

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Sculpture Made from Waste Products: A Tool for Sustainable Youth Development and Economic Growth in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria with its rich cultural heritage and abundant natural resources is known to face critical challenges in sustainable development and economic growth. These led to an upsurge in exploration of waste products into various sculptures to promote the creation of alternative, sustainable sources of income, and employment in rural communities. Nigeria as a nation has abundant raw materials that artists can harness to produce appealing aesthetics and functional objects leading to the development of the country economically, socially, and historically. This research utilizes a mixed-methods approach, with combination of interviews, field research, and case studies to evaluate the impact, and feasibility of recycling waste products into various sculptures. The study established transformation of waste products into sculptures creating different opportunity for youth to acquire skills in various professional fields, empowering them for self-reliance, curbing social vices, and creation of job in rural areas thereby stimulating local economies. Transformation of waste materials by artists into sculptures reduces the quantity of waste generated thereby promoting sustainable waste management practices and some sculptures were analyzed in the paper. These works serve as a viable alternative in sustainable sculptures and as a tool for development and economic growth, curbing environmental, economic challenges, and preserving our cultural heritage. The youth will be fully engaged in self-employed opportunities which will make them independent, contributing to sustainable economic growth, historically and national productivity.

Keywords: Waste materials, Sculptures, Sustainable Development, Youth, Economic Growth, Job Creation.

1. Introduction

Sculpture, as an art form, has been a part of human culture for thousands of years. It is a means of expressing creativity and telling stories through various materials. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in using waste products in sculptures production. The bio-based fiber materials including flax, hemp, ramon, jute, coir, hard and softwood materials; and rice husk are the biggest sources of bio-composite filler materials. (Essien and Ganagana 2025). This approach not only reduces waste but also provides an opportunity for artists to showcase their creativity. This research utilizes a mixed-methods approach, adopting studio exploration to evaluate the

impact and feasibility of recycling waste products into sculptures.

Youths are the foundation of society who defines the pace of development of a nation. It is through the youths' creative talents and labour power that nations make giant strides in socio-economic and political development (Olatundun, 2015). No country can achieve sustainable economic development without substantial investment in human capital. The skills in sculpture make it possible for youths to produce different art works which are sold to provide funds for the producer (Carroll, 2000). The society need is achieved through creation of both aesthetics and utilitarian objects with sculpture.

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Sculptures made from waste products is a skill oriented field of study that is capable of equipping recipient with skills that enhance self-reliance, and self-employment opportunities, need to be empowered among the youth to eradicate problems of unemployment that has eaten deep in the society. In support of the above assertion, Onah (2014) is of the opinion that any nation that seeks relevance and competency in this globalization age must make every effort to give it citizen the best education and possible empowerment which should gear toward self-reliance for vibrant economy. In the same view, Nnamani (2007) observed that many youths in Nigeria have lost focus of the future which has left them in a complete aberration. He then urged the youth to get involved in skill-oriented subjects like art which is known for its capability to equip them with skills that enhance self-reliance and self-employment as well as jobs creation for the employment of others too.

2. Youth as Vanguard of Development

2.1 Youth Population in Nigeria

As of 2023, Nigeria's population is estimated to be over 220 million, making it the most populous country in Africa. Youth, defined as individuals aged between 15 and 35 years, constitute a significant portion of the population. The United Nations and Nigerian government sources estimate that about 60% of Nigerian population falls within this age bracket. This means that over 130 million Nigerians are considered as youth.

2.2 Strategic Importance of Youth to the Nigerian Economy

1. *Labour Force*: Nigeria has a substantial and growing labour force due to large youth population. This demographic is vital for driving economic activities, especially in sectors like technology, agriculture, and services.
2. *Entrepreneurship and Innovation*: Nigerian youth are increasingly engaging in entrepreneurship, driving innovation across various sectors. The rise of tech hubs, startups, and SMEs led by young Nigerians has contributed significantly to economic growth and job creation.
3. *Digital Economy*: Nigeria's youth are at the forefront of the digital economy. They are the main users and developers of digital technologies, contributing to the expansion of the ICT sector, e-commerce, fintech, and digital media.
4. *Human Capital Development*: Investing in the education and skills development of youth is

crucial for enhancing Nigeria's human capital. Youth with the right education and skills are more likely to contribute positively to the economy, leading to increased productivity and economic diversification.

5. *Consumer Market*: The youth demographic represents a significant portion of Nigeria's consumer market. Their consumption patterns drive demand for goods and services, particularly in sectors such as fashion, entertainment, telecommunications, and technology.
6. *Political and Social Influence*: Nigerian youth are also strategically important in shaping the country's future political landscape. They are increasingly involved in political activism, advocacy, and social movements, which can influence policy and governance in ways that support economic development.

2.3 Challenges and Opportunities

- *Unemployment*: Despite their potential, youth unemployment remains a significant challenge. Addressing this issue is crucial for harnessing the full potential of Nigeria's youth.
- *Education and Skills Gap*: It ensures that Nigerian youth have access to quality education and skill training is essential for their effective participation in the economy.
- *Entrepreneurship Support*: It Provides support for young entrepreneurs through funding, mentorship, and infrastructure can further boost their contribution to economic growth. In summary, Nigeria's youth population is not only a significant demographic force but also a strategic asset for the country's economic development. Leveraging this potential through targeted policies and investments is key to achieving sustainable economic growth.

