

POTTERY ECONOMY OF RURAL WOMEN IN THE POST-COLONIAL TIVLAND

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Abstract

Many studies have been done on rural Tiv women. However, there is a paucity of literature on the impact of the pottery industry on rural women in Tiv area. This article intervenes to fill the existing gap. It delves into the history and impact of pottery industry on the economy of rural women in the post-colonial Tivland. To achieve this, the study employs the use of primary and secondary sources of data in tandem with interdisciplinary methods. It investigates the origin and the process of pottery production in the area under consideration. The paper explains the types of pottery vessels produced and used in the area including gbande, tsua, ityegh, ishawa, ichenge, buufu, asusu, dzwar, and tyumugh, among others. The impact of pottery on the economy of rural women in Tivland is also brought under consideration. However, it is argued that the practice and spread of the industry is dwindling due to several challenges. There is therefore an urgent need to revive and modernize the pottery industry in the area to enhance the economic self-sustainability of the rural women.

Keywords: Pottery; Economy; Rural Women; Post-Colonial Tivland

1.0 Introduction

One of the earliest technologies developed by man is pottery. Societies developed with the use of pottery crafts. Pottery started many hundreds of years BC. Societies from Greece, China, Japan, Europe, and Africa produced pottery and ceramic products. The creation of the pot is of immense importance to the socioeconomic phenomenon in history (Ritta and Muhammad, 2011). Similarly, pottery is one of the crafts of ancient Nigeria that is still being practiced in most parts of the country today. It is Nigeria's most cultural material that has caught the attention and interest of early British archaeologists in Nigeria like Professor Thurstan-Shaw, whose work of excavation of these precious baked-clay objects has been outstanding, but humongous and elephantine (*Vanguard*, 2011). Pottery has been described as one of the cheapest arts being practiced in Nigeria and heavily dominated by women. Thus, pottery making is ubiquitously practiced in virtually all the ethnic groups in Nigeria including Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, Tiv, and Idoma amongst others. The works of colonial archeologists in excavating most of the material evidence of pre-historic times have proved that pottery-making had been in existence in most parts of Nigeria, dating to 3000 BC (Andah, 1992).

The Tiv women of Benue state have not been an exception in this regard as there is evidence of their involvement in pottery production right from the first period of their dispersal from *Swem*,

their ancestral homeland around 1475-1535AD up to the last phase of their migrations into the Benue valley around 1775-1990 AD (Iyo, 2002). This was of immense socio-cultural and economic development of the people right from the pre-colonial era to the colonial and post-colonial periods as well. However, many people look at the industry with little or no interest and at best as one of the surviving cultural practices of the Tiv that may soon die out. This perhaps is because of the negative influence of colonialism and more importantly modernization. This to a greater extent has failed to place this aspect of the history of the Tiv in the proper perspective where it will be better appreciated. Thus, the objective of this paper is to examine the impact of the pottery industry on the economic self-sustainability of rural women in Tivland. To do this, the history of pottery production in Tivland; The processes /techniques of Pottery Production in Post-Colonial Tivland; pottery vessels produced in post-colonial Tivland and their uses. Besides, the Impact of pottery production on the economy of Tiv rural women in the post-colonial era has been brought under consideration. It also examines the challenges that impeded the industry within the period under study and concludes with the recap of the main argument.

2.0 History of Pottery Production in Tivland

Pottery production is an ancient craft of the people but it is very difficult to pinpoint or ascertain exactly when it started. However, there exist divergent views as to why and how pottery production began in the area. According to (Nyikwagh, personal communication, May 30, 2020), "When God created the earth, there was no iron, God, therefore, showed the Tiv how to go and remove clay underground after removing the outer layer of the soil to come and prepare it for women to mold pots" Similarly, (Kureve, personal communication, May 27, 2020), notes that "God is the one who created clay for us to use but how Tiv women started to use it for pottery production I cannot tell, I only learned it from my mother". In the words of (Agbo, personal communication, June 2, 2020), "the Bible says that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and that man was created from clay. This means that God was the first creative artist. So what we are doing today by using clay to produce pots is in line with what God did from the beginning"

Thus, it can be said that these views are in agreement with the human creation theory of pottery origins. It is therefore believed that God, who was the first creative artist to form man with clay, imparted that nature to Tiv which explains why the Tiv particularly women subsequently started using it to produce pottery vessels. Many people therefore believe that pottery is an act from God (*Aondo*). This further suggests clearly that the Tiv did not learn or acquire pottery production skills from any ethnic group as there are no oral accounts of such throughout their history as far as the pottery industry is concerned. It is therefore seen as an innate ability that was given to Tiv by God and has been passed down from generation to generation. Another view states that "pottery production started when God created man and he eventually settled down, there arose the need for using some vessels for cooking, drinking water and eating food. Tiv women therefore used the wisdom that God gave them to produce pottery vessels to meet these needs" (Agbo, personal communication, June 2, 2020).

