



Harnessing Traditional Musical Instrument Craftsmanship for Sustainable Economic Growth

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Abstract: This study explores the crucial role of traditional musical instrument craftsmanship in fostering Nigeria's sustainable economic growth. As a nation rich in cultural diversity, Nigeria boasts of wealth of indigenous musical traditions that are intricately linked to its social and economic fabric. The study highlights how reviving and promoting the craftsmanship of traditional musical instruments can create job opportunities, stimulate local economies and preserve cultural heritage. By integrating modern business practices with traditional skills, artisans can access broader markets, both locally and internationally. Furthermore, this approach encourages sustainable practices using locally sourced materials thereby reducing environmental impact. The study also discusses the potential of educational initiatives and community engagement to empower artisans, ensuring the transmission of skills to future generations. The study found out that harnessing traditional musical instrument craftsmanship not only preserves Nigeria's rich cultural legacy but also serves as a catalyst for economic resilience and sustainability. It also discovers that though the industry contributes to the economy, it demands technological, mechanical, cost-effective financial viability, trade and industrial development to enable optimal utilization of all its economic potentials.

Keywords: Traditional Musical Instruments, Craftsmanship, Economic Growth.



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Introduction

Nigeria, a nation known for its rich tapestry of cultures and ethnic diversity, is home to vibrant array of traditional music and instruments. From the reverberating sounds of the talking drum to the melodic tones of the xylophone, these instruments are not merely tools for entertainment; they embody the history, values and identity of various communities and ethnic groups that make up the nation. Nevertheless, the craftsmanship behind these instruments faces an experiential threat due to urbanization, globalization and the rise of mass-produced replacements. This decline not only endangers the survival of traditional musical practices but also weakens economic potential of artisans who rely on this craft for their livelihood.

In recent times, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of cultural heritage in economic development. This study suggests that revitalizing traditional musical instrument craftsmanship can serve as a catalyst of sustainable economic growth in Nigeria. By fostering local artisan's skills, job opportunities can be created, rural economies can be also created, and tourism can be promoted while ensuring the preservation on Nigeria's rich musical heritage.

The joining of traditional craftsmanship and modern economic strategies offers a unique pathway to sustainability. By incorporating contemporary business practices, artisans can enhance their market reach and improve profitability, thereby ensuring the durability of the craft. Additionally, this approach encourages the use of locally sourced materials, promoting environmental sustainability and reducing reliance on imported goods. This introduction sets the stage for a comprehensive exploration of the potential benefits of traditional musical instrument craftsmanship in Nigeria, highlighting how it can contribute to economic empowerment, cultural preservation and environmental sustainability. Through an analysis of current challenges and opportunities, this study aims to brighten the significance of this craft in shaping a resilient and prosperous future for Nigeria.

Statement of Problem

The craftsmanship of traditional musical instruments in Nigeria faces significant decline due to several interrelated factors. Globalization and proliferation of mass-produced musical instruments have reduced the demand for handcrafted items, threatening the livelihood of local artisans. As consumers increasingly favor convenience and affordability, traditional craftsmanship struggles to compete, leading to a loss of both skills and cultural heritage. Also, the lack of satisfactory support and recognition for artisans worsens this problem. Many craftsmen operate in isolation, facing challenges such as inadequate access to markets, limiting exposure to modern business practices and insufficient training in entrepreneurship. Thus, their economic potential remains largely untapped, deterring community development and exacerbating poverty in region's reliance on traditional music. Furthermore, the environmental sustainability of traditional craftsmanship is at risk as artisans resort to unsustainable sourcing practices in response to market pressure. This not only threatens local ecosystems but also undermines the authentic cultural narratives embodied in traditional musical instruments.

