

Combating Human Trafficking in Nigeria: The Role of the Visual Arts

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Abstract

This essay takes a critical look at the problem of human trafficking in Nigeria and how the visual arts can be used as a means of stemming this worrisome and embarrassing problem that has become a global dilemma. It argues that the visual arts and artists can be mobilized fully and productively for the purpose of re-directing and re-educating Nigerians towards cultivating a more positive approach to life. Specifically, it advocates the use of art as a veritable tool for engendering the development of women and young girls in the areas of self-reliance, self-confidence and social integration as well as in re-orientating and sensitizing them towards the ills of trafficking in persons. The areas discussed include: the financial empowerment of women through the visual arts, the use of museums and galleries as teaching and mass mobilisation outlets, creating public awareness through art competitions, exhibitions, lectures, seminars, workshops and public art, the rehabilitation of victims through art therapy and the establishment of out-of-school art organizations and recreational centres such as art clubs, camps and hobby centres.

Keywords: Human Trafficking, Nigeria, Art Exhibitions, Art Clubs, Museums and Galleries

Introduction

This essay takes a critical look at the problem of human trafficking in Nigeria and how the visual arts can be used as a means of curtailing (if not totally eradicating) this worrisome and embarrassing problem that has become a global quandary. It argues that the visual arts and artists can be mobilized fully and productively for the purpose of re-directing and re-educating Nigerians towards cultivating a more positive approach to life. Specifically, it advocates the use of art as a veritable tool for engendering the development of women and young girls in the areas of self-reliance, self-confidence and social integration as well as in re-orientating and sensitising them towards the ills of trafficking in persons. It identifies the various ways that the visual arts can be used to engender the financial, social and moral empowerment of the victims and potential victims of women trafficking. The essay opines that the achievement of these goals would help in stemming the rising rate of human trafficking and the vices associated with it, such as sex exploitation, prostitution, labour exploitation, child abuse, et cetera. The suggestions proffered in this essay for the eradication of human trafficking are rational solutions given that two major factors that are responsible for the problem basically are poverty and lack of public awareness on the dimension, trend and effects of the problems. The areas discussed include: the financial empowerment of women through the visual arts, the use of museums and galleries as teaching and mass mobilisation outlets, creating public awareness through art competitions, exhibitions, lectures, seminars, workshops and public art, the rehabilitation of victims through art therapy and the establishment of out-of-school art organizations and recreational centres (art clubs, camps and hobby centres). But first, a brief overview of the problem of human trafficking is relevant here.

The Problem of Human Trafficking

Trafficking of women is the unlawful practice of moving women and girls across national or state borders through diverse means for both sexual and labour exploitation. Traffickers employ different tactics to lure their victims into this business including the use of force, coercion, persuasion, incentives, or deception. Much has been said and written (via media articles, academic essays and coverage, books, et cetera) in recent years about the problem of trafficking in women in different parts of the world. These have given wide exposure to the escapades of traffickers and their victims; therefore, they need not be recounted here. The same applies to the range of concerted efforts that have been made and are still being made globally to fight the menace.

Predominantly, women are trafficked from Nigeria to Europe, especially to Italy, Spain, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, and South African states. The report of Human Right Watch affirms that Nigeria is also a destination country for trafficked persons from Ghana, Togo and republic of Benin. Children are also trafficked both within Nigeria and to other West African countries (Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, et cetera) for child labour and prostitution (www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=50347). Although the actual extent of trafficking in Africa is yet to be ascertained, however, the report of the Advocacy Project (2000) confirms that Nigerians constitute 70% of the 70,000 African victims of trafficking.

Why Involve the Visual Arts?

In Nigeria, the efforts to combat the problem of human trafficking have been focused mainly on investigation and prosecution, and the prevention and detention of traffickers, their victims and potential victims. Unfortunately, these punitive preventive measures have failed to yield the desired result because the problem of human trafficking is still persisting and increasing. Therefore, it has become imperative to explore other feasible solutions to help stem the menace. This essay is of the opinion that the visual arts can be exploited to an advantage as a means of fighting human trafficking. In this regard, it examines amongst others, two feasible areas: (1) using the visual arts to engender the financial, moral and social empowerment of Nigerian females, young and old, (2) the efficient rehabilitation of deported trafficked persons through the visual arts.

