VISUAL ART PRACTICE: A PANACEA FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION, UNEMPLOYMENT AND YOUTH RESTIVENESS IN NIGER DELTA.

BY

BALA HENRY IBAMA
Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Faculty of Humanities
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education,
Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Rivers State.
Tel +2348100841708
Email: sirhenrybala@gmail.com
&
Dr. Sotonye Allen Orubu
Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Faculty of Humanities
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education,
Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Rivers State.
08035535012
allensotonye@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

It is now a common knowledge that the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is faced with the challenges of restiveness and unemployment. The level of unemployment and youth restiveness in this region is alarming to the extend that if nothing is done urgently to salvage the situation by stakeholders may persist and warrant the youths of the region to indulge in social vices like kidnapping, insurgency, bunkers. This paper in a bit to proffer remedy to the issues of unemployment and youth restiveness in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. And to achieve the aim and objectives of the paper, the focussed-on avenues of alleviation unemployment and youth restiveness through the adaptation visual art practice and teaching in institutions of learning and the likes. It also discusses the hope of engaging the youth graduates and non-graduates to be creators of jobs and not job seekers which will be an alternative to youth restiveness in the Niger Delta. The paper also outlines the role of visual arts in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria in creating entrepreneurial skills for youths to be self-employed or self-reliant. It further discusses the circumstances that are militating against visual art practice and the branches of visual arts that can form the basis of entrepreneurial practice. This paper concludes by stating that visual art practice if properly handled can be able to ameliorate the problems of unemployment and youth restiveness. Thus, it recommends that effort should be made to draw the attention of government and individuals to the need of harnessing visual arts practice as a means towards meeting the challenges of unemployment and youth restiveness in the Niger Delta.

Keywords: Panacea, Unemployment, Restiveness, Visual Arts, Entrepreneur.

Introduction

Unemployment and Youth restiveness is among the one of worrisome challenges confronting of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria with multiple consequences that threaten the existence of the communities in the region. The situation has also threatened the security of lives and properties in the region. This study, therefore, is to examine and provide solutions to youth restiveness and unemployment in the Niger Delta region through the training and acquisition of visual arts practice as a means of making the youth of the Niger Delta to be entrepreneurs that can be self-employed or be self-reliant. This become very necessary due to the high rate of unemployment and youth restiveness among the growing population of the youths who are prone to violence, unrest, bunkering among other social vices.

Since the inception of the current democratic dispensation, the region has witnessed series of violence and violation of human rights which were perpetrated by unemployed youths in different parts of the Niger Delta region, their act has led to immense loss of life and properties. The degree to which youth restiveness and unemployment constitute a threat to national security has become a worrisome issue, thus it has constantly attracted the attention of the public, government and international communities; to the extent that the involvement youth in political thuggery especially in the 2019 general election and some other acts of violence seem to create thought that if it will end so soon. Thus, different groups of individuals, corporate bodies, agencies, professional institutions that are saddled with the responsibility of proffering solutions to the spate of youth restiveness and unemployment in the region has tremendously help in creating job and discouraging youth from going into youth restiveness. An employed youth creates a bright hope for any nation because he/she is regarded and perceived as a potential leader of such a country who will not only sustain the tradition but also bring innovation to society. Adewuyi, (2015).

The Nigerian constitution opines youths are people within the aged of 18 – 35. Adewuyi (2015), defined youth as people between ages 18 and 24 Years. It is a stage in life of the individual when the society where he/she functions ceases to regard the person as a child and yet has not considered the person as an adult. Youth constitute a large proportion of the population across the globe. The Total population of youth between 10 and 24 years old in the Niger Delta area was put at 15.4 million, according to the 2006 National Census results inferring from the policy of the national youth service scheme, which stipulated age 30 years as the limit for participating in the national youth service programme, it can be said that people within the age limit of 30 years are considered as youth. Adedapo, (2021)

The Niger Delta region as expressed earlier no doubt is plagued with the challenge of unemployment and youth restiveness. Data available on the number of unemployed youths is becoming worrisome more, this because more youths continue to suffer on employment, and it seem to be more prevalent in Rivers State. It becomes more interesting to note that among all the strategies aimed at meeting the needs of unemployment and youth restiveness, the visual art practice has not given enough attention to contribute towards the use of visual art practice to create employment. why is this so? It is believed to be so because there no adequate art teachers to teach or train the youths to make them potential entrepreneur? Visual arts which is able to meet the employment needs of the youths and also has the capacity to help reduce restiveness in the Niger Delta region; also, can make it possible for the youth to

generate income from the visual arts practice if given enough attention is giving to visual practice in the region.