A story is also told that from the beginning, the Tiv and uke (non-Tiv) lived together and had all things in common. When products of the farm especially grains were brought home (or even at the farms) usually, pits were dug (pits of varying sizes were made). The walls of these pits were made compact and smooth for easy grinding and pounding of the grains without losing them to the

crevasses of the pit. Plants such as '*huezza*' and *ikpine* (*brideliaferrunea*) were and their barks removed, beaten into chaff, and mixed with water producing a sticky solution that draws. This solution was used to slip the walls and floors of the pits. This produced a type of cemented surface useful for pounding and even grinding grains to (sic) the sides or bottom of the pits. Examples of what may be said to be similar to this act in the harvest of grains among the Tiv are rice and groundnuts for which pits could be dug. But not selective on clay grounds and not necessarily slipped with sticky solutions to give cemented surfaces. With time the 'Ayaaiya' (a name for grandmothers then among the Tiv but now Aya (for short) decided to mold this clay ground into a bowl to see if it would serve them as the pit does if applied the same cementing plant substance. She made a very crude bowl and allowed it to dry. But when water was put (sic) inside, it broke. But Aya saw that if she succeeded the bowl would be portable, unlike the pit. This trial and error continued and Aya became successful when some of the bowls that were kept near the fireplace became stronger and lasted a day or two before they broke (Ingyoroko,2013). This story has certainly shed more light on why and how pottery production began among the Tiv. This is because even up to date *ikpine* (*brideliaferrunea*), is still one of the substances that are used in pottery production. The cloth weaving industry which makes use of dye could have close links with the pit theory in the origin of pottery production among the Tiv. Igirgi relates that the process of preparing indigo dyes in the past in areas like Mbanienge, Mbayegh, and Mbakyondu clans in Southeastern and Northeastern Tivland respectively was in dye pits and large earthenware pots (Igirgi, 2007).

The above views of pottery production in Tivland suggest that Tiv women had the innate ability to produce pottery vessels and started deploying them to use in production to meet their needs when Tiv settled down and built houses to live in. But more to that, it is imperative to note here that since the history of man generally is characterized by migration and settlement, Tiv particularly women were able to put this ability to use anywhere they migrated and settled. This perhaps may explain why the existence of the pottery industry among the people of Southern Tivland (specifically in Kwande Local Government Area which is regarded as the ancestral home of the Tiv nation) is evident right from their migration and settlement at Swem and consequent dispersal to the Middle Benue Valley from 1475-1535AD up to the last phase of their migrations around 1775-1990 AD as indicated by Iyo (2002). The point here is that as the Tiv people were migrating and settling down, their women and even men were moving with the practice of pottery production. This also accounts for why Swem which is the most remembered part of Tiv history according to oral accounts has evidence of pottery production and usage. This is because apart from Swem being a physical geographical location around the Nigerian-Cameroun borderland, it was and is also a pot that is concocted with some rituals (Swem chia) and used as an object of oath-taking to check an unjust or wicked behavior of some people in Tiv society.

Moreover, it is also significant to point out here that whether it is viewed from the biblical perspective or the scientific explanation of the origin of man, it can be said that man did not remain static, in other words, man was developing scientifically and culturally as he faced challenges in his environment and attempted to solve them to better his living. As the population of the Tiv was increasing, the need for pottery production also increased to meet the needs of the people. This may also explain why the practice of the industry had a wider scope or was more widely spread in the pre-colonial era when the Tiv society was still in its original state without having contact with the Europeans. Given this, the older women saw the need to teach the younger ones the science and art of

pottery production to make their lives more meaningful and useful in meeting their needs. All the informants maintained that they acquired pottery production skills from their parents and relations. For instance, Takema (personal communication, May 26, 2020), maintained that "I learned pottery production from my mother and when I got married my husband's people were also potters. This was how I continued to produce pots but now I am old I cannot do it again." In the words of Atoo (personal communication, May 29, 2020)," I grew up in a very large family and my mother and other women in the extended family were potters. My immediate elder sister was learning pottery making so I joined her to learn it too." In the same vein, Avertse (personal communication, May 29, 2020) remarked "When I got married, women in my husband's place were potters so they encouraged me to learn this so that it can become useful to me in life in the future. I accepted to learn it and any time they were molding it, I would sit by the side to see how they were doing it and they also taught me how to do it." Thus, the practice of the industry in Tivland has been sustained up to date because it is passed down from generation to generation.

