



Sustainability of entrepreneurship in handcrafted Nigerian products: a case study of North Western States

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Abstract

This study investigates the sustainability of entrepreneurship in handcrafted Nigerian items, concentrating on the North Western states of Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Jigawa, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara. Utilising secondary data from scholarly literature, governmental papers, and digital platforms, alongside focused primary data from artisan interviews, the study assesses the economic, social, and environmental aspects of sustainability. The results show that crafts like textiles, leatherwork, and pottery can help the economy, but they also face problems including not being able to go to markets, not having enough infrastructure, and competition from imports. These businesses protect cultural heritage and provide communities power in social terms. In environmental terms, they use local materials but are at risk of using too many resources. Primary data enhances these insights by disclosing artisans' viewpoints on operational impediments and innovation requirements. The report suggests ways to make things more sustainable, such as forming cooperatives, using internet marketing, and using eco-friendly methods. This research aligns with Sustainable Development Goals and highlights the potential of artisanal entrepreneurship to cultivate resilient economies, providing recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders to bolster this sector.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Sustainability, Handcrafted products, North Western Nigeria, Artisanal economy

Introduction

The foundation of both cultural legacy and economic activity in North Western Nigeria, which includes the states of Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Jigawa, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara, is the artisanal sector. Handcrafted products, including batik tie-and-dye textiles, leather goods, pottery, and wood carvings, have historically supported local economies while embodying indigenous knowledge and customs (Abdullahi & Sulaiman, 2020) ^[1]. These crafts greatly contribute to Nigeria's tourist business by supplying unique cultural items that appeal to both domestic and foreign visitors (Okonkwo & Eze, 2019) ^[20]. Nonetheless, the sustainability of entrepreneurship in this sector encounters substantial problems, including globalisation, insufficient infrastructure, and resource scarcity, which jeopardise the profitability of artisanal enterprises (Ibrahim & Musa, 2021) ^[13]. Using secondary data in addition to personal insights from craftsmen, this study investigates the sustainability of entrepreneurship in handcrafted Nigerian items, with an emphasis on economic viability, social consequences, and environmental resilience in the North Western region.

Handcrafted product entrepreneurship is primarily motivated by necessity, with craftsmen using traditional skills to generate income in the face of a lack of official employment alternatives (Adewale & Adebayo, 2022) ^[3]. In North Western Nigeria, artisans often operate as micro-enterprises, often integrating

crafts with other revenue sources such as farming or trading (Yusuf & Bello, 2023) ^[27]. By promoting inclusive economic growth and protecting cultural heritage, these initiatives support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) (United Nations, 2015) ^[24]. However, colonial policies that favored raw material exports over local manufacture have traditionally neglected traditional crafts, contributing to skill erosion and youth migration to urban centers (Mohammed, 2020) ^[17]. Contemporary difficulties, such as competition from inexpensive imported goods and limited access to capital, further hinder scaling (Okonkwo & Eze, 2019) ^[20].

The study challenge relies on understanding how sustainable entrepreneurship in handcrafted products can be realised amidst evolving economic and environmental pressures. This study tries to identify the elements influencing sustainability, discover the key constraints faced by craftsmen, and provide methods to solve these difficulties. Although secondary data from government reports, scholarly publications, and internet resources offer a thorough basis for comprehending sustainability concerns and market dynamics (Ibrahim & Musa, 2021) ^[13], primary data from artisan interviews provide important insights into lived experiences and the need for innovation. This study's importance stems from its dual

contribution to theory and practice: it offers evidence-based suggestions for stakeholders and policymakers to support the artisanal economy while also advancing the idea of artisan entrepreneurship within sustainability frameworks (Adewale & Adebayo, 2022) ^[3]. By focusing on the understudied North Western states, compared to more explored places like Southern Nigeria, this research tackles a significant gap in the literature.

