

**The Prospect and Challenges of Sustaining the Traditional *Adire* Fabric Production
During COVID-19 in Abeokuta, Ogun State**

By

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Abstract

Pandemic is a situation in which healthy living becomes risky through unprecedented spread of diseases. After the effect of flu pandemic of first world war in 1949, despite the acclaimed scientific breakthrough, in 2019 the breakout and ravaging of COVID-19 in the 4th quarter became noticeable to the extent that it affected the entire system of humanity and overturned the whole universe adversely till date. It later came with different variants that seemed more deadly than the original pandemic. From the outset, the after effect of the pandemic has affected many art productions. Those in performing and visual arts panicked to come together to shoot film or make any art product because of fear of the way the spread of COVID-19 was heralded in the media. *Adire* is an aspect of textile under visual art and this has become the stable profession of practice in Abeokuta, Ogun State. The art has been thriving for decades, has served as mean for international exchange and means to empower many people economically in the state. It has been observed that the advent of COVID-19 has become a challenge thereby slowed down the thriving trend in *Adire* production and patronage enjoyed over the time in the trade. This paper is therefore looking at prospect, challenges of production and merchandise of *Adire* since the breakout of COVID-19 in 2019 and now. The article employed Elena Aguilar's Theory of Action in which hypothesis about what will happen when a set of strategy is implemented through a critical judgement to resolve an extant problem. It concludes with suggestion to improve the production and merchandise of *Adire* in Abeokuta.

KEYWORDS: Pandemic, Challenges, Prospect, Sustainability and Theory of Action

Introduction

The pandemic, Coronavirus Disease 19 (COVID-19) has been so ravaging to all strata of human society. It is a severe acute respiratory syndrome which was an offshoot from severe

acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) that was discovered and spread between 2002-2003. The pandemic was first reported in 2019 as a mere endemic in Wuhan, China. It later graduated to pandemic that affected many nations and the virus has mostly spread through person-to-person contact from community to community, state to state, nation to nation and continent to continent. Throughout 2019, it was affecting about 80% of people with mild flu-like symptoms but recovered without specialized treatment. However, one out of six may experience severe symptom that arisen to trouble breathing and death. It began to spread rapidly in many parts of the world and because of this on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic (Sarah Moore, 2021).

The declaration by WHO made many nations to effect restriction of their citizens from activities requiring convergence or close contact with people. Many were restricted from moving freely and people were barred from daily activities and interactions to curtail the spread. The restrictions and stay-at-home order began like a child's play from country to country until it reached a crescendo in which many people, business and school systems shared from the downturn effect of COVID-19. Travelling locally and internationally was put on hold and systems in developing countries began to feel the effect drastically. There was new order of living such as wearing of facemasks and maintaining distance from people to people. Everybody became interested in news and because people wanted to listen to update on matters at hand, both genuine and fake news were spreading like wild fire. As the condition of people was getting more interesting, the severity of hard time began to rob-off on people. Peoples' businesses have been paralyzed and hunger began to creep-in and make people uncomfortable to abide with the situation then, most especially in developing countries.

Academic activities were stalled to the extent that learners and adult students were barred from coming into the academic environment for any learning. The developed countries made available virtual process for their learners to be taught from home without coming to school. It was not the same story for the developing countries as they were not used to the use of internet for transfer of knowledge before the outbreak. This necessitated unexpected call for what they did not prepare for in terms of virtual learning. Different solution began to fly as some preyed on the ignorance of many people to make ends meet in the process. Government made effort to cover-up in some of these developing countries but the result was pathetic in developing nations since there was no provision for such alternative before the pandemic. Palliative suggested and expected was not successful because the process was greeted with corruption as those that were made to superintend the oversight of the process minded their gains than the love of the masses undergoing hunger. It was clear then that the issue at hand was beyond gambling as the trending demands from citizens was becoming daunting for which many government agencies were not able to resolve.