3.0 The Processes /Techniques of Pottery Production in Post-Colonial Tivland

Generally, pottery production in Tiv land involves the following processes, techniques, or methods.

Clay identification and digging: Clay referred to as *inyatyuu* or *luamatu* is the raw material for pottery production in Tivland. Even though it is found everywhere and in almost every community, it is not all types of clay that are suitable for its production. Thus, the first thing is to identify the type of clay that is suitable for production. This type of clay is usually found on water sides or riverbanks, rocky places, and hillsides. Identification of clay deposits is usually made through visual inspection of the surrounding areas being suspected. Such sites are usually located at the low land area; valley or swamp areas during the rainy season. Crabs usually dig their hole into the ground and ring out the part of the clay. The dug-out clay by the crabs and individuals is usually inspected and given simple hand tests to determine their suitability as clay for pot making. On the other hand, during the dry season, the areas suspected of harbouring clay deposits are usually surveyed visually to check if enough cracks exist (E. Awua, personal communication, May 27, 2020). After identifying the suitable clay, the next thing is digging or mining to obtain it. The clay is then carried home for the next stage of the production process.

Preparation of dogged clay: Clay preparation is done in several ways including souring or stinking, wedging, elutriation or floatation, and most commonly, by pummeling or treading the clay underfoot and then wedging it by the hand through pounding, thumbing, and rolling as clay's malleability improves with aging. Nowadays, the clay that is taken home is spread on sags, and the potter uses stone to break it into pieces until it is observed to be very smooth (without lumps). This is done when the clay is obtained during the dry season. It is also sieved and separated from other foreign matter. This is also referred to as clay purification. The clay is then soaked in water for about three or four days in a wide container (buckets, basins among others). After the clay has absorbed enough water, it is taken out and pounded in a mortar to work it into a plastic and homogeneous mass that is used to mold vessels. Sometimes, the clay is mixed with low-fired grog as a temper. The grog which is usually an old broken pot is pounded, sieved, and mixed with the clay. This gives the finished wares improved strength and helps its resistance to thermal shock while increasing the plasticity of the clay (A. Kureve, personal communication, May 27, 2020).

Forming of vessels: It is done after all the impurities in the clay are removed and all other necessary preparations are made to make it ready for molding. The size of the pot to be formed or molded determines the quantity of prepared clay to be used. Majorly, women potters in Tivland use hand modeling techniques in shaping their pots. The potter places the base of an old broken clay vessel (oval in shape) on a flat slab of wooden plank of about 302cm. Holding the bowl in one hand, they rotate it continuously while using the other hand to work the vessel (*uhuen Ityegh* or *utimen Ityegh*). The potters work and observe the pot while pausing at intervals to trim and scrape the vessel using *Igbev* (a kind of sandpaper obtained from the cover of *Iyiasepods*). Once the desired shape is achieved, the potter immerses a mango leaf in water which she uses to hold the topmost part of the vessel while rotating it until the rim (*ato a ityegh*) of the vessel is formed (either everted, inverted, or straight rim). Thereafter, a stick or a dried mango seed is used to form the tip of the vessel by placing the stick or the mango seed on the tip of the vessel and rotating the bowl in a single 3600 circle (Normishan, 2018).

Immediately after the above is achieved, the vessel is kept under a shade such that the sun cannot shine directly on it. This action enables the vessel to solidify and allows the potter to complete the process of molding. Thereafter, the potter spreads a rag on her lap and places the vessel on it while using *iyiasepod* already immersed in water to scrape the inner part of the vessel. This is done to further smooth the vessel and, in some cases increase the size of the vessel. The vessel is kept in the same way described above before the next phase which involves rubbing some water on the outer part of the vessel and using a little smooth iron object to scrape the exterior part of the vessel to remove some small sand particles that may have been left in the body of the vessel. This process is repeated until the body of the vessel becomes very smooth. The vessel is again kept to dry a little before the potter applies the needed decorations.

Decoration: The major decoration techniques applied by Tiv women potters are the knitted net and mat impressions and carved roulettes and incisions. The potters place the vessel to be decorated on a knitted net or mat and use a stone that is round and smooth and carefully hit the interior part of the pottery vessel which is only half-dried. The vessel is pressed into the net or mat through this process while the potter continues to observe it. When the potter is satisfied that the net or mat will leave some decorative marks on the exterior part of the vessel, the net or mat is then removed (A. Agbo, personal communication, June 2, 2020). Carved wooden and string roulettes and incisions are also used to create some decorative marks on pottery vessels especially *Atsua* (small and moderate size pots. The materials used for decoration are the *uwel* (carved wood), pointed sticks, (*songol*-bamboo), and maize cobs. The designs on the pots have no ritual significance. Apart from creating beautiful designs on the vessels, the decorations serve the purpose of preventing the pots from being slippery and improving heat absorption during cooking and evaporation in cooling.