The suggestions presented in this discussion are proffered for logical reasons: firstly, one of the underlying factors causing and exacerbating the problem of human trafficking is poverty and the quest for pecuniary gains. Harsh living conditions, poverty, unemployment and a lack of prospective perspectives are other paramount reasons why persons engage in this abominable business (Higson-Smith and Richter, 2009). Secondly, rehabilitation and social re-integration using art activities would be greatly beneficial to victims of human trafficking because of the appalling experiences they are subjected to. The visual arts can be used to ameliorate the psychological effects of the experiences of the victims because experts have shown that traumatized persons, who are unable to express themselves verbally, do so successfully and adequately through art. Engaging in art activities that are meaningful and fun to participate in is a good way for such persons to express their grief and release emotional stress. In actual fact, as Dyer-Friedman and Sanders, 1997; Rubin, 1978, 189-214) observed, people, regardless of age, have the aptitude to act out their feelings through recreational activities such as art-making. When people take part in art and experience art-making activities, they develop an ability to reflect on them, and to create new ideas that lead to healing.

Perhaps it is necessary to cite here some notable views on the value of art to the community. For instance, Joseph (2002) reports the former President George W. Bush of the United States as saying that, "the study and appreciation of the arts and humanities serve as both the unifying force in society and as a vehicle for individual expression." He also mentions former President John F. Kennedy as stating thus: "I see little of more importance to the future of our country and of civilization than full recognition of the place of the artist. If art is to nourish the roots of our culture, society must set the artist free to follow his/her vision wherever it takes him/her."

These are potent statements from these notable leaders which seem to be lost on policy-makers in Nigeria because in spite of the numerous values of art to the community, for some inexplicable reasons, the visual arts have not been fully exploited by the Nigerian government, NGOs, corporate bodies, policymakers, et cetera, in the fight against the dilemma of human trafficking. These organizations have failed to recognize the importance of the arts in advancing the achievement of their developmental policies, especially the great opportunities the arts offer for financial empowerment. The Nigerian government needs to acknowledge the vital role, which the visual arts and artists can play in nation-building, especially as regards women and youth development. Responsible citizenship, character development and self-reliance are desired of Nigerian citizens and the government can pursue these aspirations through the participation of the Nigerian populace in a range of art activities. Against this backdrop, the question that arises naturally is: how can the visual arts be exploited for the purpose of combating the menace of trafficking in persons in Nigeria?

Financial Empowerment of Nigerian Women and Girls through the Visual Arts

Nigerian women generally are not adequately empowered economically and financially. This is one of the reasons why women engage in trafficking in persons. In Nigeria, there is a high level of unemployment and the problem is higher among women. Several females are amongst the scores of unemployed university graduates, and women are disproportionately represented in occupational sectors due to sets of sexist views that are the offshoot of the basic traditional norms placed on women in African societies. For instance, some husbands are reluctant to permit their wives to engage in enterprises outside the homes based on the fear that their entry into the labour force would disrupt the traditional norms of the family. Also, African men generally assume that financially-empowered women tend to be irrepressible. There is also the African view that some jobs are "unsuitable" for married women (Ebeigbe, 2012). In modern industrial sector in Nigeria, women are few at the pinnacle of the hierarchy of establishments, especially public bureaucracies and they form the bulk of the personnel at the lower cadre of public service employed to carry out low paid jobs (Nelson, 2007). In the traditional setting in Nigeria, women are even in worse financial conditions. They are stunted intellectually and economically as their sole career, due to societal expectations or lack of education, are not beyond the context of marginal breeders of children, home-making and economic activities that are compatible with childcare and home-making chores.

If the financial status of Nigerian women improves, there is the possibility that fewer women would engage in despicable businesses like trafficking in persons and other equally unwholesome activities. This is

crucial because the empowerment of women and improvement of their status are important ends in themselves, and they are essential for the achievement of sustainable development. In what specific ways can the Nigerian woman be made financially buoyant and self-reliant through the visual arts?

Empowering Women with Skills in the Visual Arts

Government, corporate bodies, NGOs, et cetera could help establish and manage skill acquisition centres where women and young girls, especially deported female victims of human trafficking as well as potential victims can be taught skills in any aspect of the visual arts (textiles, graphics, sculpture, ceramics, painting and photography) to enable them acquire the proficiency they require to be financially independent. There have been some skill acquisition centres founded by some NGOs in parts of Nigeria as typified in the Idia Renaissance, the NGO founded by Eki Igbinedion, the wife of a former governor of Edo State (Nigeria), and another established by Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF) which was founded by Titi Abubakar, the wife of a former Vice-President of Nigeria. Regrettably, such ventures are too few to make any wide-ranging impact. More skill acquisition centres need to be established in the capital cities and in all the local government headquarters in Nigeria so that more women, especially at the grassroots level can benefit from such facilities.