Despite these challenges, there is a growing body of evidence suggesting that revitalizing traditional musical instrument craftsmanship can contribute to economic growth, cultural preservation and environmental sustainability. However, a comprehensive understanding of the current state of this craftsmanship as well as the barriers and opportunities for its revival remains insufficiently explored. This study aims to address these gaps, investigating how harnessing traditional musical instrument craftsmanship can serve as a viable pathway for sustainable economic development in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to provide a framework for harnessing traditional musical instrument craftsmanship as a pathway to sustainable economic growth in Nigeria. The specific objectives are:

1. To explore the existing landscape of traditional musical instrument craftsmanship in Nigeria, including the types of instruments produced, the demographics of artisans and the challenges they face.
2. To explore the potential economic benefits associated with revitalizing traditional craftsmanship, including job creation, income generation and contribution to local economies.
3. To investigate the environmental implications of traditional craftsmanship, focusing on sourcing materials and production processes that promote sustainability.
4. To create training and support programs that equip artisans with modern business skills, marketing strategies and sustainable practices to enhance their economic viability.

Concept of Traditional Musical Instruments

Traditional musical instruments are musical tools that have been created, preserved and passed down through generations within a particular culture or community. They reflect the history, beliefs, environment and artistic identity of the people who use them. In Nigeria, for instance,

traditional instruments are often made from locally available materials such as wood, animal skin, bamboo, gourds, clay or metal. Their construction methods are usually based on long-established craftsmanship traditions. They are commonly handcrafted by skilled artisans who possess knowledge passed down from older generations. Making these instruments requires patience, creativity and an understanding of acoustics and local artistic styles. Because they are handcrafted, each instrument may have exceptional features that distinguish it from another. Different societies around the world have their own traditional instruments. In Nigeria, for example, the Hausa people are well known for their **Kakaki**, a long metal trumpet traditionally used in royal courts and important ceremonies; the Yoruba people are famous for the **Gangan**, also called the talking drum, which can imitate human speech tones and used in praise singing and cultural performances; the Igbo people are famous for **Oja**, a traditional flute commonly played during festivals, masquerade performances and traditional dances; the Ibibio people are known for the **Obodom**, a carved wooden slit drum used in traditional music, ceremonies and community communication.

The concept of traditional musical instruments goes beyond their physical appearance or sound. They serve as important cultural symbols and are closely connected to social activities such as festivals, religious ceremonies, storytelling, dances, weddings and community celebrations. Through their rhythms and melodies, they help preserve the language, customs and the cultural heritage of the people who own them.

Concept of Musical Instrument Craftsmanship

Musical instrument craftsmanship is the skilled art and practice of designing, building, repairing and refining musical instruments. It combines technical knowledge, artistry, acoustics and musical skills to produce instruments that both sound good and are durable and visually appealing. The key parts of musical instrument craftsmanship include material selection, acoustic design, handcrafting techniques, decoration and aesthetics as well as testing and tuning. Musical instrument craftsmanship is both a traditional craft and a modern profession., blending centuries-old methods with new technologies such as Computer Numerical Control (CNC) machining and digital acoustics analysis. In musical instrument craftsmanship, CNC machines are often used to help make parts of instruments. Nigeria has unique instrument-making traditions such as the Hausa **Kakaki** and the Yoruba talking drum.

Concept of Economic Growth

Economic growth refers to an increase in the production of goods and services in an economy over specific period, typically measured as the percentage increase in real Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It reflects the ability of an economy to produce more output and, consequently, improve the standard of living for its citizens. The benefits of economic growth are improved living standards, job creation and increased government revenue.

A Brief Survey of Nigerian Traditional Musical Instruments

Nigerian traditional musical instruments reflect the cultural diversity and artistic heritage of the nation of over 250 ethnic groups. Each ethnic group has its own distinct culture, language and traditions, contributing to the country's rich cultural diversity. These instruments serve functions like communication, worship, entertainment, festivals, royal ceremonies and social gatherings. They are generally classified into four groups: membranophones (drums), idiophones (self-sounding instruments), aerophones (wind instruments) and chordophones (string instruments).

Membranophones – among the membranophones, the talking drum is one of the most prominent instruments, especially among the Yoruba people. The Yoruba talking drum, locally known as *dùndún* or *gangan* can imitate the tonal patterns of human speech through pressure applied to its cords while playing. It is commonly used during singing praise, royal ceremonies and festivals. Another important drum is the bata drum which is associated with religious and ceremonial performances. In the northern part of Nigeria, the Hausa people use drums such as the *kalanku* and *tambari* for praise singing and court music.