2.4 Sustainable Development and Economic Growth in Nigeria

Sustainable development is a concept that aims to meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs. It involves balancing economic growth, social development, and environmental protection. In Nigeria, there is a growing need for sustainable development practices to address environmental challenges and improve the quality of life for its citizens. Economic growth is essential for the development of any country and Nigeria is no exception. One of the primary benefits of using waste products in sculpture is its contribution to sustainability.

Nigeria faces significant waste management challenges, with a growing population exacerbating the problem of waste accumulation (Ogunwusi & Adebayo, 2021). Sculptures made from waste materials help mitigate these issues by reducing the volume of waste that ends up in landfills. This practice promotes the concepts of a circular economy, where materials are reused and recycled, thus lessening the environmental footprint of waste (Eke & Okoro, 2022). Nigeria has immense potential for growth, but it faces several challenges, including high levels of unemployment and poverty. By embracing sustainable development practices, it can create new job opportunities, reduce poverty, and improve the overall well-being of its citizens.

2.5 Economic Growth and Opportunities

The economic potential of waste-based sculptures is notable. This approach supports the growth of the creative economy by creating new business opportunities and generating income for artists. In Nigeria where unemployment and underemployment are significant issues, waste-based sculpture projects can provide jobs and enhance skill development (Adewale & Olaoye, 2020). Furthermore, these sculptures can attract tourism and cultural interest, which can boost local economies.

Artisan communities can benefit from increased recognition and demand for their unique creation.

Exhibition and sales of waste based sculptures contribute to a growing market for sustainable arts, providing financial benefits to both individual artists and the broader economy (Iheanacho & Nwachukwu, 2023).

2.6 Cultural and Social Impact

Beyond economic and environmental benefits, waste-based sculptures also have cultural significance. They reflect the creativity and ingenuity of Nigeria artists who transform discarded materials into meaningful art. This practice not only celebrates local craftsmanship but also promotes environmental awareness and cultural pride. The narratives embedded in these sculptures can address social issues and inspire community engagement (Okeke & Akinmoladun, 2021).

Sculpture made from waste products is an innovative way to promote sustainable development. By using waste materials, such as plastic bottles, metal cans and glass bottles, fibres, cow horn etc., can create unique and beautiful sculptures. This approach not only reduces waste but also provides an opportunity to harness these otherwise discarded materials to create repetition – meaningful works of art thereby showcasing their innovativeness and productivity (see figure 1 – 5).



Figure 1. Sculpture made from plastic waste by Daniel Temitope Isaac, 2024.

Source: Facebook



Figure 2. Sculpture of a bear made from coconut fibre waste by Essien, Idorenyin Akpan, 2023.

Source: Artist collection



Figure 3. Sculpture of a town crier made from metal junk by Essien, Idorenyin Akpan, 2007.

Source: Artist collection



Figure 4. Sculpture of a dancer made from metal junk by Essien, Idorenyin Akpan, 2008.

Source: Artist collection



Figure 5. *Sculpture of keep fit made from metal junk by Essien, Idorenyin Akpan, 2008.*

Source: Artist collection

3. Findings

In Nigeria, there is a growing interest in using waste products to create sculptures. This trend has not only help reduce waste but has also provided artists with a new medium to express themselves. Sculpture made from waste products can be used to raise awareness about environmental issues and promote sustainable development practices.

Sculpture made from waste products can also be a tool for economic growth in Nigeria. By promoting this art form, the country can attract tourists and art enthusiasts who are interested in unique and sustainable art. This can create new job opportunities in the tourism and art industries, reducing unemployment and poverty levels.

Additionally, sculptures made from waste products can be sold as souvenirs and decorative items, providing artists with a new media of expression and new sources of income. This can encourage more people to take up sculpture as a profession, leading to further economic growth.

3.1 Summary

In summary, the study established that, transforming waste products into sculptures create opportunity for youth to acquire skill in various professional fields empowering them for self-reliance, curbing social vices and creation of job in rural areas thereby stimulating local economies.

3.2 Recommendations

The paper recommends as follows:

- * Government at all levels should embrace and make

fine and applied arts (sculpture) a compulsory core entrepreneurial subject at all levels of educational youth empowerment programmes.

- * There should be adequate orientation and creating awareness of sculpture products for greater patronage should be given to the society through advertisement, exhibitions and ban on importation of foreign related products.
- * The government should assist the youths with grants for the establishment and equipment of their own small or medium scale business ventures. Artisans of sculpture products should be provided with materials, tools and equipment and encouraged to ensure continuous productivity.
- * Skill acquisition centres and studios with state of the art equipment should be established where both trainers and trainees (youths) should be established with functional galleries quality products (show-rooms) where those quality products from sculpture can be displayed and sold to the public to ensure a steady flow of income for the artisans.
- * Sculpture development programmes, seminars and workshops should be organized periodically to ensure quality skills acquisition for all those interested in the trade especially the youths.

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