Historical context of handcrafted products in Nigeria

Handcrafted objects in Nigeria have a deep pre-colonial history, functioning as significant components of economic, social, and cultural life across many ethnic groups. Archaeological evidence from places like Nok and Ife shows that crafts like pottery and metals go back as far as 1000 BCE. This shows that indigenous people had advanced understanding of iron smelting, weaving, and carving (Ejikeme, 2024) ^[6]. In the North West, cities like Kano and Sokoto were famous for their indigo-dyed textiles and leatherwork. These were important to trade networks that crossed the Sahara and connected North African and Middle Eastern markets (Frederick, 2020) ^[9]. These crafts had practical purposes as well as symbolic ones, showing social position, religious beliefs, and communal identity. Production was generally organised by gender and family, with women making ceramics and males making metal and leather goods (Adamu & Bello, 2015) ^[2]. These industries were able to support themselves because they had a lot of local resources like cotton, clay, and skins. This led to economic independence and regional specialization, which helped empires like the Sokoto Caliphate grow.

The introduction of British colonial power in the late 19th century significantly altered these indigenous craft industries, favouring raw material exports over local production to benefit European markets. By encouraging cotton cultivation for export through groups like the British Cotton Growing Association (BCGA), colonial administrators like Lord Frederick Lugard implemented policies that took resources away from indigenous weaving and left local artisans with a shortage of raw materials (Hammed, 2022) ^[9]. In northern Nigeria, the once-thriving artisanal textile business in the Sokoto Caliphate faced competition from imported British cloth, causing in a fall in production as local weavers grappled with increasing costs and reduced demand (Bolt & Stylianou, 2024) ^[5]. Heavy taxation on local producers and the entry of imported goods further disadvantaged crafts, producing economic strain and social discontent, as shown in riots in locations like Iseyin-Okeho in 1916 (Hammed, 2022). This era represented a move from self-reliant craft economies to dependent on foreign imports, degrading skills and resulting to the loss of traditional knowledge in many communities.

Post-colonial Nigeria has witnessed occasional initiatives to restore handcrafted crafts, yet obstacles persist due to the enduring impacts of colonial disruption. In the mid-20th century, independence stimulated interest in cultural rebirth, with crafts like pottery in Inyi and textiles in Kano regaining some significance through local markets and tourism (Ejikeme,

2024) ^[6]. However, the dominance of the oil economy since the 1970s has further neglected the craft sector, leading to young indifference and migration to urban regions for formal work (Adamu & Bello, 2015) ^[2]. Many craftspeople are studying resource scarcity and market competition from imports, despite historical devaluation that continues to affect sustainability despite modern efforts like government programmes and NGO interventions to integrate traditional crafts into modern economies (Frederick, 2020) ^[9]. Understanding this progression is vital for tackling existing barriers and utilising crafts for sustainable development.

Handcrafted entrepreneurship in North Western Nigeria

In North Western Nigeria, handcrafted entrepreneurship is defined by informal, necessity-driven companies that integrate traditional skills with subsistence strategies in rural and urban contexts. Artisans in states like Kano, Kaduna, and Sokoto largely engage in crafts such as textile dyeing, leather tanning, and ceramics, generally operating as micro-enterprises with family or apprentice labor (Igwe et al., 2018) ^[14]. These firms are often self-funded or supported by informal networks, with a considerable share (about 45%) consisting entirely of the proprietor, showing restricted scalability due to resource restrictions (Shitu & Ode, 2022) ^[23]. The sector's informality enables flexibility, enabling craftsmen to combine making with farming or trading, which mitigates seasonal vulnerabilities and boosts household incomes in economically challenged locations (Enovate Lab, 2025) ^[8]. Gender dynamics play a crucial part, with women prominent in textile and raffia work, contributing to family economies while men dominate heavy crafts like metals.

Challenges in handcrafted business in this region include limited infrastructure, such as unreliable energy and poor roads, which hinder production and market access for 76-80% of artisans (Igwe et al., 2018) ^[14]. Access to credit remains a major hurdle, with cultural and geographical variables increasing urban-rural gaps in entrepreneurial support (Shitu & Ode, 2022) ^[23]. Despite these challenges, artists display resilience through creativity, such as altering designs to fit tourist demands or organising informal cooperatives for bulk material sourcing. Historical trading hubs like Kano's markets continue to act as essential outlets, linking local producers to broader West African networks, however competition from imports threatens profitability (Enovate Lab, 2025) ^[8]. Training is often self-acquired or through apprenticeships, with just a minority getting formal vocational education, stressing the need for focused interventions to develop skills and business acumen.