Idiophones – these are also widespread in Nigerian music traditions. They include instruments such as metal gong, wooden slit drum, clay pot drum, rattles, bells and xylophones. The Efik/Ibibio and Ibo people commonly use the metal gong and wooden slit drum for communication and rhythmic accompaniment during dances and rituals. The clay pot drum originating among the Igbo and used by the Efik/Ibibio people produces deep resonant sounds and has gained national and international recognition in contemporary music performance.

Chordophones – these constitute another category of traditional musical instruments. Examples include the *kontigi* and *goje*, which are string instruments popular among the Hausa musicians. They are often used by praise singers and storytellers to accompany oral performances.

Aerophones – wind instruments such as horns, flutes and trumpets are also common. The *Kakaki*, a long metal trumpet used in Hausa royal courts symbolizes authority and prestige. Their performance usually combines music, dance, poetry and ritual, thereby serving both artistic and social functions.

Tools and Techniques of Construction of some Nigerian Musical Instruments

The construction of traditional Nigerian musical instruments involves a variety of tools and techniques that reflect the diverse cultures and craftsmanship of the country. Common tools in the process include chisels, knives, saws, hammers and various types of adhesives, depending on the materials being worked with. Artisans often employ hand tools to shape wood, metal and other components, incorporating traditional methods passed down through generations. Examples of instruments from four major ethnic groups in Nigeria and their techniques of construction are briefly discussed below:

Instrument: *Goge*

Ethnic Group: Hausa

Materials: Hardwoods (such as bamboo or mahogany for durability and resonance), Animal Skin (goat or sheep skin is used for the soundboard, providing a rich tonal quality), Strings (traditionally made from animal gut; modern variations may use synthetic materials) and Pegs (often made from wood and used to secure the strings and adjust their tension).

Construction Technique: The *goge*, a traditional Hausa fiddle, is constructed using a combination of wood and animal skin. Artisans begin making the instrument by selecting a suitable piece of wood, often from local trees such as bamboo or mahogany (Abubakar, 2021). The wood is carved using chisels and knives to create the body of the instrument, which is hollowed out to enhance its resonance. The strings are usually made from animal gut or synthetic materials, and they are attached using wooden pegs that are carefully fitted into the body. Once assembled, the *goge* is covered with a thin layer of animal skin which is stretched over the top to create the soundboard. The entire process reflects the intricate craftsmanship of Hausa artisans, who often infuse their cultural identity into each instrument.

Instrument: *Dùndún*

Ethnic Group: Yoruba

Materials: Wood (the body is carved from hardwood, usually sourced from the iroko tree, known for its strength and acoustic properties), Animal Skin (cowhide is commonly used for the drumhead, allowing for the production of variety of pitches) and Ropes or Metal Rings (used to secure the skin onto the drum body and to adjust the tension, influencing the drum's sound).

Construction Technique: The talking drum, known as *dundun*, is a significant instrument in Yoruba culture, renowned for its ability to mimic human speech. Constructing talking drums involves selecting a suitable piece of wood, typically from the *iroko* tree which is valued for its durability. Artisans begin by hollowing out the wood to form the drum body using chisels and saws. The drum is then shaped into an hourglass form which is essential for its unique sound. Once the body is completed, it is covered with cowhide, which is meticulously stretched and



secured using ropes or metal rings. The tension of the skin can be adjusted to change the pitch, allowing the drummer to produce different tones. Okunade (2011) acknowledges that *dundun* drumming is principally stick-drumming where the tension drum is played with one curved stick. He adds that this intricate process showcases the skill and tradition of Yoruba craftsmanship.

Instrument: *Udu* Drum

Ethnic Group: Igbo

Materials: Clay (primarily constructed from natural clay, which is modeled by hand to create the pot's shape), Water (used to soften the clay for easier molding), Natural Pigments (often used for painting decorative designs on the surface of the pot) and Resonator (the side hole acts as a resonating chamber, enhancing the drum's sound).

