

Review

# Poverty alleviation and empowerment of small-scale industries in Nigeria: The case of Tie and Dye Makers Association

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Using the experiences of the Tie and Dye Makers Association of Nigeria, this study examines how various governmental programmes on poverty alleviation, job creation, and empowerment have impacted the fortunes of informal sector operators in Nigeria. The study found that while the various programmes were not deficient on policy design and resource allocation, politics and corruption ensured that the masses saw and received little. For the most part, the dividend of the programmes ended up with politicians and civil servants who were in-charge of them. Given Adire-makers' efforts at formalizing their activities, to continue to allow regulatory and operational challenges hinder the formalization of the informal sector is like allowing a head of steam to pass without harnessing its horsepower.

**Key words:** Poverty alleviation, empowerment, Tie and Dye Makers Association, informal economy, Nigeria, Africa.

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## INTRODUCTION

Not long ago, the informal sector in developing countries was deemed incapable of political organization. Where such organisation exists, it was portrayed as an *'individualistic, inchoate mass that expressed its interests through political and economic disengagement rather than through organized political action'* (Meagher, 2007). MacGaffey analyzed it in terms of Scott's *'weapons of the weak'*, based on evasion and non-compliance (MacGaffey, 1994). Gutkind and Bayat argued that informal sector's discontent brought with it the threat of spontaneous mob violence (Bayat, 1997). Only a few consider it as an articulated political expression characterised by intense affirmative activities (Meagher, 2007).

Informal economy or informal sector describes any employment that is hidden from the state, most especially in the areas of tax, social security or labour laws. This definition, although widely held, inadvertently leads to the general tendency to regard company registration or organization of labour into association as a proof of formality. Formality is however not the same as legality. Informality, as studies such as those of Saskia Sassen, Hernando de Soto, etc. have shown, is a product of and driver of advanced capitalism. Arguably the most influential work on informal economy is Hernando de Soto's *The Other Path* (1989). In this work, de Soto argued that excessive regulation forces a large part of the economy

into informality and therefore prevents economic development. Using the Peruvian society as example, de Soto argues that nations depend on an information framework that records ownership of property and other economic information for their economic growth. He decries the enormous problems faced by small-scale operators in Peru whose unreported and unrecorded economic activities have served to keep them alive for many years. Lacking legal identity, these businesses cannot seek legal remedies in court and could not obtain credit from financial institutions for lack of collateral. In addition, lack of information on their income also shielded them away from paying taxes to government.

The impact of this is that a nation's economy typically consists of a legal or formal economy and an extra legal or informal economy. As it is generally known, especially in developing nations, a minority group constitutes the formal sector and it is this small but elite minority that enjoys the economic benefits of the law and globalization, while the majority informal operators wallow in abject poverty, as their assets are regarded as dead capital, which exists in the shadows of the law.

As a coping mechanism, these majority informal operators create their own rules, which, as de Soto noted, are not only full of shortcomings, but also difficult to enforce. De Soto submits that to improve the informal sector, government should formalize informal jobs through regulation. While this is a laudable suggestion, other scholars have argued that many different types of informality exist and that it is difficult to institute a one-size-fits-all solution to informality. On account of this, others submitted that government should, instead of formalizing the informal sector, provide better protections that could improve informal sector operators. These include creating environments that could guarantee credits, protection and property rights.

The dramatic expansion of informal economies together with rapid political liberalization since the beginning of the 21st Century has ushered in new perspectives on the informal sector. Rapid economic informalisation and the rise of civil society have produced a flowering of popular associations among informal actors, as well as opened up new vistas for political articulation in most African societies. The Tie and Dye Makers Association of Nigeria (TDMAN), one of the numerous informal organisations in Nigeria and an umbrella body for makers of tie and dye clothes, popularly called *Adire*, has tried to provide *Adire*-makers with technologies, information and organizational strength to ensure better-life, secure loans from banks, liaise with Nigeria's Small and Medium Scale Economic Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), etc.

TDMAN has, since its reconstitution in 2000, given *Adire*-makers regular opportunities to exchange experiences, learn from each other, and develop new technologies for placing local experiences in a global context. It is also interfacing between government and

their members.

These have become increasingly necessary, as globalisation's latitude in enterprise interdependence, diffused work structure, and enterprise-regime cut across regional and national boundaries. These create a situation whereby the prospects of enhancing skills and incomes depend on decisions taken in other parts of the world. While these general points are known by *Adire*-makers, they nevertheless lack specific knowledge about the distant forces, the new technologies and sundry other matters which determine their conditions. For example, how does the increasing concentration in the retail sectors in China, the US or UK affect the organisation of the value chain which *Adire*-makers are part of? How do their services – in terms of costs, quality, flexibility or speed - compare with those of competitors in other regions or countries? How do their earnings compare with those of similar producers elsewhere? Lack of knowledge on these and other related issues, like outsourcing, make it difficult for *Adire*-makers to defend their positions or become pro-active in their business.

Using oral interviews, structured questionnaires, written and archival documents, this study, using *Adire*-makers' association of Abeokuta as case study, examines opportunities for development through the informal sector and the regulatory (domestic and international) and operational challenges hindering the growth of the sector. The study concludes by advocating that continued informalisation of the informal sector is like allowing a head of steam to pass without harnessing its horsepower.

