

THE CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABILITY OF THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN VISUAL ARTS

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Abstract

Sustainability of visual arts is a national challenge that needs urgent attention. The developments of visual arts in our nation's tertiary institutions are a major concern, because the career is at a risk from neglect and underdevelopment by the Government and stakeholders. This paper examines some of the challenges of Millennium Development Goals in relation to the study of visual arts in our nation's higher institutions. An assessment of the nation's implementation of the Millennium Development Goals in Education was also made. The paper also looks into the poverty alleviation and visual arts, sustainability and their application in Nigerian higher institutions. It was discovered that none of the set goals has been adequately addressed by the government and the stakeholders. The nation's higher institutions where visual arts are offered are far from achieving sustainability development because, the stakeholders are not committed enough. The paper concludes by recommending some strategies for achieving sustainable visual arts training/ development in the nation.

The problem of development has occupied the attention of activists, politicians, scholars, development workers, technologists, Educators, local and international organizations in the last decades. The purpose of development is to improve people's lives by expanding their choices, freedom and dignity; this is

because development will help people to obtain physical necessities of life such as food, clothing and shelter, employment, adequate education, sustainable development and peace, gender equality, political and economic independence, participation in government and others.

Otoba. (2009) opines that Fine and Applied arts is also known as visual arts. The visual arts are art forms that create works, which are primarily visual in nature, such as painting, ceramics, drawing, sculpture, and printmaking. The modern visual arts are photography, video, film making and literature. (Wikipedia 2011); The Microsoft Encarta kids, (2009) describes visual arts as arts we can see, these include painting, sculpture and architecture which have long been the major visual arts in Europe and America. But today, we include; photography, furniture, jewelry, textile, fashion and other arts and crafts among the visual arts.

The current usage of the term “visual arts” includes fine art as well as the applied, decorative arts and crafts, Before the arts and crafts movement in Britain and other parts of the world in the 20th century, the term artist was often restricted to a person working in the fine arts (such as painting, and sculpture), and not the handcraft, craft or applied art media. Later art schools made a distinction between the fine arts and the crafts maintaining that a craft person could not be considered a practitioner of art.

Art is often a synonym for fine art; fine art describes an art form developed primarily for aesthetics rather than practical application.

The fact is that many art departments in our nation’s higher institutions are not furnished with facilities, you find teachers teaching with nothing. Arts are practical subjects which must be taught with good facilities/equipment.

The educational system in Nigeria has gone backwards; there are no facilities in the tertiary Institutions, the government is not focusing on how to equip the visuals art studios of our tertiary institutions so as to improve the quality of learning of students.

It is surprising to see graduates of fine and applied arts from Nigeria’s tertiary institutions roam the streets in search of white collar jobs. The students of visual arts still learn in abstract and are taught with nothing. The studios are not furnished with modern equipment to improve the teaching/ leaning capabilities of the students.

Training in the Visual Arts

Training in the visual arts has generally been through variations of the apprentices and workshop system. (Restany,1974).The renaissance movement which started in Europe by the 15th century increased the prestige of the artist and lead to the academy system for training artists, and today most training in art schools are at tertiary levels and today visual arts have become an important subject in most tertiary institutions.

Renaissance was a rebirth, the period in Europe civilization which was characterized by a surge of interest in classical learning and values. Among the discoveries and exploration witnessed by renaissance was the powerful innovation in paper and printing. To the scholars, it was primarily a time of the revival of the classical learning and wisdom after a long period of cultural decline and stagnation.

The following are careers opportunity in visual arts :

Printmaking, This is an art form which consists of the production of images, usually on paper but occasionally on fabric, parchment, plastic, or other support under the direct support of the artist by means of ink.