Construction Technique: The *udu* drum, an integral part of Igbo music, is a clay pot drum that is both visually striking and sonically unique. The construction begins with gathering clay which is then molded into a pot shape using hands and simple tools like wooden paddles or spatulas (Nwafor, 2022). After shaping the pot, artisans create an opening at the top and a side hole that serves as a resonator. Once the basic structure is formed, the drum is left to dry and is often painted with intricate designs. The *udu* is played by striking the surface with a beater having soft surface to avoid breakage, and its deep, resonant sound is reserved in traditional ceremonies. This method of construction emphasizes the Igbo people's connection to their environment and their artistic expression.

Instrument: *Ekpo* Drums

Ethnic Group: Ibibio

Materials: Wood (the body of the *ekpo* drum is typically made from hardwood such as mahogany or iroko. These woods are chosen for their durability and excellent acoustic properties, which contribute to the drum's rich sound), Animal Skin (the drumhead is often made from goat or cowhide and the skin is carefully selected and treated to ensure it produces a clear, resonant tone when struck), Ropes (ropes made from natural fibers are used to secure the membrane to the drum body), and Decorative Elements (the drum may also feature carvings or painted designs that reflect the cultural identity and artistry of the Ibibio people).

Construction Technique: The construction process begins with selecting high-quality wood and animal skin. Local artisans always choose materials based on availability and cultural significance. The wood is cut into appropriate lengths and shaped using hand tools like chisels and saws. The wood is hollowed out to create a resonating chamber which enables the drum's sound. The animal skin is soaked in water to make it pliable. It is then cut to size and dried to ensure it retains its shape and strength. Once the drum's body and head are prepared, the skin is stretched over the top of the drum. Ropes are threaded through holes around the drum's rim and tightened to secure the skin. This tension can be adjusted to achieve the desired sound – high, medium or low (Akpabot, 1986). Artisans may carve intricate designs into the body of the drum or paint it to reflect cultural stories and identities. The drum is then polished and sometimes treated with oil to enhance its durability and appearance.

Harnessing Traditional Musical Instrument Craftsmanship for Sustainable Economic Growth

The craftsmanship of traditional musical instruments in Nigeria represents a rich cultural heritage that can be harnessed for sustainable economic growth. By promoting and preserving these traditional skills, Nigeria can tap into both local and international markets, promoting cultural industries, employment creation, tourism, entrepreneurship and technology innovation. Nigeria possesses a rich heritage of indigenous musical instruments such as the talking drum, *udu*, *ekwe*, *goje*, *kakaki*, and *ogogo*, which are deeply rooted in the cultural identities of various ethnic groups. Scholars like Arih, Eze, & Kemewerigha (2020) have argued that traditional music and

instrument technology possess untapped economic potentials capable of driving sustainable development in Nigeria.

One major way traditional musical instrument craftsmanship can foster sustainable economic growth is through job creation and entrepreneurship. Instrument production involves wood carving, leatherwork, pottery, metalwork, weaving and decoration, thereby creating opportunities for artisans, traders, performers and cultural entrepreneurs. In many Nigerian communities, local craftsmen depend on indigenous instrument production as a source of livelihood. The commercialization of these crafts through local and international markets can increase household income and reduce unemployment, especially among youths. In Ikot Ekpene (the Raffia City in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria) workshops and markets, over three hundred (300) Akwa Ibom people are actively involved in either the supply of materials, construction or trading on the products or all. Even the physically challenged and some mentally disordered Nigerians are found in the handicraft aspect of the indigenous musical instrument making (Iriwieri (2009). The author adds that weaving diverse rattles, maracas, etc., are sometimes done by this set of people; they do not only earn a living for themselves as they are involved in this art but give them an opportunity to take their minds away from their ailments. If a guess-estimate is made, it is possible that thousands of Nigerians across the nation are employed if data were to be collected from all the states of the federation. Handcrafted indigenous products in Nigeria have considerable economic value and can strengthen artisanal economies if supported through proper market access and infrastructure.

Traditional musical instrument craftsmanship can stimulate the tourism and creative industries. Cultural festivals, traditional performances and heritage exhibitions often attract tourists who are interested in authentic African musical experiences. Instruments such as the Hausa *Kakaki*, Yoruba *Dùndún*, Igbo *Oja* and Ibibio *Obodom* can become cultural exports that enhance Nigeria's global cultural visibility. Through government investment in cultural tourism, museums, craft villages and music festivals, Nigeria can transform traditional instrument craftsmanship into a profitable sector capable of generating foreign exchange earnings.