#### **ADIRE IN YORUBA HISTORY: A BRIEF REVIEW OF LITERATURE.**

Although Yoruba history is a well-documented one, nevertheless, not much is known about *Adire*-making until the publication of "The Bluest Hands: A Social and Economic History of Women Dyers in Abeokuta (Nigeria), 1890-1940" by Judith A. Byfield in 2002. In *The Bluest Hands*, which centered on the impacts of colonial rule on Yoruba women's textile production during the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, Byfield argues that the history of *Adire* cloth production was intertwined with that of cocoa production, both in Nigeria and Ghana. Thus, when cocoa price plummeted in 1937, inability of farmers to continue to purchase *Adire* led to the decline of the industry. Byfield also shows how the colonial state favored cocoa farmers, who were mostly men, with price supports and agricultural advice, while leaving *Adire* producers, who were mostly women, to their own devices. This gendered situation might be explained by the fact that colonial officials sought to encourage cocoa production for the European export market, while viewing craft production as economically unimportant. However, Byfield documents how marginalization of women's economic and political roles was

part of a larger pattern that reflected a particular gender bias, which was played out in colonial expectations of women and work (Byfield, 2002).

Since the publication of *The Bluest Hands*, a few other publications have also come to light on *Adire*. In "Cloth is the Center of the World: Nigerian Textiles, Global Perspectives", Eicher went beyond examining *Adire* alone, she considered *Akwete*, *Pelete* and *Bite*, three other Nigerian clothes. The work's uniqueness lies in not limiting itself to merely examining cloth-making but also to examine major issues such as identity, ethnicity, gender, spirituality, patronage, cultural reproduction, innovation and creativity, the construction of meaning, domestic economies, and trade relations (Eicher, 2003). The essay demonstrates the powerful role of textiles as symbolic objects and documents of history, which are as aesthetically and culturally rich as any medium of artistic expression.

Lisa Aronson's contribution to *Akwete* clothe-makers and marketing of products elucidate the complex history of ethnic interactions in the Niger Delta region. She also offers information about the *Akwete* construction of artistic creativity and the secrecy that surrounds aesthetic and technical innovations by weavers. The heart of Aronson's contribution concerns the complex trade networks by which *Akwete* weavers sold their own cloth and gained access to imported textiles. Ironically, the *Akwete* themselves rarely wear or use the cloth made by their weavers but instead choose imported Indian madras and other textiles.

Wolff (cited in Eicher, 2003), on his part, discusses the history, iconography, and uses of *Adire* by Yoruba people. This textile, she noted, grew out of global interactions; for although indigo has an extremely long history in Nigeria, *Adire*, as it is made today, was developed only after imported European cloth became widely available. Over the course of its history, *Adire*'s fortunes have responded to political and economic changes; new techniques and new markets have resulted in dramatic developments such as the use of silk-screening and synthetic indigo dyes. Keyes, in her "*Adire: Cloth, Gender and Social Change in Southwestern Nigeria (1841-1991)*" claimed that *Adire*-making became part of Yorubaland only in the nineteenth century (Keyes, 1993). Judith Byfield, in "*Innovation and Conflict: Cloth Dyers and the Interwar Depression in Abeokuta, Nigeria*", however, maintained that by the nineteenth century, *Adire*-makers had begun to produce *Adire* with imported European manufactured cloth, as against locally woven cloth (Byfield, 1997).

In this particular work, Byfield explores the plight of *Adire*-makers during the period immediately following the end of the World War I. As she had noted, the inter-war depression was a critical juncture for women engaged in the *Adire* production in Abeokuta. Abeokuta had become one of the premier dyeing centers in Yorubaland, but by the end of the 1920s the industry declined. The decline

was not unconnected with the global economic recession that followed the war. This decline forced dyers to explore a range of economic and political options and to introduce new technologies into the production process. Dyers' ability to navigate the economic crisis was influenced, and sometimes limited, by the actions of other producers and traders as well as by the state as they tried to protect their interests. *Adire* production continued after the depression but the industry was reduced to a shadow of its former existence.

As noted above, Byfield, among others, examined *Adire*-making in the light of colonial economic motive and incorporation of Yorubaland vis-à-vis Nigeria into the vortex of global economy while Eicher, Keyes, Wolff and others looked at cloth-making and textile production in relations to issues such as identity construction, spirituality, etc. In these and many other works, writers not only underscored the importance of the industry to the development of the different communities where they could be found, they also highlighted the salience of local initiatives in the growth and development of the industry. As could be seen in Byfield's works on *Adire* in Abeokuta, gender mainstreaming, especially from the colonial period was a noticeable impediment. Keyes also reported this gender bias in her work.

In Eicher et al. (2003), the importance of the industry to understanding the worldview of the various communities is made manifest. While the focus of the different scholars differs, they were however unanimous in the view that cloth and textile production, most notably *Adire*, remains a local, individual or family-driven cottage industry. More often than not, the various stakeholders in the industry face challenges that are common to most informal sector operators. These problems relate to how informal sector operators negotiate the socio-economic and political space, especially in fledging societies of the Third World. It is in view of this that a study on empowerment of the poor in the cloth-making and textile production becomes inevitable.

From these and other literature on cloth making and textile production in Nigeria, it is incontrovertible that *Adire*-making is not a new phenomenon. However, empowerment of stakeholders in the industry is a relatively new phenomenon. While legal empowerment would be examined in the next section, the remaining part of this section clarifies concepts and issues the study addresses.