Businesses and daily labor to put food on people's table was halted and since government was unable to provide what could make citizens comfortable as they stay at home, so many negative social infractions become noticeable and recorded. Families were at war

because the family heads were handicapped to provide the means of life for their family members. The peoples' endurance was at the breaking point before the government and its allies were sincere with suggested and promised palliatives to cushion the effect of the pandemic. Nigeria was a typical example of irresponsible government officials who were peddling lies that continued to aggravate the tension among the citizens. Most business centers were short down as nobody was ready to patronize nothing apart from food items. To make both ends meet, there were circumstantial food vendors all over the places just to satisfy and provide for the instantaneous need of the people.

As mentioned above, no business was thriving because many products were not asked after since the income of the people has been affected and what people were after was food and nothing else. Artists were also affected because their product did not fall under the category of necessity. The people in entertainment industries were also barriered since they could not perform because government restricted movement and convergence of people at entertainment centers. The law stipulating distance affected local film production since the knowledge of filmmaking in developing country has gone beyond physical contact which far from attaining in most developing country like Nigeria. Visual art production was as well affected since art works required appreciation from people. The art works produced were piled up without patronage because the concern of the people was on what to eat. *Adire* is one of the productions that enhanced people's living since it is necessary to wear clothe no matter what the situation looked like. For this reason, the paper is looking at how COVID-19 pandemic has affected the production and marketability of *Adire* in Abeokuta during the period under review.

The Origin and Development of *Adire* Fabric

Adire is a Yoruba word that means tie and dye. This term is used for the artistic designs made on fabrics through resist pattern in which a tie is done on any fabric to resist the penetration of dye when immersed into the dye. The method adopted overtime has been seen to free-hand painting of cooked cassava starch, *lafun* (casava powder) on the fabric or through use of stencil to transfer pattern (motif) or message on the fabric, this process resists the dye from penetrating and at the end creating the desired aesthetic value on the fabric. *Adire* was first made according to history by a Yoruba woman of old through experimenting varied resist techniques to achieve the artistic production. She discovered *Adire* dying process through simple ties on handspun cotton material woven locally. The technology of fabric productions was achieved through local materials and with manually approach. There are several claims from literature that supported the emergence of *Adire* from Africa (Adire, 2021). Saheed Sakaree (2013) claims that *adire* was first produced in Jojola's compound of Kemta Abeokuta by Chief (Mrs) Miniya Jojolola Soetan, the second *Iyalode* (Head of Women) of Egba land and later passed the process to her children and onward to the future generation. Production of *adire* in Abeokuta was first known as family business which was passed from parent to children. This was especially done for female children while the wives of their male children were brought into its training and production as they were regarded as member of the extended family. The first material often

used for *adire* was called *teru* (local off-white cotton material) dyed with *elu* liquid solution extracted from *elu* leaf.

The history of *Adire* is not complete when Abeokuta is not mentioned. This first appeared because Abeokuta was known as the center of cotton production, weaving and colored with indigo-dyeing in about 19th century. The prototype *adire* was done with *kijipa* which was the hand-woven fabric colored with indigo-dye which was predominantly used among Yoruba women (Saheed Sakaree, 2013). The people of Abeokuta are known and called Egba, the progenitor of Lisabi. That is why the Abeokuta indigens are often referred to as Egba the offspring of Lisabi. Lisabi was a warrior who fought with Ibadan people to gain independent and upon this he led his people to hide under a massive rock called *Olumo* today. As a result of his escapade in the war, Abeokuta began to develop.

However, in the other hand, the development came along with production of *adire* that the Egba people of Abeokuta have learnt while enjoying socialization with Ibadan and Osogbo people before the war. Though the influence of colonial masters cannot be under estimated in the promotion and production of *adire* in Abeokuta. The main reason for the presence of the colonial master in Yorubaland was to promote the British commercial interest between Lagos and the hinterland. The intension was not unconnected with developmental plan conceived for the Yoruba people which the incessant war they often fight could truncate (Ade-Ajayi, 1998: 9). Despite the ravaging war on superiority that almost destroy the economy of the Yoruba people, several merchants continued to risk their lives to trade in farm product, gun powder, cotton, palm produce, assorted imported/local drinks and building materials. Some of the traders chose to be selling textile materials and their shops scattered around major towns, these shops were most especially found around Ibadan, Lagos, Abeokuta, Osogbo, Ilesa, Oyo, Ijebu-Ode and other major towns too numerous to list. This market thrived because the intention of colonial masters was to flood these major towns with fabrics from Britain.