Another important contribution can be found in cultural preservation and education. Traditional musical instruments embody indigenous history, spirituality, language and social values. The preservation and teaching of instrument-making skills can prevent cultural extinction while transferring valuable indigenous technologies to younger generations. Incorporating traditional instrument craftsmanship into educational curricula and vocational training centers would therefore encourage skills acquisition and cultural continuity. Technology and innovation can also enhance the economic potential of traditional musical instrument craftsmanship. Digital platforms, e-commerce and modern recording technologies can help local craftsmen market their products globally. Technology adaptation can improve instrument design, durability and sound quality while maintaining cultural authenticity. Indeed, technology can aid the preservation, documentation and dissemination of indigenous instruments such as the Agogo, although careful measures must be taken to avoid cultural dilution. The integration of digital technologies into traditional craftsmanship can therefore expand market reach and encourage sustainable production practices.

Government policies and institutional support are necessary for maximizing the economic benefits of traditional musical instrument craftsmanship. Policies that provide grants, cultural funding, intellectual property protection and access to export markets can strengthen the sector. Arih et al (2020) stress that traditional musical instrument technology education is essential for national development because it equips citizens with practical skills and technological knowledge. Similarly, Ojo (2021) maintains that indigenous technology and craftsmanship have the potential to generate domestic income, foreign exchange and tourism growth if adequately supported by government and private investors. Establishing cultural industries, cooperative societies and public-private partnerships would therefore improve the sustainability of the sector.



Moreover, the sustainable sourcing of raw materials can ensure environmental sustainability within the craftsmanship industry. Many traditional instruments are produced using wood, clay, animal skin and natural fibres. Encouraging afforestation, eco-friendly harvesting practices and recycling of materials can protect the environment while sustaining production. Sustainable craftsmanship aligns with global development goals that promote responsible consumption, environmental protection and inclusive economic growth.

Some Initiatives in Nigeria that Support Traditional Musical Instrument Craftsmanship

In Nigeria, various initiatives support traditional craftsmanship, particularly in the realm of music and arts. Here are some notable examples:

National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC) – The NCAC promotes Nigerian arts and culture through workshops, exhibitions, festivals and other programs that highlight traditional craftsmanship. They aim to preserve cultural heritage and support artisans by providing platforms to showcase their work.

Cultural Festivals – Events like Lagos Carnival in Lagos, Osun-Osogbo Festival in Osogbo, Osun State, Durba Festival in Kano and Sokoto, Calabar Carnival in Calabar, Cross Rivers State, Aso Rock Festival in Abuja, Eyo Festival in Lagos, the Abuja Arts and Culture Festival in Abuja, and Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in Lagos showcase Nigeria's rich cultural heritage through music, dance, art and traditional ceremonies. These events not only celebrate cultural heritage but also provide economic opportunities for artisans to sell their crafts to a larger audience. However, because of the activities of insurgents, abductors, etc., in Nigeria, these carnivals and festivals cannot be organized as usual. The Nigerian governments should, therefore, not sit on the oases. Something must be done to restore the dignity of the country.

Craftsmanship Training Programs – Organizations like the National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO) run training programs aimed at youth and artisans. These programs focus on traditional craft skills, including musical instrument making to encourage preservation and innovation in craftsmanship.

Artisan Cooperatives – Local cooperatives such as the Musical Instrument Makers Association of Nigeria (MIMAN) unite artisans specializing in various instruments. These cooperatives provide members with training, marketing support and access to resources, facilitating collaboration and enhancing the quality of craftsmanship.

Cultural Heritage Projects – Initiatives supported by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), such as The Prince Claus Fund (PCF), focus on preserving traditional crafts through funding and resources. These projects often include documentation and promotion of traditional musical instruments, ensuring that knowledge is passed down through generations.

Online Platforms and Marketplaces – with the growing of e-commerce, platforms like Jumia and Konga have begun to feature traditional crafts, including musical instruments. This allows artisans to reach a broader customer base, both locally and internationally, thus supporting their livelihoods.