Visual art practice is seeing meaningly a panacea for unemployment and youth restiveness in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. This because if well explored its potential can offer solutions to the challenges of unemployment and youth restiveness in the Niger Delta region. The paper explores the possibilities of engaging visual art practices to provide meaningful employment opportunities youths in the region, it also serves as a means empowerment and youth engagement as to make them not to idol but employ to make them reliable to themselves. The impact of art-based interventions on social and economic development in the Niger Delta in highlighting how the creative arts can contribute to peacebuilding, social cohesion, and individual well-being cannot be over emphasises. Iyayi (2003) states that visual art practice is a catalyst for addressing the complex issues facing the youth in the Niger Delta. Iyayi adds that policymakers, educators, and community leaders can leverage the arts as a catalyst for positive change and sustainable development. Iyayi (2003) argues that the creative potential of visual arts as plays a significant role in addressing the challenges faced by young people in the Niger Delta region. Visual art practice is a very importance tool in nurturing artistic talent and creativity among the youth. It can also, foster economic opportunities, social integration, and personal development. By engaging in visual art practices such as painting, sculpture, photography, and digital media, young people can not only acquire valuable skills and knowledge but also find a sense of purpose, identity, and belonging in their communities. Through a multidisciplinary approach that combines art education, cultural heritage preservation, entrepreneurship training, and community outreach initiatives, the paper advocates for the promotion of visual art as a viable career path and a tool for social change in the Niger Delta. The role of artists, art educators, cultural institutions, and government agencies in creating a supportive environment for young artists to thrive and contribute positively to society is very important, thus, should be taken very reriouly. Iyayi (2003) points out that the Niger Delta region can harness the transformative power of visual art to unlock new opportunities for youth empowerment, economic development, and peacebuilding. The holistic approach and recognition of the intrinsic value of art in promoting human flourishing, social cohesion, and sustainable development in emphasizing the need for greater investment, collaboration, and advocacy in support of the arts as a catalyst for positive change in the Niger Delta and beyond will help in further eradicating unemployment and youth restiveness.

Unemployment in Niger Delta

According to Research Gateway (2023), the term unemployment refers to a situation where a person actively searches for employment but is unable to find work. Adewuyi (2007), define unemployment as a term referring to individuals who are employable and actively seeking a job but are unable to find a job. It includes those workforces who are working but do not have an appropriate job. Unemployment is a key measure of the major challenges of Niger Delta region of Nigeria. According to national bureau of statistics, the most frequently used measure of unemployment is the unemployment rate. It's calculated by dividing the number of unemployed people by the number of people in the labour force. Unemployment has become a key economic indicator because it signals the ability (or inability) of workers to obtain gainful work and contribute to the productive output of the economy. More

unemployed youths in Niger Delta simply mean less total economic production within the Niger Delta region.

Youth Restiveness

The National Youth Development Policy (2001) defines youth as people aged 18-35. They constitute about 40 per cent of the more than 140 million people of Nigeria. The total population of youth Between 10 and 24 in Nigeria 50 million in 2006, which is 40 percent of the total population. Elegbeleye (2005) defined youth restiveness as "a sustained protestation embarked upon to enforce the desired outcome from a constituted authority by an organized body of youths." It is marked by Violence and disruption of lawful activities. Information is new ideas or knowledge extracted from the environment for human use with the aim of modifying behaviour, effecting changes, and enhancing efficiency in all human endeavours.

Relevance of Youth in Niger Delta

The youth occupy a prominent place in the Niger Delta region, apart from being the owners and leaders of tomorrow, they outnumber the middle-aged and the aged (Onyekpe, 2007). Besides numerical Superiority youth have energy and ideas that are society's great potentials (Onyekpe, 2007). The National Youth Development Policy (2001, p.1) asserts that: Youths are the foundation of a society. Their energies, inventiveness, character and orientation define the development and security of a nation. Through their creative talents a nation makes giant strides in economic development and socio-political attainments. In their dreams and hopes, a nation founds her motivation; on their energies, she builds her purpose. And because of their dreams and aspirations, the future of a nation is assured.