The first is the name *Adire* itself. The nearest English interpretation given *Adire*, over the years, has been tie-and dye. Effectively, the name, *Adire*, even to the Yoruba, merely describes the process and procedures through which *Adire* is made. *Adire*, as a word, is a shortened form of saying: '*Adi Aso, a si 'Re si nu Aro*', which means, "The cloth is knotted and soaked in indigo dye".

*Adire*-making entails different processes and could not be, as Byfield had maintained, called '*originally a women's*

*industry*' (Byfield, 1997). Some of the processes involved in *Adire* making includes: weaving, dying, dressmaking, tailoring, spinning, canning, and selling. In Yorubaland, the more labour-intensive a task is the more women are exonerated from it. So, it amounts to a generalization to conclude that these processes involved only women. Another fundamental issue that must also be noted is the tendency to consider *Adire-Eleko*, *Adire-Alabere*, *Adire-Oniko*, etc., as different types of *Adire*. There is only one *Adire*, *Adire-Eleko*, *Adire-Alabere*, *Adire-Oniko*, etc., which are used in other literature as different types of *Adire* are mainly different designs based on patterns and depth of dye.

### **TDMAN: ORIGINS AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE.**

The formation of *Adire*-makers associations, the offshoot of TDMAN, in different parts of Yorubaland was by no mean fortuitous. It arose as a response to a complex problem experienced by *Adire*-makers in Abeokuta in the 1920s. These problems ranged from severe credit crunch and low patronage to inability to source *Elu*, the local materials from which indigo dye is obtained. Attempts at solving these problems brought about two important developments.

On the one hand was introduction of new method into *Adire* production, which simplified the production processes. On the one hand, the simplification of production processes brought more people into the industry. Problems associated with production quality soon arose, as these new entrants were more concerned with turning out large quantity of *Adire* at the expense of quality products. On account of quality problem, patronage dropped (Byfield, 1997). Unprecedented fall in commodity prices and low patronage combined to destroy the industry. In consequence, export prices fell precipitously from £500,000 before 1928 to £150,000 by mid-1930s (National Archive Ibadan, 1925). To reverse the trend, or at the very best, to cope with the situation, European firms began to open shops in Abeokuta as from 1925. By doing this, layers of middlemen and retainers were removed and European merchants were selling directly to consumers. This development not only rendered many middlemen jobless, but also made many bankrupt, as they could not repay loans earlier taken.

The abolition of *Iwofa* (pawnship) system, through which credit and labour were raised in Yorubaland before colonial rule, in 1893 meant that *Adire* makers could not raise free labor. Land sale, as a measure of credit and capital, which had taken root in Lagos and Ibadan, was not firmly entrenched in Abeokuta. Therefore, the use of property as collateral for loans had not developed. The general practice in Yorubaland whereby farmers produce cash crops, such as cocoa, coffee, rubber, cotton, etc. in exchange for other things failed to cushion the effects of

the economic meltdown. Continual falling of cash crops prices and disposable incomes of most Yoruba people worsened the situation the more. The economic crunch affected not only the native people but also the colonial administration, as funds from the home office in Britain was reduced.

To make headway, the administration reformed the tax system. Besides the existing flat tax, graduated tax was introduced. While the graduated tax was paid by men and women whose annual income exceeded £40, the flat tax, which was fixed at 5 shillings for men and 2s 6d for women, was limited to those whose earnings were below £40. To ensure efficient tax collection and accurate tax records, colonial administration made the various compound heads, chiefs, Bales, and Obas responsible for tax collection. These Yoruba heads were, in turn, to report to specially appointed district heads. In the case of Abeokuta, the Alake, was the appointed district head. To motivate these chains of 'officers'; a percentage of the total tax receipts was given to them (National Archive Ibadan, 1925).

This development, rather than reflecting on the declining nature of people's incomes, completely disempowered the *Adire*-makers, as many went bankrupt in their bids to meet their unchanging tax bills. As coping measures, the different stakeholders were forced to devise measures to cope with the situation. As noted above, the European merchants removed the middlemen and commenced direct sales to end-users. The colonial administration became more aggressive with taxes and levies. It also refused to assist the *Adire*-makers and the Egba merchants to obtain credit; as such a step could hamper revenue. The indigenous *Adire* makers, on their own, began to experiment with European clothes, dyes, and caustic soda. Although the new technology and imported materials brought about changes in the industry, it however reduced the quality of the products. As semi-skilled artisans, idlers and other untrained persons began to churn out inferior products that no one wanted to buy, the older generation of *Adire*-makers watched helplessly as their cherished trade slipped into disrepute.

To stem the tide, *Adire*-makers in Abeokuta approached Oba Ladapo Ademola, the Alake of Egbaland. The king was expected to intervene with the colonial administration in other to lower taxes (National Archive Ibadan, 1933). He was also expected to prevail on the European firms to sell '*raw-materials to them on credit*' (Egba Administration Bulletin, 1927), and compel new generations of *Adire*-makers to dispense with caustic soda and imported (synthetic) dye so as to raise the quality of their products (National Archive Ibadan, 1933). The king's position in these matters is precarious. On taxation, he could not force the colonial administration. Besides, any attempt to lower taxation in his domain automatically translates to lower returns to the Alake himself. He also could not control the European merchants as they were directly linked to the colonial

administration in Lagos. In order to mediate in the competition between the older and the newer generations of *Adire*-makers, Oba Ladapo Ademola ordered the establishment of the *Adire*-makers Association in 1927 (Egba Administrative Bulletin, 1927).