The importation of these foreign materials from Britain made it easy for local craftsmen to get the ideal fabric for their artistic *adire* production. Tunde Akinwumi in an interview he conducted with one of the practitioners. Extract from the interview says that:

...the Yoruba could select his cloth for consumption because his craftsmen were able to produce varieties which could go round annually... The Yoruba were fully-clad race, who for fashion's sake were ashamed to appear in public unless gracefully draped with two or three ample cloths. Their fabrics were made of homegrown materials, dyed, with native dyes, and woven in narrow looms or framed out of yarn spun by hand. From careful calculation, it appears that 31, 000, 000 yards of cloth were annually consumed in Yorubaland, of which 30, 000, 000 were of home manufacture. From this, the chamber of commerce would be able to realize the extent to which the people were engaged in the work of making their own garments. In Yorubaland, there was an immediate market for European goods with half a million a year and in return for those goods, the people there had the will and the necessary amount to produce to put at least an equal value of trade into our hands (2015: 23-24).

From all indications, the interview established the influence of colonialism in the development of *adire* fabric production. It also affirmed that Yoruba textile design artisans were the major producers of dress fabrics and that they were able to supply the indigenous consumers with both local and foreign materials transformed into *adire* as local demands require. The foreign materials crept in when the colonial master saw the marketability of local materials in various Yoruba market and that the foreign materials that could compete favorably were available in Britain, they therefore storm the major market with them to boost Britain economic situation then. Burton Robert (1863: 104) adds that about 40 million square yards of cloth were imported per year between 1895 and 1906. The supply of foreign material would not have been so successful if there were no end users locally in Yorubaland as at that time. Though the Indians have infiltrated the market with their colorful fabrics for seventeenth century and this became the major supply and to be contended with by British commerce. Tunde Akinwumi (2015: 24) explains that light plain fabrics known as shirting were brought in large quantities to the Yoruba market from Britain. The availability of the cheap fabric had impact on the Yoruba and that made many people to engage in retailing business of those fabrics.

The *adire* artisans had their own feel of the situation because they did not rely solely on locally produced fabrics made from *obo* plant for their production any longer. Since the foreign fabrics were cheaper, available, and easy to find gave them a shift. The situation made them to be mass producing old *adire* motifs such as *opa-aro*, *adire-onila*, *adire-eleko* among others from the foreign materials in circulation. Tunde Akinwumi (2015; 25) therefore concludes that the dyers' marriage of the cultural and aesthetic system of *opa-aro* designs on British imported fabrics ensured a ready and steady market for them. He adds that the continuity of the general *adire* trade was therefore developed up to 1910. From this year onward *adire* fabric production has been accepted in both home and diaspora. It is recalled that the former president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo while he was the Nigerian president advocated for the patronage of locally made *adire* so as to develop the small-scale textile production in Nigeria between 1999 and 2007. The standard was growing tremendously and the patronage became noticeably increased. The market was as well booming and the producers and the sellers were making progress in *adire* merchandise. Abeokuta has since become the home for the development of *adire* materials up till today.

The Effect of COVID-19 on Adire Producers and Production

The trend of producing different designs of *adire* from the old and new developed motifs permeated the market in Itoku Abeokuta. The market became so famous that merchants from different part of Nigeria and the world over were coming to patronize *adire* productions. However, the story changed when COVID-19 pandemic break-up in 2019 and by March 2020 the whole world activities were short down. This pandemic was spreading like wild fire to the extent that the whole world became affected and this required drastic steps to curtail its spread. Reports showed that over one billion people died the world over and over eighty million cases

were reported while over 900,000 persons died and only over 53 million people recovered in United States of America alone (Worldometers, 2022). People still continue to die as a result this pandemic that refused to go but come in different variance. The break-out COVID-19 pandemic affected so many businesses and human endeavours and everything was at stand a still. At first no one could actually navigate a way out of the out-break and because of this, many organizations closed shop and workers were asked to stay at home according to government order to stop the spread. Though African nations did not feel the punch of the pandemic unlike other western world where majority lost their lives.