The statement above acknowledges the role of the youth in maintaining peace and security of a nation. As significant segment of any society, youth are the major determiners of peace and stability of a nation (Sulaiman, 2006). the degree of disorderliness and instability in society is also determined by some youth in society. Peace is a determinacy of development. The absence of peace means that no meaningful development can't take place easily. The National Youth Policy (2001) affirms that the extent of the youth's "responsible conduct and roles in society is positively correlated with the development of their country.

The Role of Visual Art in Community Development

According to Bello, (2003). Visual art plays a significant role in community development by creating opportunities for self-expression, cultural preservation, economic growth, and social cohesion. Here are some keyways in which visual art contributes to community development:

1. Cultural Identity and Preservation: Visual art serves as a reflection of a community's cultural heritage and traditions. Through visual art forms such as murals, sculptures, and paintings, communities can celebrate their unique identities, histories, and values. This helps to preserve cultural traditions and pass them on to future generations.

2. Community Engagement and Empowerment: Visual art projects often involve community members in the creative process, fostering a sense of ownership and pride among participants. By engaging in collaborative art-making activities, individuals can express their voices, concerns, and aspirations, leading to greater empowerment and community cohesion.

3. Economic Development: The presence of art galleries, studios, and creative spaces in a community can attract tourists, visitors, and investors, thereby contributing to local economic development. Visual art events, such as art fairs and exhibitions, can also stimulate consumer spending and support small businesses in the community.

4. Social Connection and Well-being: Visual art has the power to bring people together, foster social connections, and strengthen community ties. Art exhibitions, workshops, and public art installations provide opportunities for social interaction, dialogue, and collaboration, promoting a sense of belonging and well-being among community members.

5. Urban Revitalization and Place-making:

Visual art projects, such as street art, public sculptures, and beautification initiatives, can transform neglected spaces into vibrant and inclusive environments. These art interventions contribute to urban revitalization efforts, make neighbourhoods more attractive and lovable, and enhance the overall quality of life in the community.

6. Education and Skill Development: Visual art programs in schools, community centres, and cultural institutions help to develop creativity, critical thinking, and artistic skills among individuals of all ages. By providing access to arts education and training, communities can nurture talent, inspire innovation, and cultivate a culture of lifelong learning.

In conclusion, visual art plays a multi-faceted role in community development, enriching the social, cultural, economic, and educational dimensions of a community. By investing in visual art initiatives and supporting local artists, communities can harness the transformative power of art to build more inclusive, resilient, and vibrant societies.

Empowering Youth through Visual Art Entrepreneurship

Visual art entrepreneurship can provide young people with a creative outlet to express themselves and develop valuable skills. By engaging in visual art experiences, youth can explore their interests, build confidence, and unleash their artistic potential. Additionally, learning the business side of entrepreneurship can equip them with essential skills such as financial literacy, marketing, and networking. Empowering youth through visual art entrepreneurship can open up various opportunities for them to showcase their talents, engage with their community, and even generate income from their creations. It allows them to turn their passion for art into a sustainable career or business venture. Through mentorship, workshops, and networking opportunities, young artists can learn how to navigate the art world, market their work, and establish themselves as creative entrepreneurs. By providing them with the necessary resources and support, we can empower youth to pursue their artistic ambitions, foster innovation, and contribute to the cultural and economic development of society. Bello, (2003).

Furthermore, visual art entrepreneurship can also serve as a platform for young people to address social issues, promote cultural diversity, and advocate for positive change. Through their artwork, young artists can raise awareness about important topics such as environmental conservation, mental health, social justice, and equality. By encouraging youth to use visual art as a tool for social impact, we empower them to become change-makers in their communities. Through collaborative projects, art exhibitions, and community events, young artists can amplify their voices and inspire others to act. Chigunta,(2002).