As proposed by the monarch, each compound in Abeokuta was to have its own cell-group, which was to be headed by the most senior woman in the compound. These senior women were to subordinate themselves to their compound heads, who, in turn, were to subordinate themselves to the Alake (National Archive Ibadan, 1927). The duties of the committee of senior women include coordinating training and raw material procurements, standardizing *Adire* production and controlling production procedures by ensuring that members follow the arcane procedures of the trade. They were also to work out how to seek credit facilities for *Adire*-makers and ensure uniform charges for their products. These senior women and others within the structure were to meet monthly with the Alake to keep him abreast on developments (National Archive Ibadan, 1928).

Owing largely to the fact that disagreement between the older and the younger generations of *Adire*-makers was over the use of either the *Elu* or caustic soda in the *Adire* production, the Alake organized a competition between the younger and older generations of *Adire*-makers to determine which of the two methods would be sanctioned as official method. While the older generation wanted a reversal to the use of *Elu*, the new generation preferred caustic soda (National Archive Ibadan, 1928). Even if the older generation had won, the economic situation in Abeokuta, as in other parts of Yorubaland, had become so critical that alternative means of carrying on the trade had become inevitable. In addition to the economic recession, *Elu* had become practically unavailable. Hence, the younger generation of *Adire*-maker needed little or no persuasion to make the use of caustic soda popular. Despite this, the economic crises and the decline witnessed by the industry ultimately sounded the death-knell for *Adire*-making throughout the colonial period.

The re-emergence of the *Adire*-makers Association and its eventual nationalization owes to the rapid economic informalisation and rise of civil society that followed the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) in 1986. SAP, with its emphasis on currency devaluation, economic deregulation, liberalization, and privatization of public enterprises was a harbinger of untoward things in Nigeria. Increasing rate of unemployment, declining regulated wage labour, and growing numbers of job-cuts created corps of laid-off workers who leagued with the unemployed graduates and others to eke out a living off Nigeria's informal sector (Oyeniyi, 2009).

SAP was indeed a paradox. On the one hand, it weaned job-rationalization, while, on the other hand, led to the dramatic expansion of informal economies. Many who lost their jobs in the formal sector were compelled to

seek alternative jobs in the informal sector. As part of the measures to cushion the effect of SAP, informal operators in Nigeria came together under various local and national unions to bargain collectively. This unionization eventually produced a flowering of popular associations amongst which was TDMAN. As an umbrella body for collective bargaining, TDMAN's cardinal objectives include regulating the industry, i.e. to control entrance and exit into the industry by ensuring that new entrants are trained and registered with the organization. The organization's mandate also includes determination of price, so as to ensure uniformity and ensure that stakeholders in the industry are protected from the negative effects of SAP. TDMAN also facilitates loans and credit by serving as guarantor for members seeking loans from banks, the nation's Small and Medium-Scale Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), cooperative unions, etc. (SMEDAN, 2009). It also partners with the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) and the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the nation's frontline agencies in charge of coordinating and monitoring poverty eradication and manpower development (NAPEP, 2009). Through provision of training and empowerment opportunities for the youths, TDMAN partners with NAPEP to provide life skills and entrepreneurship training (NAPEP, 2009). To showcase its potentials, the organization periodically organised fairs, shows and exhibitions (Stephen-Imala, 2009).

To attain these objectives, TDMAN has four distinct structures. At the apex of this structure, there is the national level, which comprises elected officials from the state level. A National Chairman who is elected to serve for a period of five years heads the national association. Mrs. Stephen-Imala is the current chairperson of the association.

The National Chairman has a National Executive Council, which serves as the highest policy-making body for the organisation. There is the State Chapter at the state, which is headed by a State Chairman. This also has its council, which sees to the implementation of policies and programs passed down by the National Executive Council. Besides this, members of the State Chapter nominate five delegates who elect the national officers. Below the state level, there is the Local Government Council level and the market or town level. These two levels are, in some states, fused (Stephen-Imala, 2009).

## **POVERTY ALLEVIATION AND EMPOWERMENT OF NIGERIAN POOR: THE TDMAN EXAMPLE**

Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor defines legal empowerment as '*the process through which the poor become protected and are enabled to use the law to advance their rights and their interests, vis-à-vis the state*

and in (sic) the market'. This, according to the Commission, involves the ability of the poor to realise 'their full rights, and reaping the opportunities that flow from that, through public support and their own efforts as well as the efforts of their supporters and wider networks' (Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor, 2008). However, the Commission noted, 'is a country and context-based approach that takes place at both the national and local levels'. In Nigeria, the bastions of poverty alleviation and empowerment are National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) and the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), and Small and Medium-Scale Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN). While NAPEP coordinates the informal operators, including unemployed individuals; NDE coordinates provision of employment, while SMEDAN coordinates the organized informal operators.

NAPEP, established in 2001, symbolizes the commitment of government to poverty eradication in Nigeria. NAPEP is organized into federal, state and local government units. In terms of organizational structure, a National Coordinator, who is the Chief Executive Officer, heads the national body. Under the CEO, there are other officials such as the National Secretary and the Directors (of Administration, Procurement, Research, Monitoring and Evaluation). At the state and local government levels, the structures are not so clearly organised.