The opportunity for growth in North Western handcrafted business lies in exploiting cultural legacy for economic diversification, particularly amid Nigeria's oil-dependent economy. According to recent studies, financial incentives and mentorship can help close gaps in rural areas where craftspeople experience a lack of government support and information asymmetry (Shitu & Ode, 2022) ^[23]. By encouraging entrepreneurial ecosystems, including digital

marketing and export potential, the industry might create jobs and reduce poverty, matching with national development goals (Igwe et al., 2018) ^[14]. Case examples from Kano's leather industry indicate how historical roots can be turned into modern companies, provided impediments like corruption and gender inequality are addressed through governmental reforms (Enovate Lab, 2025) ^[8].

Sustainability dimensions

Economic sustainability

Through the creation of jobs, revenue, and genuine cultural artefacts, handcrafted goods in North Western Nigeria support economic sustainability. Artisans in Kano and Kaduna make textiles and leather goods that attract visitors, contributing to foreign exchange revenues and local revenue (Nzei, 2024) ^[18]. The sector's low startup costs and use of local resources make it accessible for necessity-driven entrepreneurs, with products sold in markets like Nkwo Inyi producing revenues that sustain home economies (Ejikeme, 2024) ^[6]. However, competition from inexpensive imports and weak marketing methods limit profitability, typically resulting in low patronage and underused potential for export (Pan African Review, 2024) ^[21]. Government incentives such as grants and tax cuts, along with measures like cooperative formations, are crucial for improving economic viability. These can increase market access and scale production, as evidenced in successful models from other nations where crafts produce billions in exports (Pan African Review, 2024) ^[21]. In Nigeria, promoting crafts through cultural events and e-commerce could broaden client bases, increase GDP contributions and stimulating entrepreneurship among youth (Nzei, 2024) ^[18]. Despite constraints such raw material shortages, integrating crafts with tourism can establish ancillary enterprises, such as hotels and transport, increasing economic impacts in rural communities (Ejikeme, 2024) ^[6]. Long-term economic viability requires resolving systemic concerns, like weak infrastructure and funding deficits, which affect 80% of craftspeople. Policy interventions focussing on skill training and financial literacy can boost entrepreneurs, turning traditional crafts into competitive companies (Nzei, 2024) ^[18]. By diversifying away from oil dependency, Nigeria's craft industry shows promise for inclusive growth, producing millions of employment and alleviating poverty through sustainable livelihoods (Pan African Review, 2024) ^[21].

Social sustainability

Nigerian handmade crafts exhibit social sustainability through community empowerment and cultural preservation, as demonstrated by companies like This Is Us and Dye Lab, which uphold traditional methods like bronze casting and indigo dyeing (Vogue Business, 2022) ^[25]. These practices build social cohesiveness by transmitting skills across generations via apprenticeships, boosting community relationships and identity in locations like North Western Nigeria (Gbadebo, 2024) ^[10]. Women's involvement in textile crafts enables financial independence, harmonising with gender equality goals and minimising societal inequities (Nzei, 2024) ^[18].

Crafts also promote social participation by involving marginalized groups, especially youth and rural communities, in productive activities that prevent unemployment and urban migration. Initiatives like cultural festivals promote social capital, bringing communities together and boosting knowledge of heritage (Ejikeme, 2024) ^[6]. However, problems like as gender hurdles and young apathy threaten continuity, demanding education and lobbying to continue these practices (Gbadebo, 2024) ^[10]. By integrating crafts into social development projects, Nigeria can harness them for broader implications, such as health and education through community-based companies. In order to ensure social relevance and resilience, artisans and designers work together to conserve cultural narratives while adjusting to contemporary demands (Vogue Business, 2022) ^[25].

Environmental sustainability

MitiMeth's conversion of invasive water hyacinth into home décor pieces is an example of how environmental sustainability is achieved in Nigerian handcrafted goods by using renewable and repurposed materials (MitiMeth, 2025). This strategy mitigates ecological damage by reusing garbage, minimising pollution in streams and increasing biodiversity (Adjoaa, n.d.) ^[4]. Traditional crafts generally incorporate eco-friendly dyes and local fabrics, decreasing carbon footprints compared to industrial equivalents (Gbadebo, 2024) ^[10]. One of the difficulties is the overuse of resources like clay and timber, which, if not handled responsibly, can result in soil erosion and deforestation. Brands like NKWO promote conservation by using natural resources sustainably, advocating for renewable approaches in handcraft production (Vogue Business, 2022) ^[25]. Upcycling textile waste and agricultural leftovers further strengthens circular economies, minimising landfill contributions and developing environmental awareness among craftspeople (MitiMeth, 2025) ^[16]. Green sourcing policy support and green technique training are essential for promoting environmental sustainability. By establishing Nigerian crafts as eco-innovation role models, these initiatives can draw moral customers and advance international sustainability objectives (Adjoaa, n.d.) ^[4].

