

## Repositioning Arts and Culture for Economic Development of Niger State

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### Abstract

*Many nations, especially those that have depended solely on just one or even two sources of foreign exchange earner have been trying to diversify their economies as a strategic means of generating revenue for the development of their respective societies. Nigeria is one such nation that has since discovered the need to look for additional sources of revenue generation. Niger State is one of the 36 federating states of Nigeria. It also needs to diversify its economy. This article discusses how arts and culture, if properly repositioned can generate additional income for the state and also create jobs for the teeming youths. The paper focuses mainly on the many tourist sites that can attract visitors both from within the state, Nigeria and even from abroad. A survey of the major sites has been carried out and analysed. It was discovered that some of these sites/centres, like the Bida Brass and Glass Works actually used to be vibrant and well patronised in the past. Unfortunately, since the last twenty years, the fortunes of the place have drastically reduced. The article concludes with a recommendation that the Niger State government as well as interested investors should take deliberate and practical steps to rehabilitate/reposition the numerous tourist centres/sites identified. This will generate additional revenue needed for the development of Niger State instead of basically depending on monthly revenue allocation from the federation account.*

**Key words:** Repositioning, Arts and Culture, Economic Development, Revenue

**JEL Classification:** M14, Z11

### 1. Introduction

Arts and culture are very important in any society. They make life worth living by providing entertainment in various forms. A society without the humanising influence of the arts lacks what is pleasurable in life, as well as much of what is educationally critical and socially essential. One can only imagine how dull human life could be without the collective effect of libraries, museums, theatres and galleries, or without the personal experiences of literature, music and art. In fact, such human existence

would be static and sterile, lacking creative arguments about the past, without a diverse and stimulating present and of course, with no dreams of the future.

The subsets of the arts and culture industry's productive activities of book publishing, performing arts and artistic creations can be seen as contributing a lot to a nation's gross domestic product (GDP). Labour productivity in the arts and culture industry might however, be seen as low but its significant aggregate output in a country's development cannot be ignored. For instance, the performing arts and artistic creation activities as subsets of arts and culture contribute significantly to the employment level of any nation.

### *1.1 Arts*

The arts represent an outlet of human expression, usually influenced by culture, and driven by human creative impulse. Major components of the arts include literature (poetry, drama, and fiction), epics, performing arts, among them music, dance, theatre, culinary arts, media arts like photography and film, and visual arts. Some art forms combine visual elements with performance (e.g. film) and the written word (e.g. comics). Unlike the sciences that have fixed laws of operation, the arts are liberal and allow us the freedom to be more imaginative in our thinking and arguments, thus making our discussions more lively and interesting. The term *arts* is usually used along with culture, hence it is common to hear people talk of the role of arts and culture in societies or among peoples, as this paper intends to do.

### *1.2 Culture*

The common definition of *culture* is that it is a people's total way of life. This embraces people's arts, food, artefacts, dress, language, and in fact, everything that defines them as distinct specie of homo sapiens.

In this paper, our working definition of culture is that culture comprises all the historically created materials designed for living, explicit and implicit, rational, irrational and non-rational, which exist at any given time as potential guides for the behaviour of man. Culture is learned and shared; it is also transmitted from one generation to another and through this process, culture is modified, renewed or dropped. Culture is therefore both static and dynamic. Culture is what makes us human, because it is the foundation of any society and it is something that all human beings have.

Nations that take arts and culture as serious and viable forms of entertainment and relaxation also gain some economic benefits. This is because cultural industries create jobs, turn ordinary cities into tourist destination sites, create interconnection between arts and business, spin-off business and attract skilled workers as well. For example, the sale of tickets to audience at play performances, exhibitions and museums, all produce direct profits for artistic and cultural initiatives. Well delivered artistic productions have power to facilitate social interaction and alleviate depression and anxiety among people.

Niger State, which was created in 1976, has a lot of potential tourist sites which if well developed, are capable of generating a lot of revenue for the state. Some of the key sites include: Gurara Waterfalls, Zuma Rock, Lord Lugard's Colonial Ruins in Zungeru, the first Railway Locomotive engine in Minna, the three hydro-electric power stations in Kainji, Shiroro and Jebba respectively, Baro Empire Hills and brass/glass work centres in Bida.

This article is a brief analysis of how arts and culture can be repositioned for economic development of Niger State through a deliberate policy of government and the organised private sector or even well financially endowed individual investors, both from within and outside the state. The scope of the paper is however, limited to some obvious tourist attraction sites within the state.