In order to exercise these mandates, NAPEP designed a number of poverty eradication programmes such as:

- (i) The Village Economic Development Solutions (Village Solutions);
- (ii) In Care of the People (COPE);
- (iii) Nigeria's Conditional Cash Transfer Programme;
- (iv) Community Economic Sensitization Scheme;
- (v) And Multi Partner Matching Funds (MPMF) (NAPEP, 2009).

As enshrined in the constitutive Acts of NAPEP, all the three tiers of government in Nigeria have a constitutional responsibility for the poverty eradication and socio-economic development of their constituents; hence, the national agency serves as a coordinating structure. In his speech to the Honorable Minister of Foreign Affairs on September 11, 2008, seven years after NAPEP's establishment, Magnus L. Kpakol, the Senior Special Assistant to the President and National Coordinator of NAPEP, noted:

- (i) poverty has become a major challenge facing Nigeria;
- (ii) that many people continue to suffer pronounced deprivation and that this condition, if not addressed, can create a divide that can engulf our country;
- (iii) that expanding direct empowerment opportunities to the poor is the way for narrowing any divide; and that the Federal Government will assist states and communities to develop Poverty Solutions (Kpakol, 2008).

In yet another speech delivered to the Government of

Enugu State, Magnus L. Kpakol enunciated further on what he described as poverty solutions, as comprising the following: Good governance; Law and Order; Rules and procedures; Value for money; Reduced Uncertainty; Reciprocal courtesy; Accountability; Hard work; and Personal Responsibility (Kpakol, 2008).

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria Act of 2003 established SMEDAN to promote the development of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector of Nigeria economy (Kpakol, 2008). The Agency facilitates access of micro, small and medium entrepreneurs/investors to all resources that are required for their development (Kpakol, 2008). The establishment of SMEDAN confirms that the nation's policy-makers also realized that poverty is a social malaise that is threatening Nigeria's growth and development.

SMEDAN, as highlighted in its constitutive Act, was established to achieve the following:

- (i) stimulating, monitoring and coordinating the development of the MSMEs sector,
- (ii) initiating and articulating policy ideas for micro, small and medium enterprises growth and development,
- (iii) promoting and facilitating development programmes,
- (iv) instrument and provide support services to accelerate the development and modernization of MSME operation (SMEDAN, 2009).

In addition to the above, the agency is also to serve as a vanguard for rural industrialization, poverty reduction, job creation and enhancing sustainable livelihoods. Other responsibilities of SMEDAN are to link small and medium enterprises to internal and external sources of finance, to appropriate technology, technical skills as well as to link small and medium enterprises to large enterprises. The agency is also to promote information sharing and provide access on industrial infrastructure such as layouts, incubators, and industrial parks. Besides the above, the agency also serves as intermediary between the MSMEs and the government (SMEDAN, 2009).

SMEDAN aims to achieve its objectives through the following programmes:

- (i) sourcing, processing and disseminating business information, which aims at creating and regularly updating data bank on MSMEs, raw materials, markets, available local technologies/machinery and prototypes;
- (ii) Policy Development, which aims at formulating and ensuring due approval and implementation of an MSME policy for Nigeria. It is also geared towards conducting impact assessment studies and using same to recommend improvements in policy intervention;
- (iii) Establishment of Business Support Centres (BSCs) to provide the following services: Model business planning skills, Mentoring Professional service such as Accounting, Financing and Book-Keeping, Industrial Dynamics and Technology Assessment, Legal and taxation

advisory services, Demonstration models to provide sector service providers and General business consultation;

(iv) Capacity building and promotional services, which aims at facilitating vertical linkages of MSMEs with large enterprises, organization of MSMEs into clusters and cooperatives to enhance their productivity and have easier access to factors of production, including finance, arrangement/facilitation of trade and technological exposition, provision of market support information system through the agency's website, encouragement and facilitation of new investments in designated priority areas in each State of the federation;

(v) Establishment of industrial parks and Regional SME Development Centres. Each park comes with industrial buildings, and offers MSMEs the following facilities on a cost-sharing basis: security, electricity, water, buying centers, service providers, petrol station and capital intensive technologies;

(vi) Enhancing MSMEs access to finance by liaising with financial institutions to harness and pool resources for utilization by MSMEs, developing and implementing a strategy for the effective and timely disbursement of SMIEIS fund, attracting foreign investment and funds for the development of the MSMEs Subsector. In addition, to constantly liaise with other institutions for the establishment and operation of an MSME Credit Guarantee Scheme. SMEDAN also sets-up a networking programmes which aims at partnering with Trade Groups, NGOs, Government Ministries and Agencies, Research and Technological institutions and Multilateral/Donor Agencies etc. to create a dynamic network of stakeholders in the development of MSMEs sub-sector of the economy (SMEDAN, 2009).

From the above, there is no gainsaying the fact that the issue of empowering the poor is not lost on government in Nigeria. However, what are the impacts of these agencies on Nigerians either as individuals or as groups? In what ways and manners have these agencies contributed to empowering the people and alleviating poverty? How have the agencies' policies and programmes affected the fortunes of organizations like TDMAN? In the remaining part of this essay, this study would seek to find answers to these and many other questions using the experiences of the various stakeholders in the *Adire*-making industry.