Global comparisons

Comparative studies of artisan entrepreneurship around the world have shown that Nigeria, Kenya, and India have adopted similar approaches to cultural preservation and economic sustainability. In India, craft cooperatives expand market access through government backing, enabling craftspeople to scale production and export, producing billions in revenue (Hasanah et al., 2023) ^[12]. Similar to North Western Nigeria's informal networks, Indian models stress collective bargaining to overcome resource limits, giving lessons for Nigerian cooperatives in tackling financial and infrastructural barriers (Zahoor et al., 2022) ^[28]. In Kenya, startups like Soko empower craftspeople through mobile-based supply chains, raising incomes fivefold by linking them to global marketplaces without middlemen (MIT News, 2019) ^[15]. This digital integration contrasts with Nigeria's limited tech adoption but

presents a template for North Western craftspeople to use platforms for marketing, potentially eliminating urban-rural gaps (Hasanah et al., 2023) ^[12]. Kenyan concentration on upcycled materials overlaps with Nigerian environmental initiatives, such as MitiMeth's waste transformation, underlining the role of innovation in sustainability (Zahoor et al., 2022) ^[28]. Comparative assessments highlight gaps in African SME internationalization, with Nigerian artisans encountering greater institutional impediments than their Indian counterparts, who benefit from robust policies (Zahoor et al., 2022) ^[28]. By adopting Thai or Vietnamese tourism-linked craft models, Nigeria might improve exports and job creation, boosting cross-cultural learning for resilient entrepreneurship (Hasanah et al., 2023) ^[12].

Gaps in literature

While existing studies provide substantial secondary data on economic and social implications of handcrafted entrepreneurship in Nigeria, region-specific evaluations of North Western states are sparse compared to Southern regions (Yusuf & Bello, 2023) ^[27]. Few sources discuss resource management or green technologies in the artisanal sector, indicating a lack of research on environmental sustainability (Ojo & Adebayo, 2021) ^[19]. Moreover, there is a dearth of primary data to support secondary findings, particularly addressing artisans' lived experiences and innovation demands (Adewale & Adebayo, 2022) ^[3]. This study tackles these limitations by combining secondary data with targeted personal interviews to provide a complete examination of sustainability in North Western Nigeria's artisanal sector.

Theoretical framework

The sustainability of entrepreneurship in handcrafted products is based on the idea of artisan entrepreneurship, which focusses on creativity, cultural identity, and creating value for the community combined with economic goals (Ratten & Ferreira, 2017) ^[22]. This approach incorporates the triple bottom line (TBL) paradigm, which evaluates sustainability via economic, social, and environmental criteria (Elkington, 1997) ^[7]. Economic sustainability is about making money and being able to sell things, social sustainability is about protecting culture and giving people power in their communities, and environmental sustainability is about using resources wisely and having a positive effect on the environment (United Nations, 2015) ^[24]. In North Western Nigeria, artisan entrepreneurship is mostly driven by need, as individuals utilise traditional talents to mitigate economic vulnerabilities in the absence of formal employment (Adewale & Adebayo, 2022) ^[3]. This corresponds with overarching ideas of entrepreneurship in underdeveloped nations, wherein informal sectors are essential for generating livelihoods (Webb et al., 2020) ^[26].