Drying: With the beautiful designs completed, the pots are sun-dried for it to be ready for firing. The pots are to be dried to prevent them from bursting because of the steam that could be formed within the walls during firing. Potters place the vessels in an open place to fully dry. Vessels in Tivland are dried either in the open hut (*ate*) or in the open air to receive sunshine. The process of drying the pots was usually slow to prevent cracking. During the dry season, extra efforts are made to prevent pots from drying faster than necessary. The drying takes between two to three days depending on the season (A. Agbo, personal communication, June 2, 2020).

Firing: This refers to the process of subjecting fully dried pottery objects to heat generated through combustion. The method of firing employed by potters in Tivland was the bonfire or open firing. The pots were stacked together in different ways while the firewood was piled around and over the pots and set ablaze. With the fire on, the temperature rises rapidly to a maximum and begins to drop slowly (D. Akpera, personal communication, May 26, 2020). The maximum temperature made the pot red-hot which meant it could be removed from the fire, the potter used a long stick to remove it and immediately applied the Ikpine' (brideliaferunea) extract or solution on it using Ishuur- a local broom. The Ikpine extract was made from the bark of the 'Ikpine' tree. It was collected, pounded into powder form, and soaked in the water for some time to bring out the extract solution. The solution extract sunk into the body of the pot as a dark brown stain or pigment, giving it a kind of black colouring. The Ikpine added beauty to the pot and made it more compact as it cooled down, thereby making it stronger and more durable. The extract was used in making black lines or dark black portions on wares or bowels that had been slipped red-brown. The pots were tested to know if they had been properly fired and were ready for use. This was done by giving it a little knock and if the sound produced was metallic, then it was considered well-fired and with no crack. The pot was ready for use and also for the market. Clay that had been fired to a certain temperature can never return to the plastic condition again and though it was mechanically weak, it held water without collapsing (N. Tsenda, personal communication, June 2, 2020).

Glazing: This refers to the application of a certain paste-like liquid to pottery objects to ensure that the surface is shiny, glossy, and more attractive. In southern Tivland not all types of pottery vessels are glazed. The ones that are glazed are the gbande, ichenge, ishawa, and asusu. The substance that is used in glazing them is called dev (Reddish clay in a liquid form) (E. Awua, personal communication, May 27, 2020). It is usually obtained in some specific soil types that contain it. Experienced potters know it when they suspect it in a particular area. After obtaining it, it is usually grounded in powdered form and sieved with lalia (a local net used in sieving yam and cassava flour to make turning food). The potter then applies it on the vessel when it is half-dried using a smooth stone. It is thereafter allowed to dry before firing it. After removing it from the fire the shiny nature of the substance appears on the vessel. Ikpine' (brideliaferunea) is not applied on these types of pottery vessels. This explains why these types of pottery vessels are not usually black but either reddish or brownish in colour reflecting the colour of the clay that is used to glaze them.



Plate 1 Clay mining sites



Plate 2 Extracted clay has been dried



Plate 3 Fully prepared clay for molding



Plate 5 Pre-drying of pottery vessels during production



Plate 6 Firing of pottery vessels

4.0 Pottery Vessels Produced in Post-Colonial Tivland and their uses

Pottery products in Tivland come in different sizes and shapes and represent indigenous science and technology and artistic display of the people which began from the pre-colonial era and has been sustained up to date even with the affront of colonization and modernization. However, it is important to state here that some of the pottery vessels that were produced and used in Tivlan are going into extinction. According to Aava Kureve, "some pottery vessels in Tivland such as the *zwar*, *tyumugh*, and *abah* have gone into extinction with the emergence of modern sacks which have replaced their uses, nevertheless, many pottery vessels are still produced for various purposes" (A. Kureve, personal communication, May 27, 2020). These pottery vessels include the following:

- (i) **Gbande (singular) Agbande (plural):** It is used for serving soup, drinking water, traditional medicine, etc.
- (ii) **Tsua (singular) Atsua (plural):** It is a pot that is used mainly for cooking food. They are also of two types and different sizes. One was used for cooking of soup tsuaiyue while the other was used for boiling yam to pound, akpu, and turning food. This is the type of pot that is also used for oath-taking Swem Chia. The atsua is the set of pots that are mostly produced in Tivland today because they are still highly needed especially for medicinal purposes.
- (iii) **Ishawa (singular) ushawa (plural):** It is used mainly for fetching and storing drinking water. It is fairly big in size. The longer water stays in it the cooler it becomes. This makes it suitable for drinking especially during heat periods. The mouth is usually narrow but wide enough to enhance the fetching of water for drinking. The mouth is built like this so that the drinking water can be properly covered to prevent insects and other things from falling inside and possibly causing contamination. It also has turned rims. This type of pot is still very useful in Tivland.
- (iv) **Ichenge (singular) Achenge (plural):** It is built mainly for frying things such as groundnut, Bambara nut, benniseed, and garri. They are very wide to enhance the turning of fried things. They are still very much in production in Tivland. These sets of pots are glazed with a substance called dev.
- (v) **Buufu (singular) Ubuufu (plural):** It is a perforated pot that was used for different purposes such as sieving or preparing locust beans (*porkiabiglobosa*) and gbaaye (*prosopis Africana*) used as spices on soup, smoking fish and other bush animals that are killed from hunting. They are moderate in size and are usually short-necked. The production of this set of pots in the area is still very high as there are hardly any alternatives for sieving or preparing these local spices which are highly needed.
- (vi) **Asusu (Saving Bank):** The asusu is a small roundish pot with a small handle and a small rectangular opening or hole. It is designed specifically to save money just like a saving box.



Plate 7 Different sizes of atsua



Plate 8 Glazed agbande



Plate 9 Ishawa was produced by Tiv potters



Plate 10 Ishawa was produced by Itulo women but bought and sold by Tiv women potters



Plate 9 Ishawa was produced by Tiv potters



Plate 10 Ishawa was produced by Itulo women but bought and sold by Tiv women potters



Plate 11 Different sizes of Asusu-saving bank

5.0 Impact of Pottery Production on the Economy of Rural Women in the Post-Colonial Tivland, 1960-2015

The pottery industry has continued to play a significant role in the socio-cultural and economic development of the people, especially women. This has been made possible by two major factors, first, up to date, the majority of the population of the people in Tivland still lives in rural areas Secondly, the massive importation of foreign utensils has not been able to meet certain socio-cultural needs of the Tiv people thus; the pottery industry has continued to meet the domestic, ritual and medicinal needs of the society to a considerable extent, especially among the rural people. To be specific, the availability of modern utensils has not been able to meet the essential needs of cooking certain Tiv soups and foods like *Genger* and *Ahuma*. They are cooked better in local pots (Normishan, 2018).

It is also an undisputed fact that most of our communities in Nigeria a developing country are characterized by poverty as some people cannot meet the basic needs of their lives. In this regard, some people cannot afford modern refrigerators a situation that gives them the option of using local pots such as the *Ishawa* for cooling drinking water. Moreover, culture is inherent in nature and as a result, many people find it very difficult to completely abandon their culture even in the face of modernization. The point here is that some people feel that by cooking certain Tiv foods in pots and drinking water from the *Ishawa*, they are identifying with their culture. Moreover, some pots have been used as musical instruments in some Christian assemblies up to date.

Another important area where the pottery industry has continued to be useful in Tivland is that of using it for the brewing of local beer called *Tashi* or *burukutu*. There is hardly any market in Tivland, especially in the villages where you will go and not find some people drinking *Burukutu* or *Tashi* either under trees or in round huts, especially on market days. Many people cherish it because it provides an opportunity to meet, discuss societal issues, and while away time.

Also worthy of note is the fact that the existence of the pottery industry in Tivland has played a significant role in the historical reconstruction of the Tiv people through archaeological research. According to Igirgi (1987)" important however about pottery, is also the use of these bits and pieces that have been left over the years by archeologists in attempts to date early settlement sites and to generally widen the horizon of our knowledge of Tiv history."

Economically, the pottery industry has contributed to the economic independence of many of the women apart from farming. After producing pottery vessels of varying sizes and shapes, they are taken to different markets such as Adikpo, Ikyogen, Achiaetc in Kwande Local Government Area, Lessel, Ikyobo, Ushongo, Akerioretc in Ushongo Local Government Area, Agbo, Ityemngoetc in Vandeikya and Korinya, Agberagba etc in Konshisha Local Government Area for sell. There are fixed prices for specific sizes of pottery vessels. Thus, the *atsua* costs between N100-300, *gbande* N100-200, *buufu* N300-600, *asusu* N100-200, *ichenge* N500-1000, *ishawa* N1500-2000. These price ranges are dependent on the size of the pottery vessels. It was also found out that some of the women selling *ishawa* were not potters themselves but only served as middlewomen by buying them from the Utuu (Itulo women) to come and sell and make a profit. At the same time, some of the women who sell *ishawa* are potters themselves but they do not specialize in the production of *ishawa* but rather prefer to buy it from the Itulo women to come and sell along with the vessels they produce

themselves. However, few of the Tiv potters in the area still produce *ishawa* for sale. The main marketing strategy adopted by potters in the area is selective marketing. This means some specific potters are selected to be the only ones to display their products in some selected markets on some specific market days. According to the potters, this is to avoid bringing out excess products in one market thereby making the vessels lose their price value in the eyes of prospective customers. One of the potters remarked that "when there is a market, one potter alone sells up to fifteen pots in a single market"(A. Agbo, personal communication, June 2, 2020). Apart from taking the pottery vessels to the markets, some people buy these vessels in the homes of the potters. The people of the Mbabyuur community situated along Ugbema-Ushongo -Adikpo road usually display the vessels at different places by the roadside where people come and buy them.