More importantly, when established, the centres should be properly managed and funded because our investigation shows that many of the few existing centres in Nigeria are currently failing and going defunct or have failed and gone non-operational for many reasons. Firstly, ample public awareness of the aims and usefulness of the centres has not been created to get enough persons interested in attending them, thus the centres often register extremely low attendance. Secondly, the programmes at the centres are ill-designed for the purpose for which they were established as the participants lack sufficient locally sourced materials, and they are not introduced to a wide range of art-making skills. Thirdly, not enough artists are employed in the centres, which is a great lapse because artists are the most competent persons who are trained to combine the creative process with realities of the economy, and they are skilled in giving trainees access to different kinds of mechanisms for learning and creating art. More artists, therefore, should be fully engaged in art centres for them to succeed. A fourth reason why the skill acquisition centres in Nigeria are not yielding the desired results is that the facilities focus on over-ambitious learning and teaching, and the execution of complicated practical art projects which the participants cannot easily grasp or cope with. Finally, the emphasis has been not on the use of simple familiar equipment and media, but on the use of sophisticated models that are difficult for the participants to handle. These points are very important because the target population for the centres comprises of either illiterates or school dropouts, probably, without previous art training and previous knowledge of the use of sophisticated equipment. Besides, the cost of purchasing and maintaining sophisticated studio gadgets is exorbitant which in turn raises the cost of running the centres.

An import point to mention is that in view of the fact that skills acquired and not utilized amounts to a waste of time and resources, the Nigerian government must also establish fund credit windows that would offer financial assistance to trainees who are interested in entrepreneurship to enable them set up small-scale industries after their training. This would help tackle the problem of women unemployment, which would be a major achievement, because as Fenwick (1982) notes, unemployment breeds low self-esteem, inferiority complex, lack of self-confidence, a sense of failure on their part and that of their society, economic isolation, and less commitment to the society. Moreover, being gainfully employed would enhance the personal sustenance of the entrepreneurs, and being employers of labour themselves, would engender in them a sense of achievement and usefulness.

The promotion of entrepreneurship has many advantages, for example, being gainfully employed not only helps to enhance people's financial status; it also helps boost people's self-confidence. One of the major effects of trafficking on its victims is gross lack of self-confidence, and loss of dignity and self-fulfillment due to the gruesome experiences that they went through. Thus being gainfully employed would be a meaningful way of re-building the self-esteem and self-reliance of the victims of human trafficking. Furthermore, the promotion of entrepreneurship would enhance the development of small-scale art industries and workshops in the country.

Business Enterprise Workshops

Government and NGOs could organize business enterprise workshops to help repatriated victims of human trafficking who have acquired art-making in the art centres gain an understanding of products, pricing and market forces. The knowledge acquired would be useful when the participants eventually establish businesses of their own. This is a crucial issue because one of the most critical constraints to the growth of indigenous small-scale enterprises in Nigeria is low patronage due to poor marketing strategies. To further enhance the effectiveness of the workshops, participants should be involved in excursions to thriving art-making outlets as a way of giving them an insight into the useful prospects of art-making. Such trips would encourage them to establish similar ventures after their training.

Art Galleries as Outlets for the Creation of Public Awareness

Many art galleries established by private individuals and the government are available in Nigeria that can be utilized as effective channels to showcase ample artworks that focus on themes that address issues bordering on the ills of anti-social acts such as human trafficking, child labour, prostitution, et cetera. Apart from providing aesthetic satisfaction to viewers, the artworks would also serve as a tangible means of raising the level of public awareness of these problems. This would be helpful because many Nigerians are either unaware that these problems exist or barely understand their dimension, trends and effects. Heightened public awareness via these outlets would help in encouraging people to imbibe wholesome lifestyles.