Chigunta,(2002). Additionally pronounce that visual art entrepreneurship can help young people develop essential life skills such as creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, and resilience. These skills are not only valuable in the field of art but also transferable to various aspects of their personal and professional lives. In essence, empowering youth through visual art entrepreneurship is not just about fostering creativity and innovation but also about nurturing the next generation of leaders who are socially conscious, resilient, and equipped to make a positive impact on the world around them. By investing in the artistic talents and entrepreneurial spirit of young people, we are investing in a brighter and more vibrant future for us all.

the Impact of Visual Art Programs on Youth Empowerment

Curtain, (2000) Visual art programs have been found to have a significant impact on youth empowerment in several ways. Here are some key points to consider when evaluating the impact of visual art programs on youth empowerment:

1. Creativity and Self-Expression: Visual art programs provide young people with a platform to express themselves creatively. Through various art forms such as painting, sculpture, and photography, young individuals can explore their emotions, thoughts, and experiences in a visually expressive way. This encourages self-expression and helps them develop their sense of identity and individuality.

2. Confidence and Self-Esteem: Participation Engaging in visual art programs can boost self-confidence and self-esteem among youth. When young people see their artistic creations come to life and receive positive feedback from peers, teachers, and mentors, it can enhance their belief in their abilities and talents. This sense of accomplishment can translate to other areas of their lives, improving their overall confidence levels.

3. Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills: Visual art programs encourage participants to think critically and solve problems creatively. By exploring different techniques, materials, and styles, young people develop their analytical skills and learn to approach challenges from various perspectives. This fosters a growth mind-set and equips them with valuable problem-solving abilities that are transferable to other aspects of their lives.

4. Social and Emotional Skills: Participation in visual art programs can enhance social and emotional skills in youth. Collaborative art projects promote teamwork, communication, and empathy, fostering positive relationships with peers and mentors. Additionally, art-making can serve as a therapeutic outlet for processing emotions, reducing stress, and building resilience in the face of challenges.

5. Community Engagement and Advocacy: Visual art programs can empower young individuals to become advocates for social change and community engagement. Through art projects that address relevant social issues, youth can raise awareness, promote dialogue, and inspire action within their communities. This sense of agency and civic responsibility contributes to their empowerment and sense of purpose.

6. Career Development and Future Opportunities: For aspiring artists and creative professionals, visual art programs offer valuable training, mentorship, and networking opportunities. By developing their artistic skills and building a portfolio, youth can pursue career paths in the arts, design, media, and other creative industries. This exposure to

potential career pathways empowers young individuals to pursue their passions and realize their professional aspirations.

When evaluating the impact of visual art programme on youth empowerment, it is essential to consider these diverse dimensions of growth and development. By nurturing creativity, confidence, critical thinking, social skills, advocacy, and career readiness, visual art programs play a vital role in empowering young individuals to reach their full potential and make a positive impact on the world around them.

Visual Arts: As a Panacea for Unemployment and Youth Restiveness in Niger Delta

Visual Arts is one of the vocational subjects that are been approved for teaching at all levels of education in Nigeria, which includes the Niger Delta region. Ganagana (2003) observed and pointed out that, visual arts as a subject which is supposed to be taught in all schools in the Niger Delta area is either not been taught or it is not effectively been taught due to non-availability of required infrastructure and lack of staff, materials and equipment. Orubu (2016) also pointed out that visual arts course are profession courses that has uplifted and facilitates the development of man practically, economically, culturally and educationally. This assertion is true because ever since man started to pursue his development on earth art ideas and experience in terms of exploring has been one medium through which man has provided essential amenities needed for him to survive, promote and preserve his cultural heritage. The basic idea and expense were developed by artistic craftsmanship or vocational training. It is the believe of scholars like Ganagana (2003), Orubu (2016) that if Vocational skill education is provided for youths, it will help reduce unemployment and youth restiveness

In the Niger Delta the youth may not give to youth restiveness and face unemployment. To Corroborate, the believers Ganagana (2003) and Orubu (2016) observe that, acquisition of vocational skills Leads to a significant reduction of poverty and unemployment. because vocational skill make one enter preserving in term of enabling one to be employable and be self-reliant. Deducing from the accounts enumerated it is obvious that vocational skill acquisition is vital towards the development of man and his society. Therefore, if vocational subject or course like fine and applied arts is been taught effectively in schools in the Niger Delta it will help combat or tackle the issue of youths restiveness and unemployment in the Region, because when the youths have skill they will employed or engage by employers or by themselves and it will make not to be idol to think Negatively to go into social vices. benefits of integrating art in job creation programs

Integrating art in Job Creation Programmes and its Benefits

1. Enhanced creativity: Art encourages thinking outside the box and can enhance creativity in individuals. This creative mind-set can be transferred to various job roles, leading to innovative solutions and approaches.