Pottery vessels are sold beyond Tivland. For instance, the potters in the Mbabyuur community in Ushongo town in Ushongo Local Government area maintained that "there is a woman from Makurdi who buys pots from us twice a year. When she is about to come, she informs us to produce many vessels because she buys pots that fill an 18-sitter bus and takes them to Makurdi for sale"(E. Awua, personal communication, May 27, 2020). From the foregoing, it can be seen that the industry has become a source of livelihood for some rural women. Money that is gotten from the sale of these pottery vessels helps women buy clothes for themselves, food items, and ingredients, assist their husbands in paying their children's school fees, etc.

Table 1: Range of Income Generated from Pottery Sales by a Single Potter in some selected LGAs in Tivland

S/N	Local Government Area	Range of income per market	Range of income per month	Range of income per year
1	Kwande	₦ 3,000 -5,000	₦ 12,000-20,000	₦ 120,000-150,000
2	Ushongo	₦ 3,000 -5,000	₦ 12,000-20,000	₦ 120,000-150,000
3	Vandeikya	₦ 3,000 -5,000	₦ 12,000-20,000	₦ 120,000-150,000
4	Konshisha	₦ 3,000 -5,000	₦ 12,000-20,000	₦ 120,000-150,000
5.	Gboko	₦ 3,000 -5,000	₦ 12,000-20,000	₦ 120,000-150,000
6.	Tarka	₦ 3,000 -5,000	₦ 12,000-20,000	₦ 120,000-150,000
7	Buruku	₦ 3,000 -5,000	₦ 12,000-20,000	₦ 120,000-150,000

Source: Market Survey, 2022



Plate 12 Finished pottery vessels displayed in the market for sale

6.0 Challenges of the Pottery Industry in Post-colonial Tivland 1960-2015

The major challenge that the pottery industry in Tivland faced in the post-colonial era was that of modernization which brought about changes in the socio-cultural and economic lives of the people and more importantly led to the massive importation of European goods such as aluminum, metal, and plastic plates, giant plastic jars etc. to replace pottery products that were widely used for domestic and other purposes. Speaking on the challenges of the pottery industry in Nigeria, Okhiria (2015: 55) equally opined that:

Pottery art has suffered a setback due to modernization that brought in aluminum, iron, and ore products used for various household chores. These products gain more prominence due to their durability and ease of transportation. Pottery art in Italy, China, Japan, and many other countries has advanced beyond only pots and other domestic containers. Unfortunately, pottery in many parts of Africa especially Nigeria is yet to move with the modern needs of people in the area using pottery to meet the wider needs for interior decoration, such as cookery and serving wares.

Thus, the industry has been unable to favorably compete with these foreign utensils. These modern items have almost replaced pottery products. The introduction of Western education, commercialization of land, and introduction of diverse economic activities which began in the colonial era have been consolidated in this post-colonial era bringing about changes in the socio-cultural and economic lives of the people. Many people now consider indigenous pots as inferior in value which can only be used by rural dwellers.

The use of crude tools and techniques; this has been one of the greatest challenges of pottery production in southern Tivland, up to date, the tools and techniques that were used in the pre-colonial era are still the ones employed in pottery production. In the first place even though more than 80 % of clay the basic raw material for its production is sourced locally, the people use manual methods such as the use of hoes in digging or mining the clay. The basic method of production in southern Tivland is still the molding technique which is very rigorous and takes a lot of time. But in other places, machines such as kiln and potter's wheel are used in pottery production. They also employ techniques such as the use of balls, slabs, throwing on the wheel, and casting in production. Pottery vessels are also glazed. The implication of this on pottery production in such societies is that the quality and designs of the products finest meeting the needs of the modern man. It also increases the quantity of production. According to Irabor et al (2014:12):

it is significant to acknowledge the science and engineering nature of the ceramic discipline. This fact is not in doubt in the developed worlds, except in the underdeveloped economies where a degree of lack of knowledge exists in the area of pottery, its technology, and engineering. This has forced the available skilled manpower in this sector to either be frustrated, change into other professions, or become redundant, leaving the stage for pseudo-experts in ceramics. In the area of equipment, Nigeria's machinery and system-building capabilities are very low and this sad situation has been reflected in the level of production.