## **2. The Need to Reposition Tourist Attraction Sites in Niger State**

Owing to the dangers inherent in small and especially mono economies, many nations are diversifying their economies. It has been predicted that in 30 years from now (2018), oil reserves in Nigeria would be no more. It has therefore become imperative for all the states in Nigeria to look inwards for alternative sources of funds to run government and become economically self sufficient and less dependent on federal monetary allocations. A situation where a delay in the monthly allocation from the federation account always becomes a threat to states' socio-political and economic survival is dangerous and unacceptable. Thus, arts, culture and especially tourism development through the establishment of holiday resorts, game villages, parks, recreational centres and museums or monuments are some of the ways the Niger State government can diversify its economic for greater development.

## **3. Economic Potentials of Tourist Sites in Niger State**

### *3.1.1 Gurara Waterfalls*

Gurara Waterfalls has the potential to become a world class tourist destination by virtue of its pleasant weather, beautiful scenery and conducive vegetation. Reports have shown that the highest percentage of people that visit the Waterfalls are secondary school and university students who usually come in groups for excursion, parties and picnics. Unfortunately, most of these visitors merely come to confirm its existence. However, visiting a site like Gurara Waterfalls for the mere confirmation of its existence cannot boost internal revenue generation for the state. It is thus necessary to revive the falls by providing attractions such as recreational facilities and amusement parks within the vicinity of the falls. Moreover, the following measures are essential in repositioning Gurara Waterfalls for optimum economic benefits:

- i) Robust security system in and around the Waterfalls. This would give confidence to the tourists, especially now that insurgency, terrorism and kidnapping have become security challenges in Nigeria.
- ii) Employment of qualified professionals to manage the falls.

- iii) Provision of social amenities such as good road network within and around the falls, communication facilities like telephone and internet services as well as a steady power and water supply, etc.
- iv) Complete rehabilitation of Minna-Suleja road as this would ease the access to the falls and encourage tourists to patronise it.
- v) Control of fishing and hunting activities in and around the falls.
- vi) Regular publicity of the activities of the Waterfalls and what it has to contribute to the economic development of Niger State.

### *3.1.2 Baro Empire Hills*

This was a colonial radio station used by the first Governor-General of Nigeria, Sir Frederick Lord Lugard. It was actually used before and after the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates of Nigeria in 1914. Investigations revealed that the radio station was not used for public broadcast but for sending and receiving messages from the Queen of England on the day to day administration of the colonial territory of Nigeria. It was also used to send messages to troops of the West African Frontier Force deployed to the area by England.

It is interesting to note that the present administration of Governor Mohammed Sani Bello in Niger State (as gathered online) is making efforts to bring in the British High Commission in Nigeria to assist in preserving British colonial monuments in the state. It was also gathered that the Nigerian Army has been approached with a request to turn Baro Empire Hills to a training ground, and build an FM radio station there. These are right and necessary steps towards repositioning attractive tourist sites in the state for socio-economic development.

The dredging of the Baro inland port by the Federal Government of Nigeria has made the Baro Empire Hills very critical to the economic development, not only of Niger State but also of Nigeria as a whole. Baro Empire Hills, if well harnessed by the Niger State Government, would give those who are going to patronise Baro Port and rail line a place to relax before moving to other parts of the country. (Thisday, 2017).

### *3.1.3 Bida Brass/Glass Making Centre*

Bida brass, silver, gold and metal works were well known throughout Nigeria and beyond. It has been reported that during the reign of Etsu Usman Zaki in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, brass and metal works in the Nupe kingdom, particularly Bida, flourished. In the past, visitors from Asia, Europe, America, and other parts of Africa, especially people from Songhai Empire, Mali Empire, and Ashanti Empire of Ghana used to come to Bida to buy the beautiful works of art such as kitchen utensils, bangles, kettles, pots, buckets, bracelets, beads and gold wears. Unfortunately, the situation is no longer the same. One Mukhtar Zailani is reported to have said that patronage of brass works began to decrease drastically with the coming of civilian administration in 1999 to date! According to him, military administrations used to ask the brass makers to produce souvenirs for their (military) visitors and this made the brass industry to grow as hundreds of young men and women were engaged in the industry. Currently,

it is only the Etsu Nupe that occasionally patronises the industry by way of purchasing gifts for his visitors. (Abubakr, 2017)

### *3.2 Required Government Intervention to Reposition Bida Brass Works*

In this section, we itemise what we think are the necessary steps that the government in particular and other interested investors may take to reposition the Bida Brass Works in such a manner that it can be economically viable and thus contribute to the socio-economic development of Niger State.