In 1960 the international congress of plastic Arts drafted a resolution intended to regulate contemporary prints. The crucial paragraph reads:

The above principles apply to graphic works which can be considered originals, that is to say, the prints for which the artists made the original plate, cut the woodblock, worked on the stone or any other material. Works that do not fulfill these conditions must be considered “reproductions”, and in 17th and 18th centuries in the west, most prints carried all the relevant information on their margins. In 19th century the U.S painter and etcher, James Mc Neill Whistter became the first western artist to hand sign his prints, an act which has been carried to date. The painters usually sign in the lower right or left corner of their works.

Sculpture: Is an artistic form in which hard or plastic materials are worked into three-dimensional art objects, (Encyclopedia Britanica, 2010). Materials such as wood, glass, clay, textiles, plastics, polymers, stones (rocks), metals (bronze) ivory, plaster of Paris (sulfate of line), fibre glass –a synthetic resins, especially polyesters are reinforced with laminations

of glass fibre to make it strong, hard and durable.

Photography: Photography is the process of making pictures by means of the action of light on a high –sensitive material the word comes from the Greek words ‘phos’ and ‘graphs’ meaning “ drawing with light” or “representation of lines” or drawing” (Rainer and Adam, 1983) , photography is a means of visual communication and expression, it has a distinct esthetic capabilities. The process is done through mechanical, chemical or digital devices known as cameras.

Filmmaking: Filmmaking is the process of making a motion picture, from an initial conception and research, through scriptwriting, shooting and recording animation or other special effects editing, sound and music work and finally distribution to an audience.

Ceramics: This is the art of making and decorating earthen wares by firing so as to make it durable. This word was formed from the Greek word Keramos –meaning “the porter’s clay” ceramics is made from clay, bauxite, feldspar silica and talc which are minerals called silicates. (Ogumor, 1998). He concluded by saying that most ceramic products are made from clay except for which is made from sand.

Painting: In an artistic sense, it means the combination of drawing, composition and other aesthetic consideration in order to manifest the expressive and conceptual intention of the painter. Like drawing

painting has its origins in caves and on rock faces the finest examples believed by some to be 32,000 years old, are in the Chauvet and Lascaux caves in southern France. They are in shades of red, brown, yellow and black, while the paintings on the walls and ceilings are of bison, cattle, horses, and deer.

Textiles: Textile is any filament, fibre, or yam that can be made into fabric or cloth and the resulting material itself. This term is derived from the Latin textiles and the French Texere, meaning “to weave” it includes fabrics woven, knitted, bouded, felting, or tufted and laminated. (Harns, U.S.1963).

Computer and Millennium Development Goals

Computer art is any art in which computers play a role in production or display of the art work. Visual artists are no longer limited to traditional art media. Computers are being used for producing works. Sophisticated rendering and editing software has led to multi-skilled image developers. Photographers may become digital artist, illustrators may become animators. Handicraft may be computer- aided or use computer – generated imagery as a template. In Wikipedia, an internet search, states that computer art has long been a tool in visual art since 1960s. In this 21st century, our nation’s tertiary institutions are yet to be informed about information technology (computer art) in visual arts.

The African peer Review Mechanism (APRM) Nigeria self-

assessment states that one area of excellent achievement in terms of citizen’s access to service is information and communications technology (ICT). One will agree that the many information and communication technology institutions in the country are not enough to create a specialized career in students. ICT should be moved into the classrooms.

Copyright (ACT) Definition of Visual Arts

It is absurd to know that Nigeria has no copyright act definition of art products. That is to protect the works of artists. But in the United States; the law protecting the copyright over a piece of visual art gives a more restrictive definition of visual arts. In the copyright law of the United States of America – chapter 1 reads:

A Work of Visual “Art” is-

1. A painting, drawing, print or sculpture, existing in a single copy, in a limited edition of 200 copies or few that are signed and consecutively numbered by the author, or in the case of a sculpture, in multiple cast, carved, or fabricated sculptures of 200 or fewer that are consecutively numbered by the author and mark of the author.
2. A still photographic image produced for exhibition purposes only, existing in a single copy that is signed by the author or any work in the applied art, produced the sake of exhibitions and do not exceed 200 copies.