In this regard, pottery products in Southern Tivland cannot compete favorably with modern utensils that meet these standards. This perhaps explains why patronage and income generation from pottery have relatively remained low compared to modern utensils.

Lack of appropriate marketing strategies; the marketing of pottery products in southern Tivland is majorly in two ways. First, some people live close to the house of the potters and are aware that they produce pottery vessels. Thus, when they need these pottery products, they go to their houses and purchase them. Second, the vessels are conveyed to the various markets in the area such as Ikyogen, Jato-Aka, and Adikpo, etc. in the Kwande local government area, etc., and displayed for sale. Prospective buyers will come and see the products, price them, and buy at an agreed price.

It is important to state here that these styles of marketing pottery products are not bad but are certainly not enough especially in this age of globalization where the entire world is been described as a global village. There are no strategies to advertise the products through local means or in the markets where they are usually taken to be sold. The potters also lack the requisite skill and knowledge to advertise their products using information and communication medial channels such as radio and television not to talk of social medial channels such as Facebook, Twitter, or Integral They also lack the knowledge to employ the services of others. This explains why Akilandeewari and Pitchai (2016) noted that "Artisans of Pottery are suffering to sell their products in the market as they were doing direct marketing, whoever needs the products comes and purchase the product. This is one of the reasons for the failure of the product because it does not create the need for the product among the customer." This turns to limit the knowledge that people have especially the younger ones who are born in towns and cities some of whom have never seen pottery vessels before on the important uses of pottery vessels and their comparative advantage to modern utensils in preparing some Tiv meals. It must be understood that information and communication technology have changed everything in the world. Today, herbal concoctions prepared by herbalists are been advertised on radio and television even in the face of modern medical practice where there are hospitals, health clinics, and pharmaceutical companies that produce synthetic drugs. There are equally no associations formed by women potters to ensure that they agree on uniform prices for the sale of their products. In this regard, every potter sells as she deems fit. But other traders in particular items agree on specific prices for their products to ensure maximum gain. There is also no conscious effort to showcase pottery products in major towns and cities to enhance marketing. Herbal products for instance are taken to distant markets even to other states for marketing. In addition, the potters have no shops where they can display their wares. Bearing in mind that the majority of potters are from rural areas, they take the utensils to market on market days. After selling some of the utensils, potters take the remaining utensils back to their rural homes for they do not have where to keep them until the next market day. All these have acted in greatly limited the market pottery products would have attracted and the income generated from pottery sales in the area.

Lack of training; the lack of training of potters in the area to acquire modern skills and techniques in production using machines accounts for why the industry is the way it was handed over to the people by their forefathers right from the pre-colonial period. This has not only affected the growth of the industry itself but also the level of economic growth and development that would have been experienced in the area. This is because studies and available evidence show that there is a lot of potential in the pottery industry. The people depend largely on the use of traditional tools and techniques which do not enhance productivity nor does it improve the quantity or quality of pottery products to compete favorably with modern plastic and aluminum utensils. In general, there lack of training in design, business management, and marketing of products.

Lack of funds for increased production; no doubt lack of funds is another major challenge that potters in southern Tivland are facing. Most of these people are rural women and the little generated from pottery sales are readily used to meet family needs. They lack the funds to purchase modern tools and equipment that enhance pottery production. There is also a lack of funds for potters to advertise their products on radio and television and the use of websites that will showcase the importance and uses of modern vessels even in our modern world. There is also a lack of funds to transport these vessels to other towns for marketing. This is worsened by its fragile nature that attracts huge transportation. Loans that are available either in local bam or modern commercial banks which would have been a remedy for the situation have high interest rates that can consume the capital and profit of the entire business. Sometimes there are collaterals that the potters themselves don't have. This is greatly affecting the industry and its modernization.

Lack of government/ private sector interest in the pottery industry; this is one of the challenges pottery productions face in Tivland in this post-colonial era. Even in the most developed economies of the world, the government is the engine of socio-economic development through the deliberate formulation of policies or legislation and implementation. The reverse has been the case in Nigeria about traditional industries. Since oil was discovered, attention was shifted from all else and focused on the oil sector. This has led to the neglect of other sectors particularly the development of indigenous industries like pottery. In collaboration with this view, Master Potter Levi Yakubu (personal communication, June 27, 2021) observed that:

The pottery industry was still doing well after independence but something drastic happened that affected the pottery /ceramic industry in Nigeria. The oil boom came with its merits and demerits. The boom came with a doom. Nigerians became over-dependent on that resource and did not want to suffer to venture into other self-help areas including pottery. Following this, the Chinese started pouring in their stuff which was bright, brilliant, and cheaper. People didn't see the rationale to suffer to produce local pottery that was much more expensive but went for the imported ones which the quality was not as high as the local alternatives that we had.