The down-turn of human activities brought about different innovation for people to make ends meet. The families that had been depending on daily income from their day-to-day toils and sales became incapacitated to feed themselves and their family. In other countries of the world, government became supportive of their citizen through provision of daily needs to cushion the effect of the lockdown made possible by the pandemic. Nigerian government left their citizens to fend for themselves and thereby created untold hardship for people to the extent that people have to device means of livelihood for themselves. In relationship with the Theory of Action by Elena Aguilar (2020) where she stated what will happen when a set of strategies is implemented to resolve an unexpected situation that completely changed the status quo of human endeavours. This theory is applicable to the changing effect of COVID-19 pandemic in which generality of people continued to ask for the way out since then. Theory of Action is a hypothesis about what is going to happen when a retinue of strategies are implemented. This requires the use of critical judgement in which strategic actions will bring about a formidable result desired to find solution to lingering problems. It is the process of connecting what we plan to do with what we hope to get (Elena Aguilar, 2020). When there is a problem in the society, we generate several strategies in response to solving the lingering problem, however, developing a core approach to put together all the strategies has been the issue to be resolve in order to achieve the goal of mapping out such strategies. The development of the theory of action has helped to prioritize and go deeper with few of the strategies that seem productive than implementing a whole possible hub of strategy. This theory helps to be intentional in finding solution thereby propels creativity. As a project in creativity, there must be a process of articulating some set of actions to enable result and impact expectation. When there is problem at hand and those concerned collaborate to work on what theory of action suggest, it pushed to reality all the proposed strategy. To perfect the theory of action, it requires the team to articulate the actions and subsequent changes that would eventually lead to those desired outcomes because the theory pushes to have specific result and concrete outcome (Elena Aguilar, 2020).

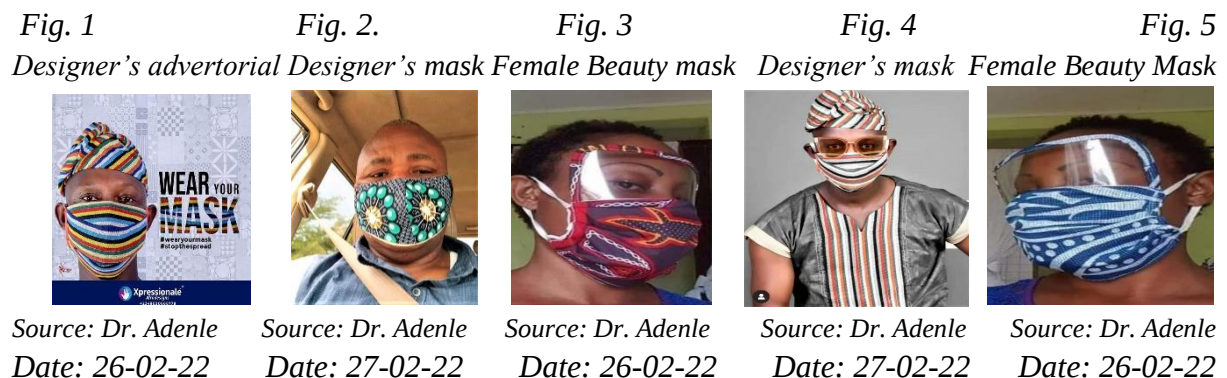
How the Theory of Action Works on the Effect of COVID-19

This theory can be developed by individual or group of people in anticipation of creating a solution about a biting uneasiness. The underlying issue is that an individual may be having a problem, it might be that such an individual is battling with or a collection of people in a group

may be a victim of a circumstance, it behooves such individual or group to apply theory of action to address the problems. The first take is to identify the problem and intensify action to brainstorm on what to do to finding solution. How it affects an existing human situation should be the pointer for creating a leverage in alternative to the current tough situation. To determine the best and highest leverage action under reference, there should be a proposed action to bring about the desired change to address the unpalatable status quo. The theory of action is based on the concept of 'if'. That is, *if we do it this way, then this will happen. And the one that happened will lead to this which will result to a particular outcome.* Because of the stated goal, the need to examine the strategies and select the workable strategies amongst them cannot be overemphasized. When there are too many strategies to be implemented, they are rarely fully implemented. The goal is therefore to select the best workable ones and implement them.

