production in most cases require little income to start and the business enlarges in a short while because dress is a living culture of everyday life and activity (Aniakor, 1999, p. 152) hence the high demand for it as earlier mentioned. As this outfit grows, it no doubt accommodates more people and generates more income which will bring about high cash flow to take care of their economic situation and help in checking the lopsided economic trend usually witnessed in Nigeria. More so, textile design and fashion production or business offers more stable prospect for economic growth since the sector does not witness economic fluctuations such as found in other sectors such as oil, banking and exportation of agro based products. Since Nigeria operates an economic system based on the exportation of primary products, which have created a gap by contributing immensely to the unhealthy trade unbalance more people particularly the vast majority of youths graduating out of school instead of looking for white collar jobs should be encouraged to take up textile design and fashion business in other to check this trend. It is a fact that economically textile design and fashion business is not a single market, but a whole family of markets with different prices, can be located anywhere and attracts several different buyers and clients.

(e) Textile design and fashion can also be used in the stimulation of local economy through job creation. Nigeria due to its mono economy which depends largely on oil export as earlier mentioned has brought about a battered economy, unemployment and underemployment because the oil sector cannot absorb the teaming unemployed population. One of the most reasonable ways to check unemployment and economic expansion can be massive investment in both private and government driven textile and fashion industries so that both they can accommodate large number of persons. It has been noted that in Britain, France, Italy and the US, textile and fashion industries generate large revenue income and this has effect on employment. With adequate government support, textile and fashion sector can be a veritable source that can trigger economic development through the employment of talented and skilled personnel, such as tailors, textile technologists, and artists. Others that this sector can accommodate include people in specialized areas of textiles such as male and female models, sales representatives and auxillary staff in a situation where the outfit is large. The products of these outfits can be distributed or channeled to some local retailers or merchants who sell in local markets and who are closest to the final consumers. With these developments in place more people will acquire the product, more income will be generated and circulated within the localities, and new business and markets can spring up.

(f) There is no gainsaying that textile design and fashion sector creates a sustainable business links for the growth of the economy. Since textile design and fashion outfits depend largely on local sources for raw material in other to sustain their business, they have to engage the services or get in contact with the local farmer who cultivates and provides the primary raw material required in their production process, particularly cotton. This however, means that these textile design and fashion outfit do not require to import whatever the local farmer has to provide for their production thereby taking out the country's local currency, but instead such funds or investment on raw materials go back or circulate within the local sources where they are acquired or to the local farmer. This business chain or links do not only sustain both the textile design and fashion outfit and the local farmer, but also helps to stabilize the country's economy.

(g) Among the ethnic groups in Nigeria, locally made fabrics are produced by several organized cottages and on the verandas of some entrepreneurs. Locally produced fabrics are still in high demand and valued commodity. In fact, Stella Akinrujono (2002:266) is of the view that locally made fabrics still have high prestige over the industrial ones and that they are highly valued compared with industrial ones. Some of available valuable and precious locally made fabrics include akwete cloth provided by pockets of cottages in Ndoki area of in Igbo land and akwa-ocha hand woven cloth by the Aniocha people also in Igbo land. Among the Yoruba come the popular aso-oke as well as sanya, alarin and etu. Among the Tiv, traditional weavers produce tugudu, anger, ashisha and gberave. The cottages in Ebira produce varieties of local fabrics known as okene cloths done in vertical looms. These aforementioned weaving traditions can go a long way to generate high income for the local weavers, as well as enhance the social and economic status of Nigeria both at local and international levels. Government therefore should fully be aware of the need to sustain these local fabric productions in other to enjoy their full economic values. To this end, the full cooperation of the government is required in other to encourage and accelerate the growth of these local cloth weaving outlets not only making sufficient standard facilities available, but also providing avenues or channels particularly international markets, for the sale of their commodities.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, attempts have been made to grapple with the conceptual attributes of and economic potentials of textile design and fashion in economic development of Nigeria. Against this background, the paper highlights various ways by which these commodities can be explored for the country's economic growth. In examining the economic potentials of textile design and fashion as export commodities for both local and foreign exchange earnings, it recommends effective implementation strategies through which they will be packaged especially for export trade that will bring positive results. The end result of the entire picture is that textile design and fashion are not only

good viable sources of income for the producers but also have enormous and immense potentials for the country's economic advancement.

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