There are no conscious and concerted efforts by the government to develop or modernize traditional pottery production for better economic performance. In this regard, the industry is left in the hands of a few elderly women in rural communities. The private sector in partnership with the government is also contributing significantly to the economic growth and development of nations but in Benue state and Southern Tivland in particular, there are clear indications of a lack of private or individual interest in investing in the pottery industry. In the entire Tivland, the only private pottery center is Dajo Pottery. This is certainly not enough. In southern Tivland, there are no pottery centers rather production is carried out by individuals in their homes. This lack of interest in not only preserving this cultural and scientific heritage but modernizing it may explain why the industry is on the verge of going into extinction shortly.

Contempt and apathy for the industry: This is one of the major challenges of the industry in Tivland. In the words of Master Potter Levi Yakubu(personal communication June 27, 2021), contempt and apathy have been one of the major challenges of the pottery industry up till now. In the first place, pottery making was considered a woman's preoccupation in Tivland. A man would lose his respect if he ventured into pottery making. For instance, I was the first

male in the Tiv culture made up of over five million people to venture into pottery making. Many people gave me up. They thought I was out of my mind when I resigned from my appointment as a Lecturer with Benue Polytechnic Makurdi In June 1985 to start my pet project Dajo Pottery. Secondly, our people feel that once it is not imported, it is not useful, glamorous and high quality. Erroneously, that's how we reason here. We crave what we don't have whereas the foreigners desire what we have. That's the challenge of an inferiority complex.

The influence of Western education and modernization has led many people especially the youth to develop negative attitudes towards the pottery industry. Most people today feel that pottery production is a cultural activity of uneducated rural women. Some even feel that using pottery products in the world of today where there is advancement in science and technology and modern ways of life is a mark of illiteracy or lack of civilization. The younger generation particularly feels that picking up a career in pottery production cannot give them any social recognition nor will they have fulfillment in life. This is certainly a mistaken belief but it is unfortunately held by many. The emergence of Christianity as a dominant religion in many parts of Nigeria and Southern Tivland has also made its adherents see the patronage of pottery products which are mostly used by traditionalists for herbal medicine and other cultural purposes as contradicting their faith. Some of the people feel that the use of pottery products is associated with unholy cultural practices. It therefore prevents them from buying and using pottery vessels

Scanty research done on pottery-making; the scanty research done on pottery making in the country mainly focuses on the direct importance (economic significance) of handicraft works and the utilitarian purposes of the products. However, the significance goes beyond that and the utensils that are shaped may have additional socio-cultural values. In other words, a pot shaped by a potter is not only for functional/utilitarian purposes (e.g. for steaming, boiling, storage, etc.) but also for social and non-utilitarian or symbolic values (e.g. self-expression and identity marks) which can be sources of tourism industry (Barwa and Ahuwam 2019). There is equally no research to see how potter production can be adopted into the contemporary ceramic industry in the area.

Infrastructural challenges; this has to do with bad roads, storage facilities, and inappropriate means of transportation. All these make it very difficult for pottery products to conveniently get to desired markets to be sold. This is worsened by the fact that the vessels are very bulky and fragile in nature. The challenge of transporting the vessels to the home without the fear of them breaking on the way makes many people reluctant to purchase them.

7.0 Conclusion

This paper has clearly shown that the pottery industry is one of the ancient crafts of the Tiv people predominantly the rural women. The industry has survived some of the daunting challenges that have confronted it right from pre-colonial times to this post-colonial era. The production and spread of the industry are made easy due to the availability of clay which is the major raw material for its production. The techniques for its production are simple and indigenous with different vessels of varying sizes produced. The vessels produced have a lot of socio-cultural and economic impact on the development of the people, especially the rural women. There is, therefore, an urgent and compelling need to revive and modernize the industry in the area by establishing pottery skill

acquisition centers, introducing ceramics programmes in higher institutions in the Benue State, organizing training workshops, seminars, and conferences on pottery production, using modern techniques and tools, developing effective marketing strategies, etc. This is because the need for entrepreneurship development in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized as job absence in terms of formal employment has become a chorus song of many citizens. Thus, as the government is now emphasizing the development of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) as the basis for addressing the challenge of unemployment by looking at indigenous knowledge systems, the pottery industry readily presents itself to be used in that regard. This will enhance the economic self-sustainability of the rural people, especially women, and more importantly, guarantee the economic growth and development of not only Tivland but Nigeria at large as has been the case in East Asian economies, especially in this new global economic order.

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