2. Skill development: Art provides an avenue for individuals to develop various skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and collaboration. These skills are valuable in the workplace and can help individuals succeed in their careers.

3. Emotional expression: Art can be a powerful tool for emotional expression and can help individuals cope with stress and improve their well-being. This emotional intelligence can translate to better interpersonal skills in the workplace.

4. Community engagement: Integrating art in job creation programs can help build a sense of community among participants. Collaborating on art projects can foster a supportive environment and encourage teamwork, which are important aspects of many job roles.

5. Increased job opportunities: Art-related skills are in demand in various industries, including design, marketing, advertising, and entertainment. By integrating art in job creation programs, participants can develop skills that are marketable and increase their chances of finding employment in these fields.

6. Diverse perspectives: Art can inspire individuals to see the world from different perspectives and appreciate diverse viewpoints. This openness to new ideas can lead to more inclusive and innovative workplaces.

7. Personal growth: Engaging in art can lead to personal growth and self-discovery. Participants in art-integrated job creation programs may develop a greater sense of confidence and identity, which can impact their career development positively.

Challenges of Visual Arts Practice in Niger Delta region of Nigeria

Visual arts as a field of study have suffered neglect in Nigerian Education system. Majority of students hardly Make visual arts a first-choice course of study when preparing to sit for higher institution entrance qualifying Examination. Nigerian students lack motivation and Interest to willingly study visual arts in higher institutions. Most of the students studying visual arts are mostly those Who could not be admitted into first and second choice Departments. Although, with time they may end up to have interest in visual arts practice. In most Nigerian institutions offering the Course of study, there are inadequate manpower, equipment and materials that can enhance teaching and Learning. Visual arts must be given the attention it deserves from the government to enable graduates in the specialty be self-reliant, create jobs and become employers of labour. The following are major challenges that hinder the effective teaching and training of visual arts youth in the Niger Delta:

Lack of qualified staff for training: The training of academic staff is a continuous exercise to ensure Improvement in the quality of their outputs. According to Ekemode (2005), usually, local training within the nation is cheaper than overseas training but more strenuous because of inadequate facilities, literature and distractions arising from the need to meet the necessary demands. Overseas training requires a lot of foreign exchange, but the enabling environment exists to achieve success in a record time. However, over time it has always been difficult to get the trainees

Lack of Modern Facilities: Most visual arts departments in Niger Delta universities do not have effectively very standard art studios or workshop spaces let alone with modern equipment and facilities and even where they exist, they are inadequate, as the studio's only have the items or equipment that were provided where the University was established. It is surprising to know that most visual arts departments still Depend on theoretical works only and this is due to lack Of modern equipment which has also made the teaching and learning process of visual in the Niger Delta area more difficult and expensive.

Conclusion

Some years ago in Nigeria, anyone who had university degree was sure of securing a good paying job or the other. During this period most employers would just march into the institutions to shop for middle level manpower by placing adverts in different schools and faculties for various vacant positions, but in today's life the story is quite different due to various factors that have militated against our Economy. Most often, it is the case of "who you know" and "give and take" just to get Employment, Thus, if visual art practice is truly given little or more attention it will not only be an alternative to the Rising rate of unemployment and youth restiveness in the Niger Delta region but will also promote human capacity building, self-reliance, poverty alleviation, crime prevention and a sustainable economic development of the in the Niger Delta region.

Recommendations

Going by the rate of unemployment and youth restiveness in the Niger Delta region, the following recommendation, among others, are proposed:

1. The Niger Delta Development commission (NDDC) in conjunction with the relevant authorities should set up resource centres, for Visual arts at Least one, in each state of the region to help train youth especially Graduates, to become self-employed and free from youth restiveness
2. Government should mandate schools at all levels, especially at senior secondary school level And possibly at the first year of tertiary education, to offer art as a compulsory subject in their Curricula to improve skills that stimulate the spirit of self-reliance**.**
3. Government should provide loans for youths In the Niger Delta region to start.
4. Non-governmental agencies should also map out plans to introduces visual arts practical's on their programmes.
5. Universities should also introduce visual arts as a general studies course (GNS).

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