Museums as Teaching Outlets

Nigerian museums are still limited to the conventional function of providing spaces where art works are exhibited for public viewing and passive learning. Museums can serve more than these functions as they do in developed countries. For instance, studios could be attached to the museums and their programmes could be expanded to include the engagement of professional artists who would create artworks that depict themes that deride the social problems in our society while visitors observe the actual creative process of the creation of the art works. Also, museums could provide audio-visual interpretations of the processes of art-making via cameras mounted to track the actions of the artists at work and the images can be projected onto large screens for viewing by visitors to the museums. Museums could be provided also with equipment that can access pre-loaded computer files (on large screens) of visual art images or videos that discuss societal problems for viewing by guests to the museums. These are methods that are being used successfully in many museums in developed countries. For instance, the Museum of Glass in Tacoma (United States of America) has a Hot Shop amphitheater where up to two hundred guests can observe the creative process of glass-making (<http://www.newhorizons.org>). Another illustrative example (from the same source) is the Remann Hall Women's Project (organized by the same museum) which is planned and executed in collaboration with Pierce County Juvenile Court. Remann Hall is the residential unit for juveniles sentenced for a range of crimes within Pierce County (United States). As reported, students at the facility are able to work with professional artists, sponsored by the museum, in designing and executing refined projects, including art installations, exhibitions, websites and publications. One of the advantages of this project, as the report explains, is that the empirical process renders the learning real for students because the themes relate to their own life experiences. After their discharge from detention, the students are retained to work with the museum in a volunteer capacity and they assist in the museum studio participating in a mentorship program organized by the Young Women Christian Association (YWCA) in collaboration with the Museum of Glass (<http://www.newhorizons.org>).

Projects like these are not available in Nigeria currently and they can be organized in Nigerian museums for victims and potential victims of human trafficking (and other crimes) by similar organizations in Nigeria (YWCA, Girls Guard, Christian Women Organization (CWA), the Salvation Army, et cetera), the government, NGOs, corporate bodies, et cetera.

Free Weekend Art and Craft Classes

Free weekend art and craft classes could be organized by the Nigerian government where participants can be taught by volunteer visiting local artists who would provide hands-on assistance and support. The classes should be made free of charge to encourage parents to send their children and wards to attend. Funds for running such classes could be generated through regular sales of artworks produced during class sessions. Moreover, the classes would be a proper environment for fun learning of art skills and they would provide good opportunities not only for character-building, but also for the development of the unique individuality and potentials of each participant. Art is more than creating things of beauty for aesthetic and utilitarian purposes; the visual arts can also be a powerful tool for improving people's life, for addressing social ills and for discussing social issues and solving some of societal problems in Nigeria as exemplified in human trafficking.

Community organizations can also sponsor free art classes as part of their youth programmes. It would be beneficial if such classes are organized for victims and likely victims of women trafficking. The classes would be of immense benefits for them especially if the practical projects assigned to the students emphasize themes that can stimulate social change and engender social reforms. This is one way to empower the trainees socially and morally and channel their time and energy into fruitful thoughts and activities. Indubitably, such art classes would be useful to the participants because art generates a wide range of feelings (aesthetic and emotional), it is inspirational and it provides avenues for creativity and self-expression.

Technical Schools

The many technical schools in Nigeria could incorporate into their curriculum adult continuing classes in art and craft such as interior design, metal fabrication, pottery, basketry, textile design, et cetera. Government assistance can come in form of scholarship awards to interested persons who are willing to participate in such a programme.

A venture like this would offer victims of human trafficking, and school drop-outs the chance to advance their educational achievements and career aspirations, and it would afford them educational qualifications that would enhance their job opportunities.

Out- of- School Organisations

Governments, NGOs, corporate bodies, promoters of reform for youths and other similar organisations can establish hobby art centres, art camps and art clubs. These are good outlets for raising the educational achievement of people through the arts, and they are also practical outlets for participants to enhance their personal growth, self-reliance and usefulness to themselves and their society. They are also good outlets for the participants to learn the core values of positive attitude, resourcefulness, citizenship, empathy and collaboration.

Art clubs like the type proposed here are very rare in Nigeria currently unlike in developed countries where they are abundant. For instance, there is the National Arts Club of Chicago that was established to stimulate, foster and promote public interest in art and educate the American people in the visual arts (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arts_Club_of_Chicago.org). A comparable facility is Birmingham Ishango Science Club, an educational charity set up in 1999 “with the singular objective to advance the educational achievements and career aspirations of black youths within the fields of science, mathematics and technology by engendering the ethos that the pursuits of such qualifications can be fun, empowering and achievable” (www.bbc.co.uk/birmingham/your_community/bhm/ishango.shtml).