Adire production is a process of putting food on the table for some people in Abeokuta while it helps to service other secondary needs. This group has formed the major part of activities as merchandize is concerned in the city. As mentioned above, it has become a known trade that cannot be disputed. The merchandizing of adire in Abeokuta has gained ground nation-wide to the extent that it becomes an international supplier of the product. The market was booming not until the advent of COVID-19 when the situation became a state of comatose. The production and marketability of the product became stand still because the product on ground could not be sold since movement has been proscribed from both home and abroad. The situation began to affect the lives of adire makers and to food on their table began to be affected. If one thinks the reserve should sustain them, such thoughts might be without understanding the economic standard of many of these producers which eventually would make one to conclude so.

Information from sourced out from the research conducted showed that, some of these producers are appendage to a particular reach merchant who gets the materials in bulk and gives out to end users for them to pay after production and sales made of the products (see example of Olatunbosun Ayodeji who is a producer of Fig. 11-14). In an interview with Mr. Dada Sodunke who is a producer himself confirmed the procedure agreed upon to be in the trade of adire business. He said that there are producers from which the marketers buy and sell to merchants who take the products to far and wide to sell and from which they live. He pointed out that during lockdown, the products were lying fallow with no one asking for what one sells. The concern of every individual then was how to put food on the table because before the pandemic we were working from hand to mouth. Some businesses became moribund because no one was ready to buy anything that will not add to their lives at this period. Those with fund reserves exhausted it in no time and created more problems to be solved with a no formidable action. The worst was that business capital has been eaten in the process.



People were now required to bring up strategies of resolving the lingering problem of how to put food on the table. The pressure to find food was too much on people especially those with many dependents and children. Everybody was scouting for what will soften the hard trend that no one knew when it will subside. Every person on the street was actually looking for any opportunity for grab. There was a demand for facemask because government made it mandatory for everyone to put one on if you must go out. Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) even threaten to imprison anyone found moving about without facemask, likewise the task force set up by the state government was also on the look for culpable ones on the street. The laws surrounding the use of facemask made the price to become inaccessible for so many people.

In Ogun State, the government in the bid to make life easy for the citizens since they were unable to provide palliatives expected to subdue the unbearable hardship, two days in week were set free from 11.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. for people to move about to get few things for personal and family care and upkeep. The theory of action was applied by the *adire* producers to now begin to produce *adire* facemask which was born out of the need of the people since the imported and orthodox types are beyond the reach of low-income people (see Figs. 2-5 and 8-10). They started producing different designs and brands from *adire*. It was well accepted to the extent that few corporate organizations began to brand their companies' name with such *adire* designs for distribution to their well-wishers and customers. This strategy applied revolutionized the product as the alternative for imported and very expensive facemask. With between a minimum of fifty and one hundred Naira, it was possible to get one *adire* facemask. Another thing that made *adire* facemask patronage the people's choice was the re-useability of it. It was possible for people to use, wash and re-use in another subsequent time when one was going out instead of medical facemask that could only last for few hours, though very expensive and not good for re-use at all.

Marketing the Facemask

Different marketing strategies were also mapped out as part of theory of action in the process of alleviating the effect of COVID-19 on the *adire* producers. Hawking was considered as the best way to reach the masses who are uneducated but saw the need for the use of facemask as

government directive and if not, they were aware of the stiff consequence. The need for it cannot be overemphasized, so no matter what it is mandatory to acquire on for use. It was strategized that, on all open days earmarked by the government, young people were commissioned to hawk with intention of having part of the sales as their own reward for their labor. The young school age boys and girls grab the opportunity to make sales and have some funds to feed their family as their own contribution. That time at it was normal to find hawkers at the entrance of the departmental stores. malls and supermarkets, where you cannot gain entrance without your face kitted with such mask. Such places served as sales point for many hawkers. Marketing was also done on internet for those who love to be reached through it (see Figs. 1, 6 and 7). Many online marketers took sales of designers' facemask as part of their collections for display. There were bookings online for beautiful facemask for who cared to have one.