- i) Financial assistance to the brass/glass workers is of paramount importance for the industry to grow. This would reduce the problems of finance needed in sourcing for raw materials for the industry.
- ii) Procurements of necessary modern equipment for the industry. This will make the products of the industry to be competitive with similar ones elsewhere in the world and thus encourage patronage.
- iii) Patronage of brass works by government, its officials and well doing members of the society as this will stimulate more production.
- iv) Advertisement of the industry, its activities and products is key; Government should also help the brass workers by advertising their products across the country and beyond.

### *3.3 Other Tourist Sites and Industries that Need to be Developed*

As we stated at the beginning of this paper, Niger State is blessed with a lot of economic tourists attracting sites and industries. What we have so far discussed above is just a tip of the ice berg. Other sites and tourist industries that have to be well repositioned to generate revenue for the government and investors are the following:

*3.3.1 Zuma Rock:* This is a large rounded natural rock formation that rises high into the sky presenting a fascinating background to Abuja. It is located along Abuja-Kaduna road. Oral tradition has it that the Zuma Rock used to be hiding fortress to the ancient Gwari people during prehistoric inter-tribal wars.

*3.3.2 Bina Footprints:* These are visible footprints seen on a rock at a hilltop in Bina village close to Muye in the eastern part of Lapai Local Government Area of Niger State. The footprints are known as Dauda Woyeba in the local language of the area. Fable attributes the footprints to be that of one Dabo, who moved from Bina to Gulu, when he observed his ablution rites and then built a mosque there before moving to Kano.

*3.3.3 Lord Lugard's Colonial Ruins in Zungeru:* Zungeru was the first colonial headquarters in Nigeria before it was moved to Kaduna. There is a cemetery containing graves of about 100 white settlers and aides to Lord Lugard in Zungeru. Amalgamation of Northern and Southern Protectorates in Nigeria in 1914 is reported to have taken place while Lord Lugard was in Zungeru.

- a) First Railway Locomotive Engine in Minna: The first steam train to work in Northern Nigeria in 1901 can still be found at the Minna Railway Station. It is 0-6-7 1/2 x 2 two cylinder 2.6 gauge locomotive built by Hunslet Engine Company,

- England. It ran on the 12” Wushishi-Zungeru-Barijoko Train way. The steam facilitated construction works on the railway road that link Zungeru to Wushishi.
- b) Baro Port: It was used in the colonial days to transport goods by ship to and from foreign countries through River Niger. Minna-Baro railway line terminus was also used for the transportation of goods from the hinterland to the Baro Port for export. The remains of the warehouse where goods were stored can still be seen at the Baro Port. It is gratifying that the federal government has finally recognised the need to rehabilitate the Baro Port. When this is completed, it will definitely promote economic activities which in turn will alleviate poverty among the traders and investors that may patronise the Port.
  - c) The three hydro-electric power stations in Shiroro, Kainji and Jebba respectively, are equally sites for tourist attractions that if well repositioned with adequate facilities can also generate revenue from tourism, both for Niger State and the federal government.
  - d) Kainji Lake National Park in New Bussa is noted to be the largest park in Nigeria. Even though a national asset, if the park is viable, it can provide employment for Niger state indigenes as well as small businesses for the inhabitants and interested investors in catering and hotel businesses.
  - e) Ladi Kwali Pottery Centre in Suleja Local Government Area is another site of cultural attraction in Niger State. The Centre used to produce different types of pots and other ceramic products and it was well patronised by foreigners visiting Abuja. For some unknown reasons by these writers, the Ladi Kwali Pottery Centre is currently a shadow of its former active self! Something urgently needs to be done to revitalise/rehabilitate the Centre to make it to be socio-economically viable.
  - f) Kutigi Annual Traditional Wrestling Festival is equally capable of attracting tourists if properly repositioned and publicised.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In the present globalised economy, it is suicidal for nations and their constituent parts to depend on one main source of revenue as Nigeria and her federating states have been doing until very recently when efforts are being made to diversify the economy. Attention is being mainly paid on agriculture and the exploitation of solid minerals. While these are noble efforts, the cultural and tourism industries are other sources of enormous revenue generating outlets, if properly harnessed. What this article has attempted to do is to draw the attention of the Niger State government and well to do investor to tap into these tourist site highlighted above by way of providing the necessary facilities to enhance their profitability. Thus, we conclude that if the governments (federal, state and local) and other interested investors really reposition these cultural and tourist attracting sites, the era of continuously waiting for monthly federal financial allocation will gradually be less life threatening, when delayed.

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