Art Hobby Centres

Art hobby centres should be established in at least all the State Capitals in Nigeria. As of now, such facilities are not available in the country. Hobbies in art and craft are effective ways of eliminating stress, depression, et cetera, as medical experts have shown. This type of therapy is necessary for victims of human trafficking who, no doubt, are amongst the most traumatized humans on earth due to the dreadful experiences they are subjected to and the breach of their fundamental human rights. The visual arts offer many opportunities for reducing or eliminating stress and depression because art is functional, aesthetically pleasing to the eyes and is capable of stimulating different parts of the human brains to create a whole range of emotions, as already noted above. Besides, the process of interacting, assisting others and being assisted in art-making activities in art classes can help enhance the participants’ pleasure, emotional wellbeing, and self-fulfillment.

Therapeutic Art Classes

Although the victims of women trafficking are not evaluated medically to assess the effects of their experiences on their mental state, it is safe to deduce that owing to their harrowing experiences, they cannot but experience different forms of psychological trauma. For instance, the victims of human trafficking are denied basic human rights, robbed, abused and exploited sexually and physically, and some of them become infested with sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS, as reported by Beatrice Mariotti (a counsellor at Solidarity With Women In Distress (SOLWODI), an NGO founded in Kenya. Moreover, victims of human trafficking often face societal rejection and stigmatization which result in secondary symptoms of diminished self-esteem, depression or shame. For instance, in Edo State, one of the most notorious parts of Nigeria due to human trafficking, the derogatory label of “Italo- Mama” is used for prostitutes and all those who grant sexual favours for money in foreign countries. In Nigeria, women who get deported for prostitution and human trafficking are highly stigmatized both in their homes and in their communities because such acts are highly condemned in African culture, and because the deportees are suspected to be HIV/AIDS carriers. Thus they are usually ridiculed and avoided by people including their family members in some cases. Horrid experiences such as these are unquestionably capable of affecting the victims negatively one way or the other.

Art-making is a very helpful tool in building the confidence levels of traumatized persons and for rehabilitating distressed persons (children, adolescents, and adults). This is one reason for its use in many clinical settings with diverse populations and in non-clinical settings as well as in art studios and in workshops that focus on creativity development. Art therapy basically, is the therapeutic use of art making to promote healing and growth in a professional relationship. It is a term that has been used to describe, broadly, varying practices in education, rehabilitation, and psychotherapy. It combines traditional psychotherapeutic theories and techniques with an understanding of the psychological aspects of the creative process, especially the affective properties of the different art materials (<http://www.arttherapy.org>). Judging from all these, it is clear that art therapy would be of immense help to these unfortunate victims of trafficking in persons.

Trade Fairs

It is true that trade fairs (trade shows or expos) are mainly economical and effective pathways to meet new clients and increase industry visibility and they offer small entrepreneurs opportunities to gather information about industry innovations (Valente, 2012), but they can also be superb outlets for the exposure of artworks that

dwell expressly on social issues as exemplified in women trafficking. The government can sponsor and organize trade fairs solely for artists to showcase art works with themes that reflect the values and sensibilities of the nation, and those that are based on the appraisal of culturally specific issues with which Nigerians can easily identify. Apart from providing the participants with outlets to generate funds and boost domestic market growth, more importantly, art trade fairs would be avenues to disperse large quantities of artforms with potent moral messages that can serve as potent measures that deride acts such as human trafficking to stimulate people's sense of right and wrong, and as persuasive measures to encourage them to be morally upright.

Art Competition, Exhibitions, Lectures, Seminars and Workshops.

Art competitions, lectures, seminars and workshops and touring exhibitions are outlets for the creation and display of art works that can be used effectively as a means of curtailing the tide of anti-social behaviour in Nigeria. The government could fund more of such activities and at frequent intervals in different parts of the country, especially at the grassroots level to promote national awareness, responsible citizenship, character, development and self-reliance among the Nigerian populace through participation in a range of art activities.

For these events to serve this purpose effectively, the aim should be geared towards the dissemination of topics that are entertaining, aesthetically pleasing, educationally inviting, edifying and informative. The art works produced should be based on themes that would serve as potent tools for mass mobilization because art is a constructive medium of communication; and an effective means through which multifaceted information and messages can be transmitted to people visually in a simple and easy to comprehend form. In Nigeria, politicians have been taking advantage of art and the artists effectively for mass mobilization during political campaigns and rallies to achieve their political ambitions and to gain support for their political parties. There is no reason why positive results would not emerge also in the area of fighting the problem of women trafficking in Nigeria. The usefulness of art has been proven by many artists who through their various professional associations have organized conferences and exhibitions to address diverse facets of societal problems in Nigeria. For example, the Ceramics Association of Nigeria (cerAN) in conjunction with the university of Benin had a conference and exhibition entitled: "Ceramics and Environment" to create awareness on the importance of environmental protection in Nigeria in November, 2011 in Benin City. Nigerian artists in the visual arts can organize conferences and art exhibitions to sensitize the Nigerian populace to the problem of human trafficking.