The development and metamorphosis of TDMAN from 1927 till date can well be described as efforts at empowerment. Institutionally, it was kick-started by the seventh Alake of Egbaland, and later developed during the 1980s. TDMAN, as reconstituted in the 2000, is an umbrella body for all *Adire*-makers in Nigeria. Since its decline in the 1920s, *Adire* production did not recover and the association formed in 1927 became moribund. Its fortune rose later in the 1990s, as Nigerians began to look inward for alternative methods of cushioning the

paralyzing effects of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP).

Although unorganized at first, *Adire*-making, by the 1990s, has become so successful that markets of considerable sizes such as Itoku (in Abeokuta), Akerele (in Lagos), Gbagi and Oje (in Ibadan), Oja-Oba (in Ilorin), Powerline (in Osogbo), Erekesan (in Akure), etc emerged all over Southwest Nigeria. Today, the national association claimed to have not less than 34, 000 members across Nigeria (Stephen-Imala, 2009). Owing to the successes recorded by the industry in terms of patronage and acceptance, most Fine Arts departments in secondary schools, colleges of education, and polytechnics have incorporated *Adire*-making into their curricula. Besides, government began to pay attention to the industry like never before. For instance, contingents to major sporting and cultural events since the 1997 from Ogun, Lagos, Oyo, and Osun states have adopted *Adire* as states uniforms (Stephen-Imala, 2009).

In a 2009 trip to South Africa, the Minister of Culture and his entourage adopted *Adire* as official uniform 'to showcase our rich cultural heritage' (The Nation, 2009). Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, Nigeria's former president, unofficially adopted *Adire* as his 'official' dress on foreign trip throughout his 8-year rule. Other notable Nigerians that have taken to *Adire* include Professor Wole Soyinka, Ambassador Olusola Adeniyi, Professor Ade-Ajayi, etc. *Adire* has also taken the center-stage among party enthusiasts at important occasions.

As an industry, *Adire* provides employment for different kinds of people. Unlike in the pre-colonial times when the indigenous people produced threads and clothes, *Adire* is made with industry-produced clothes, which may be imported or made locally in Nigeria. Today, besides the end users, there are four classes of people in the trade. These are producers, artist-in-residence, designers, and retailers. Included in the category of producers are merchants who have enough money to buy materials – clothes, caustic soda, synthetic dyes, etc. in bulk for retail trading. At Itoku, as well as at Akerele *Adire* Market, these producers also employ artists-in-residence who specialize in making patterns on print, and fashion designers who specialize in creating new fashion styles with the raw materials. Retailers mainly sell either the raw materials or the finished *Adire*. There are also tailors and seamstresses or fashion designers who ply their trades independent of the producers. Besides the aforementioned, there are dyers who either dye materials brought to them by producers or end-users. Interestingly, from Abeokuta to Osogbo and Ilorin to Lagos, there is no official industrial estate or park for the *Adire*-makers. For the most part, business-owners use shops in front of their houses or open spaces and sidewalks to ply their trades. Some house-owners also run the trade by converting part of their houses to business points. In Abeokuta, where many people regarded as the home of *Adire* in Nigeria, Itoku market is a beehive of activities, posing

environmental and health hazard to both the traders and their customers.

Notwithstanding this lack of any formalized setting for the trade, stakeholders in the industry attest to its potentials. Mrs. Grace Stephen-Imala, claimed that

*...the trade has brought me a lot of luck and fame. With it, I was able to send all my children to school. Through it, I have sat with the high and mighty in Nigeria and abroad. Apart from the fact that people come to me from all around the globe for the material, I have also met many good people (Stephen-Imala, 2009).*

Mrs. Stephen-Imala recounted that she was one of the government delegates to welcome former American President, Bill Clinton, when he visited Nigeria in 2000. She recounted with gusto:

*The experience I cannot forget is when I met the former American president Bill Clinton face-to-face in 2000. I was one of the delegates in Abuja when he visited Nigeria. I think it was in the month of August. I was also one of those invited to exhibit Adire by the former Vice-President, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, the same year Clinton came (Stephen-Imala, 2009).*

She however noted that the industry is currently suffering, as

*materials are now expensive. I used to buy a drum of Sulphate for 9,000 naira (or 57 USD) in 2008, in 2009, the same goes for 18,000 naira (or 114 USD); in 2008, caustic soda was sold for 2,400 naira (or 15 USD), in 2009, it is sold for 7,000 naira (44 USD). It is the same with other materials that we use. Brocade, quality dye, etc. are now sold for twice the price. When we increase price of Adire, customers just disappeared (Stephen-Imala, 2009).*

Mr. Tunji Adedayo, a specialist in designing Adire and director of Febat Enterprises, noted:

*ten years ago, the Kampala (this is another name for Adire) business was booming. Then we had lots of designs and new innovations. The graph began to drop in 2003 and by last year, the situation became very worse (sic). People are now citing the financial meltdown as reason for the decline in patronage (Adedayo, 2009).*

Mrs. Dupe Adeyemi, a customer at Akerele market noted: *"the situation of things in the country is affecting everybody. I used to buy materials in bulk, but these days, I just come here to count very few (sic) because people are no longer buying as they used to"* (The Nation, 2009). A society lady, Catherine Irabor, maintained further that:

*I really love patronizing people if they have Aso-Ebi*

*(party-clothes) to sell because they do the same for me. Before, I come here regularly to buy Kampala, but I have stopped because, as you can see, things are not like it (sic) used to be. I don't think if things continue like this, I would be able to keep up with the trend of even buying Aso-Ebi from friends whether it is Kampala, lace or Ankara. I only hope things change (The Nation, 2009).*