Methodology

In order to investigate the sustainability of entrepreneurship in handcrafted products in the states of Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Jigawa, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara in North Western Nigeria, this study used a mixed-methods case study methodology, largely using secondary data with primary data to enhance conclusions. Secondary data are acquired from academic journals, Nigerian government studies and NGO publications, concentrating on craft types, economic consequences, and sustainability challenges in the region. About 50 sources are picked for their relevance and recent publication, creating a firm foundation. To complement this, semi-structured interviews are done with 25 craftsmen from craft centres in Kano, Kaduna, and Sokoto, chosen for their active involvement in textiles, leatherwork, or ceramics, with equal representation of men and women to capture varied perspectives. Interviews, conducted in Hausa and translated, investigate artisans' opinions on sustainability and barriers, utilising open-ended questions for depth. Secondary data are evaluated thematically for qualitative insights and with descriptive statistics for quantitative indicators like income or employment, utilising software tools. Primary data are classified thematically and cross-checked with secondary findings to verify consistency, such as correlating artisan-reported concerns with documented infrastructural issues. Ethical practices include referencing secondary sources appropriately, gaining informed consent from interviewees, ensuring confidentiality, and securing ethical approval. Limitations include limitations in region-specific secondary data and the modest primary sample size, addressed by focusing on significant craft hubs and cross-referencing data sources for trustworthiness.

Findings

Overview of handcrafted products

The handcrafted product sector in North Western Nigeria, spanning Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Jigawa, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara, is characterized by a diverse array of crafts rooted in cultural traditions and local resources. Secondary data highlight key products, including batik tie-and-dye textiles and leather goods in Kano, calabash carvings and pottery in Kaduna, and ironworks and wood carvings in Sokoto and Zamfara (Abdullahi & Sulaiman, 2020; Yusuf & Bello, 2023) ^[27] ^[1]. These crafts utilize locally sourced materials such as cotton, clay, hides, and plant-based dyes, supporting low-cost production. For instance, Kano's textile industry relies on indigo dyeing, a centuries-old practice, while Kaduna's pottery leverages abundant clay deposits (Ejikeme, 2024) ^[6]. The table below summarizes the primary crafts and materials by state, illustrating regional specialization.

Table 1

State	Key Handcrafted Products	Primary Materials Used
Kano	Batik tie-and-dye textiles, leather goods, metalwork	Cotton, leather, metals, indigo
Kaduna	Calabash carving, pottery, leatherwork	Calabash gourds, clay, leather
Katsina	Textile weaving, pottery	Cotton, clay, plant fibers
Jigawa	Wood carvings, raffia products	Wood, raffia palm
Kebbi	Pottery, weaving	Clay, natural fibers
Sokoto	Ironworks, leather tanning	Iron, leather
Zamfara	Wood carvings, metal crafts	Wood, metals

Primary interviews reveal that these crafts are produced in small-scale workshops or houses, typically involving family members or apprentices, reinforcing their significance as community-based enterprises. Artisans claim that demand is fuelled by local markets and tourism, with products like Kano's textiles sold as cultural mementos (Okonkwo & Eze, 2019)^[20].

Entrepreneurial profiles

The majority of artisans in North Western Nigeria are necessity-driven businesspeople between the ages of 20 and 45 who have little formal education but a wealth of traditional craft expertise acquired via apprenticeships (Adewale & Adebayo, 2022)^[3]. Secondary data reveal that 60% of artists are men, particularly in metallurgy and leather tanning, while women dominate textile weaving and raffia crafts, indicating gendered labor divisions (Igwe et al., 2018)^[14]. Most operate micro-enterprises, with 45% consisting entirely of the owner, and others hiring 1–3 apprentices or family members (Shitu & Ode, 2022)^[23]. Primary data reveal that craftsmen commonly combine crafting with farming or trading to diversify income, particularly in rural areas where economic options are sparse. For example, a Kano-based textile craftsman reported augmenting income through seasonal crop sales, indicating flexible tactics. Motivations for business include economic survival and cultural pride, with craftsmen professing a commitment to preserve tradition despite financial hardships. Business strategies are informal, relying on local markets like Kurmi in Kano or cooperative networks for material sourcing and sales. However, craftsmen lack formal business expertise, limiting their capacity to develop businesses or access broader markets (Enovate Lab, 2025)^[8].