A Work of Visual“ Art” Does Not Include –

1. Any poster, map, chart, technical drawing, diagram, motion picture or other audio visual work, book, magazine, newspaper, database, electronic information service or similar publication.
- 2 Any merchandising items or advertising, promotional descriptive, covering, or packaging material or container.

Millennium Development Goals

On September 8th, 2000, then Indian Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihar Vajpayee took the stage at the United Nations General Assembly in New York - 26th in a line of 66 world leaders to speak on the final day of the summit. The leaders sought to utilize the UN not only to prevent world wide wars, but to address the other major threats to the planet earth and humanity. Vajpayee stated in this manner, “Giant strides in science and technology, marking the conquest of new frontiers of knowledge has helped us grow more food, produce life saving drugs, and satellites into space- yet, millions still go hungry, die of easily curable diseases and are deprived of the enlightenment and empowerment that education ensures” With this opposite ideas in mind, 147 heads of States and government out of the total 189 UN member states at the summit signed to reach a set of eight goals by 2015. These are as follows:

Goal 1 – Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Goal 2 – provide primary education to every child

Goal 3 – promote gender equality and empower women

Goal 4 – reduce child mortality

Goal 5 – improve maternal health

Goal 6 – combat HIV / AIDS malaria and other diseases

Goal 7 – ensure environmental sustainability

Goal 8 – establishment / develop a global partnership for development.

These targets are known as Millennium Development Goals or MDGS. The MDGS are a set of minimal goals necessary for human development. It offers a nation the possibility of tackling multiple issues at one, and in an integrated manner. For example, reducing poverty by halve (**goal 1**) and eradicate illiteracy by 100% in every child (**goal 2**). Goal 8 is not measurable but commits the developed and the developing countries to working together to achieve an open, rule – based trading and financial system, more generous aid to countries committed to poverty reduction and relief for the debt problems of developing countries. Abdussalam, (2008), states that each of these regions and countries were free to plan ways of achieving these development goals. And in Africa, the United Nation’s recognized the new partnership for African Development (NEPAD) as the frame work for African Development.

In Nigeria a three tier development plan was developed and termed NEEDS, SEEDS, and LEEDS for the national, state and local Government levels. The Millennium Development Goals are expected to be achieved within a decade-by 2015. In Pursuit of these goals, Needs requires that the bulk of governments capital funds should go to social development particularly rebuilding infrastructure and improving education and health. But the weights attached to the priority sectors shows that the highest priority is given to the power sector, yet it has not been achieved others are water, health and education. Agriculture is the least in the priority sectors.

Social Transformation of Millennium Development Goals

So many people believe that the MDGs cannot be achieved. The National Economic Empowerment and Development (NEEDS) document clearly states that if present trend continues the country is not likely to meet the Millennium Development Goals, but the 2005 report gives the conditions for meeting the goals, that Nigeria has sufficient resources to meet the Millennium Development Goals in 2015. The government should change the implementation of policies and programmes in order to achieve the MDGs. These transformations are as follows;

1 Transformation of Leadership: whenever power is concentrated in the hands of a few, they will utilize such

powers to accumulate wealth. To achieve the MDGS will require leadership transformation

2 Educational Transformation; to achieve the millennium development goals in Nigeria, education should be structured. Contracts should not be awarded to a person simply because he has affiliating to him in politics.

3 Employment: Employment is the gate way of achieving the MDGs because individuals will use their skills to contribute to the development of the nation's economy.

4 Industrial Transformation: Revitalize industries that have collapse or dead.

Revitalization of collapse industries is essential if the Millennium Development Goals are to be achieved. The country cannot continue to depend on foreign companies primary commodities that they can produce.

5 Technological Transformation: Perrow, (1967), states that technology is a technique or complex of techniques employed to alter materials (human or non human, mental or physical in an anticipated manner. It is the process and knowledge of using machines and tools to perform tasks effectively and efficiently. Therefore, it is time the government takes a step forward in providing the technological tools needed to fulfill the great Millennium Development Goals that she has been committed to do for the nation.