Collaborations with Educational Institutions – Partnership between artisans and universities, such as the University of Nigerian Nsukka, University of Uyo, Uyo, Nigeria and Delta State University, Abraka have led to research and projects focused on traditional craftsmanship. These collaborations often involve students and artisans working together to innovate and preserve traditional techniques.

Government Grant and Support – The Nigerian Government has introduced various grant programs aimed at supporting artisans and preserving cultural heritage. These grants often fund workshops, exhibitions and training programs for artisans.

It can be acknowledged here that these initiatives collectively contribute to the sustainability of traditional craftsmanship in Nigeria, ensuring that cultural heritage is preserved while providing

economic opportunities for artisans. By continuing to support such programs, Nigeria can maintain its rich artistic traditions and foster economic growth within local communities.

Challenges of Harnessing Traditional Musical Instrument Craftsmanship in Nigeria

Harnessing traditional musical instrument craftsmanship for sustainable economic growth in Nigeria presents several challenges that must be addressed to fully realize its potential. These challenges encompass issues related to market access, skill preservation, resource management and cultural recognition.

1. Market Access: The lack of access to broader markets for traditional artisans is one of the primary challenges. Many craftsmen operate in remote areas with limited or no exposure to potential customers beyond their local communities. Afolabi (2021) points out that the dominance of mass-produced musical instruments in international markets often overshadows handcrafted items, making it difficult for local artisans to compete. This competition can lead to decreased sales and income for artisans who rely on traditional craftsmanship as their primary source of livelihood.

2. Skill Preservation: Another significant challenge is the decline in traditional craftsmanship skills among younger generations. As urbanization and modernization continue to influence societal values, there is growing tendency for youth to pursue more lucrative, contemporary careers rather than learning the art of traditional instrument making. Nwafor (2022) emphasizes that without structured training programs and mentorship from experienced artisans, these invaluable skills may be lost forever. This decline threatens the cultural heritage associated with traditional instruments and limits the potential for economic growth in this sector.

3. Resource Management: The sustainability of raw materials used in crafting traditional instruments poses another serious challenge to harnessing musical instrument craftsmanship for economic growth. Many artisans rely on specific types of wood and animal skins which are becoming increasingly scarce because of environmental degradation and overharvesting. Ekanem (2022) notes that unsustainable practices in sourcing these materials can lead to higher costs and reduced quality, ultimately affecting the artisans' ability to produce competitive products. Addressing this issue requires commitment to sustainable resource management and possibly the exploration of alternative materials.

4. Cultural Recognition: Cultural recognition and appreciation for traditional craftsmanship are essential for its economic viability. However, there is sometimes a lack of government full support and public awareness regarding the importance of preserving these crafts. Abubakar (2021) holds that without government policies promoting traditional arts and providing financial support to artisans, the sector may struggle to survive. Increasing public interest and appreciation for traditional instruments can play a crucial role in fostering sustainable economic growth.

Conclusion

The study has demonstrated that traditional musical instrument craftsmanship possesses significant potential for promoting sustainable economic growth in Nigeria. Beyond its cultural and artistic value, the sector represents a viable source of employment, entrepreneurship, cultural tourism and community development. The production of indigenous instruments such as drums, flutes, xylophones, string instruments and other locally crafted musical tools reflects the richness of Nigeria's cultural heritage while also creating opportunities for income generation and skill preservation.

Moreover, the integration of traditional craftsmanship into tourism, cultural festivals, music education and export promotion can significantly enhance income generation and community development. Modern technology, digital marketing and vocational training can also improve production quality and expand market accessibility for craftsmen across rural and urban areas. Nevertheless, achieving these benefits requires deliberate government intervention, private sector participation and institutional support aimed at funding, skill acquisition, intellectual property

protection and cultural preservation. Ultimately, sustaining traditional musical instrument craftsmanship will not only strengthen Nigeria's cultural identity but also diversify the nation's economy beyond oil dependence.

The findings however reveal that many traditional craftsmen continue to face challenges such as inadequate funding, limited access to modern markets, poor government support, declining interest among younger generations and the increasing dominance of imported musical products. Despite these obstacles, the resilience and creativity of local artisans indicate that industry can thrive if properly supported through policy implementation, vocational training, financial assistance and strategic promotion of cultural industries.

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