Given its wider acceptance, long antiquity and its centrality to Yoruba culture, one wonders why this new decline in the Adire industry. Miss Mariam Sosan, a 38 years old Itoku tailor, claimed that:

*the problems we are facing are many: no credit facilities, there is the competition with imported clothes from China, and high cost of importing raw materials. Within the industry itself, there are whole lots of problems. There is the need to improve on designs. We cannot be doing it in the same way our parents did it. Time has changed. We need to modernize. We need to change Adire from local industry to a modern one. Yes, there are improvements here and there. In Lagos, you don't see people bending over coal-pots or stove to boil and mix dyes. They are now using electricity. But what about mixing the dye and the actual dying? We are still doing it the same way. That explains why our hands are like leather. Some of what we need to change cannot be done without the government (Sosan, 2009).*

Miss Sosan, like many others both in Abeokuta and Ibadan, claimed to have been assisted by the government agency, the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), to learn the trade. She however decried a situation whereby such assistance was intermittent and limited to party faithful.

*I benefited from NDE and NAPEP. When I completed my teacher training at Osiele, I roamed the streets for three years seeking for non-existing jobs. In 2005, I obtained NDE and NAPEP forms and listed that I have a Teacher's Certificate, but would like to learn a trade. I went round to see the politicians who facilitated the process and I was shortlisted. I had wanted to learn Computer, but I was shortlisted for Adire-making. I accepted it and was sent to Madam Badmus Shogbesan at Itoku. I was there for three months and was paid three thousand naira (or 19 USD) every month. When we completed the training, we were given certificates and ten thousand naira (or 63 USD) each, as capital to start our trade (Sosan, 2009).*

Madam Badmus Shogbesan expressed worries about the lack of government involvement with the Adire industry. She decried a situation whereby governments talk about self-employment, self-reliance, but with no practical commitment.

*When we started what became TDMAN today, we thought of using the organization to help seek the face of*



government so as to help us, especially with loans. We were told to partner with government's programme on employment and poverty alleviation. NDE was the first to approach us; later NAPEP and SMEDAN approached us. We were to provide training for youths and government promised to pay us 30, 000 naira (or 189 USD) per trainee. People were sent to us for three month training and everything went smoothly until it was time for paying us. We went to the offices of NDE and NAPEP on many occasions. Only those with connections with the politicians got paid. Others were not (Shogbesan, 2009).

Mr. Tunji Adedayo, also a beneficiary of the government initiative, said:

*the trouble with Nigerian policy makers is that they see everything as politics and politics as everything. As a card-carrying member of the ruling PDP, I can tell you that none of those laudable objectives of NAPEP, SMEDAN, and NDE could be realized. They are politicized almost immediately they are formulated. Politicians use them to payback their cronies. I was trained in this trade during the NDE days. To get into the NDE, or NAPEP, you either pledged the three-month allowances to the politicians or your name would not appear on the list (Adedayo, 2009).*

NAPEP, as at May 2009, has officially distributed 2 million tricycles, popularly called Keke NAPEP in Southwest Nigeria. In the same vein, the agency claimed that it has trained 6 million youths in different skills as well as expended 44 billion naira (or 277 million USD) in loans, grants, and trainee-fee since inception (NAPEP, 2009). Most of these cannot be found on the ground. For instance, Alhaji Muritala Moshood, a tricycle rider at Ikotun-Egbe, Lagos, described NDE, NAPEP, and SMEDAN as not different from slavery.

*All they do is help you secure loans, which you payback at a higher interest rate. I have been riding Keke NAPEP for seven years and payback is 10, 000 naira (or 63 USD) every month. I am still on it and would be freed at the end of 2009. Are we saying that this tricycle worth more than 200, 000 naira (or 1, 257 USD)? (Muritala, 2009)*

The situation with SMEDAN was not different from that of NAPEP; corruption has eaten so deep into the process that a professor of Nutrition who was a former Vice-Chancellor and a member of the Obasanjo's Cassava Initiative abandoned the project midway. He alleged that the process was mainly used as propaganda to give the impression that government was doing something while it was not. He berated NDE, NAPEP, SMEDAN and other poverty-alleviation initiatives as conduits to siphon state resources (Oke, 2009). Governments, at the three levels of governance in Nigeria, have persistently maintained that NDE, NAPEP, SMEDAN and other poverty

alleviation initiatives of government were non-partisans and that the beneficiaries were, indeed, Nigerians. Majority of the beneficiaries interviewed consistently countered that the initiatives are not value-free. Some of the latent conditions include party membership, advanced fee payment, etc. Mr. Tunji Adedayo, on the other hand, noted that the importation of cheap clothes from China, Japan and other parts of the world has adversely affected textile production in Nigeria. He observed that before the establishment of China Town in Lagos, Akerele Adire Market was a beehive of activities, but with the establishment of China Town where all kinds of cheap, low-quality fabrics from China are sold, interests in Adire changed dramatically (Adedayo, 2009). While this might be difficult to prove, Miss Sosan of Itoku Market in Abeokuta, earlier quoted, also confirmed it.