Sustainability dimensions

Economic sustainability

Local economies benefit greatly from the revenue and jobs created by handcrafted businesses. According to secondary statistics, North Western Nigeria's artisanal sector supports tourism with cultural products and generates foreign exchange revenues while employing thousands of people, especially young people (Nzei, 2024)^[18]. For instance, Kano's leather goods attract worldwide clients, with export potential acknowledged in trade reports. However, profitability is hampered by competition from inexpensive imports, with 70% of craftsmen reporting reduced sales due to machine-made alternatives (Pan African Review, 2024)^[21]. Primary data reflect this, with artisans noting poor patronage as a primary

hurdle, often pushing them to sell below production costs. Market access is constrained by insufficient infrastructure, with 80% of artisans encountering difficulty in getting items to urban areas or export hubs (Ibrahim & Musa, 2021)^[13]. Cooperatives give some relief, enabling bulk purchasing of supplies, but access to finance remains a problem, with banks requiring collateral that most artists lack. Despite these limitations, innovations like modifying designs for tourist markets offer possibilities for economic growth.

Social sustainability

Community empowerment and cultural preservation are two social benefits of handcrafted entrepreneurship. Crafts like indigo dyeing in Kano and calabash carving in Kaduna sustain traditional processes, supporting cultural identity and pride (Abdullahi & Sulaiman, 2020)^[1]. According to secondary research, 65% of artisans learn through family or community networks, demonstrating how apprenticeship programmes pass skills down through the generations (Gbadebo, 2024)^[10]. Primary interviews demonstrate that women craftsmen, particularly in textile crafts, attain financial independence, fitting with gender equality ideals. For example, a female weaver in Katsina reported utilising her profits to fund her children's schooling. Community engagement is seen in local markets and festivals, where crafts develop social relationships. However, young apathy, spurred by urban migration and the stigma of traditional employment, threatens long-term viability (Mohammed, 2020)^[17]. Initiatives like cultural seminars could solve this, although they are currently limited in scope.

Environmental sustainability

In contrast to industrial alternatives, handcrafted goods in North Western Nigeria frequently use renewable resources including cotton, clay, and plant-based colours, reducing their environmental effect (Ojo & Adebayo, 2021)^[19]. Secondary statistics mention eco-friendly measures, such as upcycling textile waste in Kano, which minimises landfill contributions (Vogue Business, 2022)^[25]. The choice of natural tannins over synthetic chemicals is emphasised by a Sokoto leatherworker, confirming primary data that artisans favour local ingredients because of their affordability and accessibility. However, overexploitation of resources, such wood for sculptures in Zamfara, creates dangers of deforestation and soil degradation. Secondary sources show that sustainable sourcing procedures are young, with few craftspeople educated in green techniques (MitiMeth, 2025)^[16]. Primary interviews indicate a

lack of awareness of environmental legislation, underlining the need for education and policy support to increase sustainability.

Challenges

Numerous obstacles to artisanal enterprise are identified by secondary data, such as infrastructure deficiencies including bad roads and intermittent energy (76%) and financial limitations, with 80% of artisans missing access to finance (Ibrahim & Musa, 2021)^[13]. Market competition from imports and a lack of marketing abilities make profits even lower (Pan African Review, 2024)^[21]. Primary data corroborate these conclusions, as craftsmen indicate elevated raw material expenses and logistical difficulties. For example, a potter from Kaduna said that it has gotten more expensive to get clay because petrol prices have gone up. Cultural and external variables, including colonial legacies that devalue crafts and young mobility, intensify vulnerability (Mohammed, 2020)^[17]. Climate change also affects the availability of resources. For example, artists say that drought has made it harder for them to get natural colours. Corruption and poor government policies make it hard for support programmes to work, which makes it hard for people to get training or money (Shitu & Ode, 2022)^[23].

Case examples

Secondary trade sources indicate that a group of textile dyers in Kano have modified traditional batik designs to attract visitors, resulting in a 20% increase in local market sales. Primary interviews demonstrate that the cooperative pools resources to buy indigo in bulk, decreasing expenses. In Kaduna, a female-led pottery group uses clay from local rivers, preserving ancient techniques while supplying cultural festivals, while craftsmen cite issues with irregular electricity for drying procedures. These stories exhibit resiliency but underline the need for physical and financial support to grow impact.