The Visions of Visual Arts

Looking at what we have on ground in visual art studio in our nation’s tertiary institutions, to achieve planned objectives becomes difficult.

A visual art is a branch of art, a technical subject which has to do with practical skills that develop students /learners to become responsible citizens that will become productive members of the society. Therefore, these technical goals as identified by the National Policy on Education are to:

- i. Provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business.
- ii. Provide technical knowledge and vocational skill necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development of Nigeria.
- iii. Give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals what shall be enterprising and self-reliant economically in Nigeria.

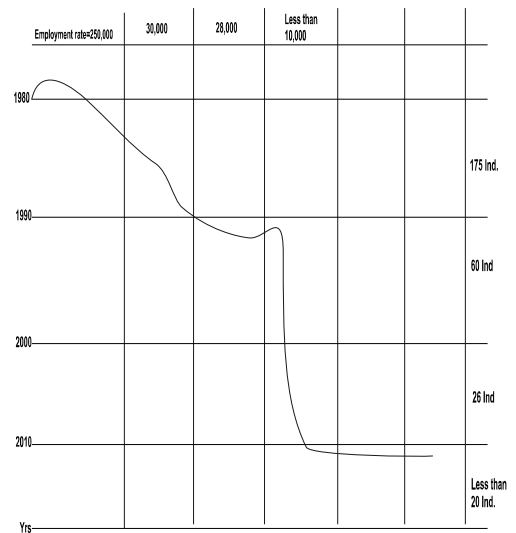
If Nigeria wants to excel and meet the needs of her citizens, the strategic plans enumerated in the Millennium Development Goals must be achieved. Else, it would seem as to be building a castle in the air.

In 1980s, the economy of Nigeria used to boom, the stock market, financial institutions and insurance companies made a lot of profit. Education was rated high, but today our education system is noting to write home about. There are incessant strikes by the various arms of institutions,

under funding of schools and total neglect by the government.

Nigeria, is a land so blessed with vast natural resources, among which is oil. Today, the prices of oil is crashing, so it is time to look inward and go into other areas that will boost the nation’s economy, among these are: Agriculture and Textile. If the Millennium Development Goals are to be achieved by 2015, the government should look towards utilizing other resources that abound in the country.

In this perspective, it is sad to know that textile which in the 1970s was the highest employer of labour after government has been “killed”. Imagine when seventy-one (71) textile companies that would have employed 4003 employees each are dead. In this process, more than 284, 213 people were thrown into the labour market.



From the above table, it is clear that the Nigerian textile industry is dead. All over the country lie carcasses of abandoned textile companies, and most of them overgrown with weeds, yet we talk of industrial development.

According to Walid, (2007), the textile industry used to employ about 250,000 in its 175 industries in the 1980s. The figure dropped to 30,000 employees in about 60 companies in the 1990s. By year 2000, the figure had dropped to a mere 26 companies employing barely 28,000 people. Today, there are less than 20 of such companies surviving nationwide. As we clamor for change to join the best top world economy, machineries should be put in place. Power should be engineered towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals in reviving the nation's textile industries. The government can make policies that will encourage the local textile industries by placing a ban on some foreign textile goods. It is sad that after fifty (50) years of independence, Nigeria is still importing low standard textile goods from Asia and Europe.

The Challenges of Visual Arts Education

The learning of visual arts in our tertiary institutions have remained unchanged and stagnant with a fixed method of teaching and learning which the researcher feels does not meet learners need for career development in technical achievement of self-reliance. This unchanged system is as a result of lack of facilities/ equipment for student's

utilization, workshops, and seminars. Some of these challenges are:

1. Inadequate Funding

There is no doubt that government at different levels are making huge budgetary allocations to education every year, but to disburse this fund to appropriate institutions becomes a problem. The situation is even worse when one considers the fact that there are usually shortfalls in the amounts approved. Sometimes, these statutory grants to the institutions are delayed, making project planning and financial management difficult.