Mrs. Grace Olowu, CEO of Damseg Men and Women Wears, on the other hand claimed that the on-going beautification of Lagos State, which led to pulling down of all illegally constructed structures, affected the industry. *"Although things really changed last year, it became worse when the clean-up in Lagos hit us. As you can see, I have to make do with the open ground in front of our house. I and my children (sic) must eat"* (Olowu, 2009). On prices of Adire, Mrs. Olowu noted:

*With the global economic meltdown, you would think that the situation would reduce price, but materials are going up every day. A Kampala gown without embroidery that was sold from 1, 200 naira (or 9 USD) in 2008, now sold for between 1, 800 naira (or 11.32 USD) and 2, 500 naira (or 16 USD) in 2009. A pair of men's wear without embroidery, which sold for 1, 800 naira (or 11.32 USD) in 2008, now sold for between 2, 500 naira (or 16 USD) and 3, 000 naira (or 19 USD) depending on the quality (Olowu, 2009).*

Mrs. Grace Stephen-Imala, like many in the industry, noted: *"without the government, one cannot go very far in this trade. We need the government to meet up with international markets' demands. Government needs also to empower the young ones, help them to develop and expand their businesses"* (Stephen-Imala, 2009).

## Conclusion

From the discussion so far, it is incontrovertible that there is no dearth of empowerment efforts in Nigeria. As the example of the TDMAN showed, government (pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial), individual traders, and consumers played important roles in empowering the poor. The first empowerment effort was the establishment of the Adire-Makers Association, first at Abeokuta, later across Nigeria. Although ineffective at first, its reincarnation between the 1980s and 2000 when it was reconstituted into a full-fledged organization, weaned

collective bargaining, engagement, and negotiation with stakeholders in the industry as well as the Nigerian state.

From regulating the activities of its members to providing the training and manpower requirement of government poverty alleviation initiative, TDMAN was effectively brought into the vortex of economic growth and development, as it began to play more than traditional roles in poverty alleviation. Although bogged down by institutional and political problems, which characterised most initiatives in Africa, Asia and Latin America, TDMAN has succeeded in leveraging its weight in ensuring credit facilities, interfacing between government and Nigerians, and ensuring better working condition for its members.

However, the drive for foreign investment by Nigerian government and national economic requirements allow distant forces to predate on Nigeria's economy so much so that import substitutions under benign conditions impinge on the development of local industries. Exposure to cheap, imported materials is a draw down on development of local industries and job creation.

As the case of TDMAN shows, rather than assisting local industries to acquire new technologies and training requisite to lift these industries, Nigeria government, through various bilateral relations, is daily exposing these industries to competition from highly industrialized nations. The attendant consequence is the importation of cheap, mass-produced products from China, Japan, UK, and USA, which drove indigenous production into the background.

The increasing concentration of Chinese retail outlets and influx of cheap imported textile impact the organizations of value chain to which *Adire*-makers are a part. Poor design, out-dated and out-model technologies impair service delivery, costs, quality, flexibility and speed of production. These problems invariably lower indigenous producers' earnings. These also inhibit *Adire*-makers ability to defend their positions or become proactive in their business.

Despite the establishment of NAPEP, NDE and SMEDAN, government presence in providing credit facilities and industry related information is non-existent. Although budgetary votes are publicized, industry players hardly feel the impact of government. This inadvertently hampers production capabilities of local producers. As things are, local players cannot afford the type of resources needed to compete with producers in the developed Western nations. In consequence, local products cannot compete with cheap, imported ones. To do otherwise is to drive prices up and lose patronage.

As the case of *Adire* makers showed, local producers cannot improve on techniques and product design in the face of inadequate technical know-how. *Adire* makers may have changed from using coal-pot and other rudimentary materials to using gas and other modern methods, the age and state of the trade requires that there ought to have been computer-aided-methods of production now. It is only in this way that quality

improvement in design and production can transform the industry, alleviate poverty through job creation.

Unless with government intervention, facilitating credit from financial institutions is difficult and *Adire* trade, unless formalized, may not be properly situated to attract loans from financial institutions. Where politics intrudes in policies and programs, industries like *Adire* making cannot be raised from its cottage orientation to a full-fledge industrial system. For *Adire* production to evolve, policies and programmes of government must be freed from party politics. These are some of the measures TDMAN and other organizations of its kind need to facilitate credit from financial institutions, to reinvent its organizational dynamics in order to raise industry standard from its present cottage orientation to a full-fledge industrial system, etc. It is only in this way that cottage industries can become true engine of growth.

It must be conceded that the establishment of agencies such as NDE, NAPEP, SMEDAN, etc. helped the TDMAN to redefine and reposition itself as a global player in garment-making, but beyond the establishment of these organisations, the state in Nigeria, through bilateral relations with other nations, has stunted the growth of cottage industries through exposure to competition under uneven conditions.

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#### ORAL INTERVIEW

- Oral interview with Alhaji Muritala Moshood, 51 years, of No. 2, Ajisefini Street, Ikotun-Egbe, Lagos, August 20, 2009.
- Oral interview with Madam Badmus Shogbesan, 68years, Shop No 7, Itoku Market, Abeokuta, August 15, 2009.
- Oral interview with Miss Mariam Sosan, 38years, Shop No 12, Itoku Market, Abeokuta, August 15, 2009.
- Oral interview with Mr. Tunji Adedayo, 41 years, of No 72, Akerele *Adire* Market, Surulere, Lagos, August 5, 2009.
- Oral interview with Mrs. Stephen-Imala, 68 years, of House 98, Akerele *Adire* Market, Surulere, Lagos, August 5, 2009.
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