Fig. 6

Mask Advert on internet



Source: Dr. Adenle
 Date: 27-02-22

Fig. 7

Mask Advert on internet



Source: Dr. Adenle
 Date: 26-02-22

Fig. 8

Sample Adire Mask



Source: Idowu Olatunji
 Date: 07-03-2021

Fig. 9

Sample Adire Mask



Source: Idowu Olatunji
 Date: 07-03-2021

Fig. 10

Female Adire Beauty Mask



Source: Dr. Adenle
 Date: 27-02-22

The main reason for implementing these strategies was born out of theory of action to satisfy the immediate need of the people. It surely worked because at the moment in question the producers were able to make ends meet when they were languishing in abject lack of means of life that COVID-19 came with. Though there are lots of prospect in art work production especially when it concerns outfit that is unique and glamorous. However, the future of this aspect of art is still very bright despite that the pandemic had sent the signal of discouragement to producers. From look of things now, market has started picking up because the effect of pandemic has been subsiding and normalcy is being experienced gradually in human activities. Many merchants have returned to market and the business in now witnessing improvement if compared with what took place many months ago when the pandemic was ravaging the society. During my recent survey, I found that producers have come out with many new designs and improved method of production has also been felt in the market. The aggression in marketing the products become noticeable as if they want to cover-up for the time COVID-19 took from them.

Fig. 11

Samples of Adire Mas



Fig. 12

Sample of Adire Mask



Fig. 13

Sample of Special Couple's Mask



Fig.14

Sample of Adire Mask



Source: Courtesy Olatunbosun Ayodeji, Expression Designs Abeokuta

Date: 01-03-22

There was a choice to be made by everyone in this matter. It was either one applied the necessary strategy available to alleviate and subdue the effect of pandemic or stay idle and be ready to die of hunger. Everyone that adopted the theory of action knowingly or unknowing broke even at the time. The lesson in that scenario of pandemic was that when there is any problem confronting us as a people, it is better to brainstorm individually or collectively to finding solution to it for life to continue. Some confessed that they were not expecting the kind of money they made at the time because of the innovation adopted in finding solution to the problem created by COVID-19. The book of wisdom says that "A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit saps one's strength" (Proverb 17:22). This indicates that finding solution to a problem when it rears its ugly head strengthens one to discover more of such solution. Though not everyone during the period made lots of money but at least, they were able to feed, feed their immediate family and even some share with others out of the little they were able to gather from their creative approach to the problem then at hand. Many people are wise now and when similar situation happens in the future lesson has been learnt on how to hold the head above the water that seem sinking the imprudent ones.

Conclusion

COVID-19 came when nobody expected it as a pandemic. It roughens the entire human endeavours without any class distinction. Since everybody was caught unawares, the need to tackle it head long was unavoidable. Government of African countries left their citizens to fend for themselves and find solution to the problem and that made them wiser. When it was announced in the last quarter of 2019, everybody took it to Chinese problem not until when the pandemic broke the national, international and continental border to inflict unimaginable sickness and death to all innocent citizens of the world. This paper looked at the event that permeated that time and how people made attempts to solve problems created by the pandemic. Since nobody perceived the incoming of the pandemic, there was no preparation to nip it in the bud and that allowed for unimaginable residual creative tenet in everyone to be awakened for the

challenge at hand if people must survive. The lesson people have learnt from the pandemic would help to probe into unprecedented future happenings that might catch humans unaware. There should be plan B in all human endeavours so as to enable people to absolve the effect of unpalatable situation that human existence is fraught with. Government and functionaries should not reel out rules and regulations but create justified environment to punish culpable individuals. When government plays their role the ruled have no option than to abide. The comfortability of the citizens should be endeared to rulers by providing adequately for the citizens existence.

Another lesson of the pandemic was that it made both the rich and poor to be on same level. The rich also cried because they were also barricaded from accessing foreign medical facilities they normally enjoy. The developed countries also short their gate against everybody including the rich and the so called Very Important Personnel (VIP). There is therefore, need for the rich to think and put resources together to develop home stead because people say charity begins from home, instead of relying on what they can enjoy in the developed society because they have means to access them. Many lives the affluent people that were lost at that time could have been sustained had it been that medical facilities in Nigeria could compete favorably at least with that of other third world countries. Government and rich citizens should invest in local human for them to have ability to sustain the society. Society thrives when the citizens have the developmental acme to get things done through their resources and this also helps them to live as independent citizen devoid of government's regular fake and unattainable palliatives in time of trouble.

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