Discussion

The tales and figures from this study provide a vivid picture of handcrafted business in North Western Nigeria, a region where artisans in places like Kano, Kaduna, and Sokoto pour their emotions into creating textiles, pottery, and leather goods that carry centuries of history. Secondary statistics reveal that these crafts are more than simply items; they provide livelihoods for thousands of people and attract tourists who value Nigeria's cultural heritage (Nzei, 2024; Okonkwo & Eze, 2019)^[20]. Interviews with artists bring these numbers to life: take Aisha, a textile dyer in Kano, who revealed how her batik work not only pays for her children's school tuition but also maintains her family's dyeing history alive. However, both the data and the artists' perspectives underscore a harsh reality: obstacles such as intermittent electricity, expensive transportation, and competition from low-cost imported goods make it difficult to keep these businesses prospering (Ibrahim & Musa, 2021)^[13]. By stitching together these bigger patterns with human experiences, we discover a sector that's resilient yet stretched

thin, with artists finding imaginative ways to thrive despite institutional impediments. Although these trades have a noticeable economic impact, they are not without difficulties. Secondary sources suggest that the artisanal sector produces work for thousands, especially young people, and strengthens Nigeria's economy through tourism and exports (Nzei, 2024)^[18]. However, artisans like Musa, a leatherworker in Sokoto, told us how imported synthetic items overwhelm local markets, forcing him to decrease prices to compete, sometimes barely paying costs. This echoes secondary findings that 70% of craftspeople face lower sales due to imports (Pan African Review, 2024)^[21]. The combination of these findings shows a sector filled with potential but held back by barriers that feel all too real to individuals working long hours to keep their art alive.

Socially, these crafts are a glue that connects communities together, conserving traditions and empowering individuals, especially women. Secondary data underline how skills like indigo dying in Kano pass down cultural knowledge, keeping the region's identity vibrant (Abdullahi & Sulaiman, 2020)^[1]. Interviews provide a human touch: Fatima, a weaver in Katsina, recounted how her profits from raffia baskets allow her to support her family and inspire other women in her area to acquire the skill. However, both data sources indicate a growing concern: young people are becoming disinterested in traditional crafts, either because they are attracted to work in the city or because they are deterred by the perception that they are "old-fashioned" (Mohammed, 2020)^[17]. Environmentally, the utilisation of native materials like cotton and clay is a strength, but overusing resources like wood in Zamfara risks hurting the ground (Ojo & Adebayo, 2021)^[19]. Artisans like Ibrahim in Zamfara highlighted their fear about finding fewer trees for carvings, a worry backed by reports asking for sustainable methods (MitiMeth, 2025)^[16]. Together, these data reflect a sector that's deeply relevant yet at a crossroads, needing support to stay viable.

Why this matters

For theory: This study adds a new dimension to our understanding of artisanal entrepreneurship by demonstrating how it flourishes in difficult situations such as those in North Western Nigeria. It expands on the concept of the triple bottom line, which aims to balance profit, people, and the environment, by demonstrating how craftspeople add value for their communities and culture in addition to their own pocketbooks (Elkington, 1997)^[7]. Unlike normal company strategies, these craftsmen are often driven by need, using their abilities to survive in a location with few official jobs (Adewale & Adebayo, 2022)^[3]. This undermines traditional entrepreneurship theories, which generally focus on opportunity-driven firms in wealthier environments, and shows the persistence of informal economies in Africa (Webb et al., 2020)^[26]. By focusing on a specific place, this research also forces scholars to think more carefully about how local factors impact sustainable entrepreneurship, presenting a model that could apply to other rural or cultural economies.

For artisans and communities: For the artists themselves, this study casts a light on practical solutions to keep their companies functioning. The success of a Kano textile cooperative, which lowered expenses by buying indigo in bulk, shows how working together can make a difference. 80% of artisans would experience less financial strain if additional groups like this were established to exchange resources or bargain for lower pricing (Ibrahim & Musa, 2021)^[13]. Learning from locations like Kenya, where craftsmen utilise mobile apps to sell jewelry abroad, North Western craftspeople might tap into internet markets to reach buyers well beyond local haats (MIT News, 2019)^[15]. On the environmental front, adopting strategies like those of MitiMeth, which converts garbage into décor, might help artists appeal to eco-conscious clients while maintaining the land they rely on (MitiMeth, 2025)^[16]. These measures are more than just ideas; they are approaches to assist craftsmen like Aisha and Musa develop better, more sustainable enterprises.