Many of the structures (of state and national councils, cultural museums, galleries, ministries, tertiary institutions, et cetera) that were established to promote art in Nigeria are failing in their duties (Okpu, 2004). These organs should rise to the challenge of promoting more events in the art scene that specifically address the issue of human trafficking. The general lament of lack of funds for such projects is not justifiable since sufficient funds to sustain the regular organization of more of these ventures can be generated from the sales of the artforms produced during the events.

The Use of Public Art

People, at times, engage in vices out of ignorance and lack of information on the consequences and the damaging effects of their acts on their lives and their society. Information and education are powerful tools that can play a major role in task of fighting anti-social behaviour in our society. If people are well-informed on the evils of their actions, the knowledge would serve as deterrence against the perpetration of such acts. Visual symbols are powerful carriers of meanings which can be used effectively to transmit information on societal values that could change people's way of thinking, attitude, and behavior because as Dickinson rightly notes, the arts (literary, performing and visual) are "languages that all people speak that cut across racial, cultural, social, educational, and economic barriers and enhance cultural appreciation and awareness...they integrate mind, body, and spirit and they provide opportunities for self-expression, bringing the inner world into the outer world of concrete reality" (<http://www.newhorizons.org>).

Indeed, art improves both creative thinking and critical thinking. If people are educated through the use of art, they would develop an enhanced critical thinking that would enable them question their despicable actions and the things they take for granted. The inherent power of art symbols to influence human thinking can be exploited, as it is done in advertising campaigns, for the purpose of combating crimes in society. Not all persons who engage in anti-social activities do so out of their own volition. Some are sometimes brain-washed or intimidated into participating in such activities. A common feature of the modus operandi of traffickers in persons is the deliberate peddling of false information about the nature and effects of their activities. For instance, false promises of marriage, job and educational opportunities, and wealth are deceptive ploys used by traffickers to delude and lure susceptible persons, especially poor and greedy persons into the business of human trafficking.

Coercive persuasion is a potent means that can also be used positively to deter potential victims from this dastardly business. This is an area where public art (any work of art or design that is created by an artist for display in a public domain) proves very useful. Standard examples are visual displays on buses, bill boards, memorable captions and visual images in public places (schools, markets, hospitals, et cetera) to educate people

on the ills of anti-social acts. These are more likely to capture people's attention, especially the illiterates, more than long boring hours of lectures and seminars that are too academic for them to understand. As noted by the Newport News Public Art Foundation based in Virginia (in the United States of America), "by its presence alone, public art attracts attention, can heighten our awareness, question our assumptions, transform a landscape, or express community value, and it has the power to stimulate public thinking, energize and transform public spaces and it demonstrates civic and corporate pride in citizenship" (www.nnpaf.org/what_is_art.html).

The Role of the Nigerian Artists in Combating Human Trafficking

Nigerian professional artists, especially the female artists, have a major role to play as well, and they should participate in the fight against human trafficking. They must be alive to their civic responsibility in this regard and consider contributing their quota to eliminating this menace from our society as a part of their service to the nation. For instance, they could make donations of funds, art materials, studio spaces and equipment, et cetera (individually or collectively). They can establish volunteer-led art classes for desiring participants, form organisations that offer assistance in voluntary capacity in any of the programmes or projected already suggested above. Their efforts would be far-reaching and phenomenal, especially if they are geared towards the teaching of young children and youths in their impactful years when they are more likely to go astray. This way, they would be doing a good turn and making a notable difference in the life of their fellow human beings, helping in imparting knowledge and acting as role models and mentors.

CONCLUSION

This essay takes a critical look at the problem of trafficking in persons and the role that the artists and the visual arts can play in stemming the problem. It advocates the purposeful use of art as a veritable tool for women and youth development in the areas of self-reliance, social integration and intensity of political awareness and nationalistic outlook. Some of the ways that the visual arts can be explored for this purpose are also tendered. The areas discussed include: the financial empowerment of women through the visual arts, the use of museums and galleries as teaching and mass mobilisation outlets as avenue to create public awareness through art competitions, exhibitions, lectures, seminars and workshops. Also dwelt on are the necessity to use public art to rehabilitate victims of human trafficking through art therapy and the need to establish out-of-school art organizations, art clubs, camps and hobby centres.

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