2. Corruption and Politicization of Appointments

The surprising fact is that the government joins national issues with party issues. Appointment of principal officers in our nations higher institutions are based on political or ethnic affiliation. Edu,(2007) opines that the evolving political culture of absolute loyalty to authorities and the need to score political points, mixed with political sentiments have made us to sacrifice merit at the alter of mediocrity in appointment of institutional, departmental, faculty heads.

3. Poverty

The first goal of MDGs is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, its target is 2015, with halve proportion of people living on less than us \$1 a day. statistics in Nigeria have always indicate increasing levels of poverty over the past two and a half decades from 28.1% in

1980 to 65.6% in 1996 (MDGs Report, 2004).

Visual arts are practically oriented subjects that need materials for each subject. But current findings have shown that only 20% of students who offer visual arts can afford to buy their materials. This is as a result of poverty.

The UNDP in its Human Development report of 2003 titled Millennium Development Goals: A compact Among Nations to end Human Poverty, pointed out that to achieve the MDGs require policy responses to structural constraints on several fronts along with stepped up external support. The report recommended six policy clusters to help countries break out of their poverty traps. One of them is to invest early and ambitiously in basic education and health while fostering gender equality.

Lack of finance among students has resulted to few students enrollment in visual arts as compared to other course like business administration or mass – communication.

4. Lack of Effective Industrial Training

The Students industrial training is not efficient enough to make them acquire knowledgeable skills and experience during the four months industrial training. Most of the students go to sub-standard establishments for their industrial training, a situation whereby the director or the instructor there are inexperienced in the specialized area. In some cases, the school calendar may be altered thereby shortening the period of Students industrial training. There are situations where students are not

paid their industrial training allowances. The stakeholders collect this money and eat without paying students their allowances.

5. Lack of Workshop Practice

Students do not attend workshops and seminars as well as excursions. As the labour market becomes more competitive, the need for high level of skills is necessary. The government, the institutions, associations and establishments should invest by funding workshops, seminars and excursions for students. Other strategies like Alumni can also assist in funding.

6. Power Sector

Another set back in the use of visual arts is power supply. Most visual arts equipments such as electric welding machine and kiln are powered by electricity supply. Inadequate power supply is detrimental to the life of these equipments. The stakeholders and school administrators are also not helping government because some allocations and contracts approved to the schools are catered away by the stakeholders, or at times, made by supplying sub-standard equipments to the schools.

Conclusion

Visual arts education can be effective and productive in achieving the Millennium Development Goals if we are committed and dedicated in adequate funding of projects, effective industrial training for students, reduction of poverty,

eradication of corruption and partisan politics.

We must remind ourselves of what prime Minister Vajpayee observed nearly a decade ago when the Millennium Development Goals were adopted, that development is a global challenges of which the world leaders must respond to. In conclusion, "The shortfalls in progress toward the Millennium Development Goals are not because they are unreachable or because of unmet commitment, inadequate resources, lack of focus or accountability and insufficient interest in sustainable development (Ban Ki- Moon, UN Secretary General).

Recommendations

If we really want to achieve the laudable progress called for Millennium Development Goals, the government must make a substantial and sustained commitment to the development and upgrading of infrastructure in departments of visual arts in the nations higher institutions.

Huge and demanding projects as the Millennium Development Goals should not be awarded or seen as an avenue to compensate politicians or individuals with ethnic affiliation or to party members, but to competent individuals who are committed to deliver to the people.

As government gets committed to achieve the MDGs in universal primary / secondary education, such commitment should also be extended to the students of visual arts in the tertiary levels. This in turn may assist in reducing the poverty rate

of the students in procurement of practical materials else, the career may collapse in no distant time.

The government should develop an industrial policy that will nurture our local industries from collapse. In doing this, the stakeholders should be properly monitored and supervised in ensuring that the contracts awarded to them are perfectly supplied.

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