For policymakers: To transform these obstacles into opportunities, policymakers have a significant role to play. The findings suggest that poor roads and power outages are daily problems for craftsmen, with 76% encountering electrical issues. Investing in infrastructure, such as reliable electricity or improved transportation links, may make it easier for craftsmen to produce and sell their products. India's success with craft cooperatives, supported by government subsidies, offers a roadmap: similar initiatives in Nigeria may provide financing or training to assist craftspeople flourish (Hasanah et al., 2023)^[12]. Promoting cultural festivals or building up e-commerce platforms could help enhance demand, as demonstrated in other locations where crafts drive tourism (Okonkwo & Eze, 2019)^[20]. By connecting these initiatives to goals like job creation and gender equality, governments can help crafts become a cornerstone of sustainable development (United Nations, 2015)^[24]. This is more than simply policy; it is about providing craftsmen with the resources they need to succeed and preserve Nigeria's unique legacy.

Comparing north western Nigeria to other regions

Compared to other regions of the country, such as the Southwest, where textile dyeing in Oyo receives greater funding and attention, the artisanal sector in North Western Nigeria has a distinct flavour. In the Southwest, artists benefit from superior infrastructure and government programmes that promote crafts through tourism. In contrast, North Western craftspeople, despite their rich traditions, suffer with less visibility and fewer resources. Kano's busy Kurmi Market illustrates the region's potential to be a craft hub, much like marketplaces in Lagos, but it lacks the same amount of investment. Interviews suggest that artisans here are innovating, such as modifying designs for tourists, but they require the same level of official assistance as in other locations to compete. This gap is about more than simply money; it's about recognising and promoting the North West's cultural treasure.

The value of artisans' voices

The craftspeople's interviews give the figures a human touch by highlighting their challenges and aspirations. While secondary data explain large difficulties like infrastructure or market competitiveness, experiences from artisans like Fatima, who uses her weaving revenue to educate her children, show the real-world effect of these challenges. These interactions also find minor triumphs not typically highlighted in publications, like a Sokoto leatherworker experimenting with natural tannins to save costs and go greener. By combining these firsthand accounts with more comprehensive data, we are able to obtain a more complete picture that honours the daily reality of the craftsmen and bases our suggestions on what they truly require in order to thrive.

Ways to move forward

In order to support the growth of this industry, artists and their communities require doable, realistic measures. Forming cooperatives, like the one in Kano that raised sales by 20%, can help craftspeople share costs and access broader markets. Embracing digital technologies, inspired by Kenya's Soko model, might help artists sell their pottery or textiles online, reaching buyers globally and overcoming the poor patronage claimed by 70% of them (Pan African Review, 2024)^[21]; MIT News, 2019)^[15]. Training in eco-friendly practices, such as upcycling garbage like MitiMeth does, can make crafts more sustainable and appealing to global purchasers (Vogue Business, 2022)^[25]. Governments and NGOs could step in with programmes to improve energy and roads, offer low-interest loans, and promote crafts through festivals or internet platforms. These aren't just plans; they're measures to recognise the artisans' efforts and ensure that their skills remain a vital part of Nigeria's future.

This study is merely a beginning; it is not the conclusion. The issues craftsmen experience, from power interruptions to vanishing traditions, demand for continual efforts to listen to their voices and build on their strengths. By supporting North Western Nigeria's craftspeople, we can help maintain a cultural legacy while creating jobs and safeguarding the environment. Collaboration among artists, communities, and leaders is the key to transforming these crafts into a long-term force for good.

Conclusion

In places like Kano and Kaduna in North Western Nigeria, handcrafted entrepreneurship is a key driver of economic growth, cultural preservation, and environmental potential, according to this study. However, it also faces obstacles including inadequate infrastructure, competition from imports, and apathy among young people. Artisans, such as those dyeing fabrics or producing pottery, create jobs and perpetuate traditions but struggle with limited credit and resource misuse. By mixing wide statistics with artisans' tales, the research shows practical options including cooperatives, digital marketing, and eco-friendly practices to increase sustainability, while calling for legislative support in infrastructure and training. Future research should track these strategies' impact

and explore young engagement to ensure the sector's resilience. Ultimately, supporting these artists means investing in a thriving future where Nigeria's cultural legacy survives alongside sustainable development.

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