

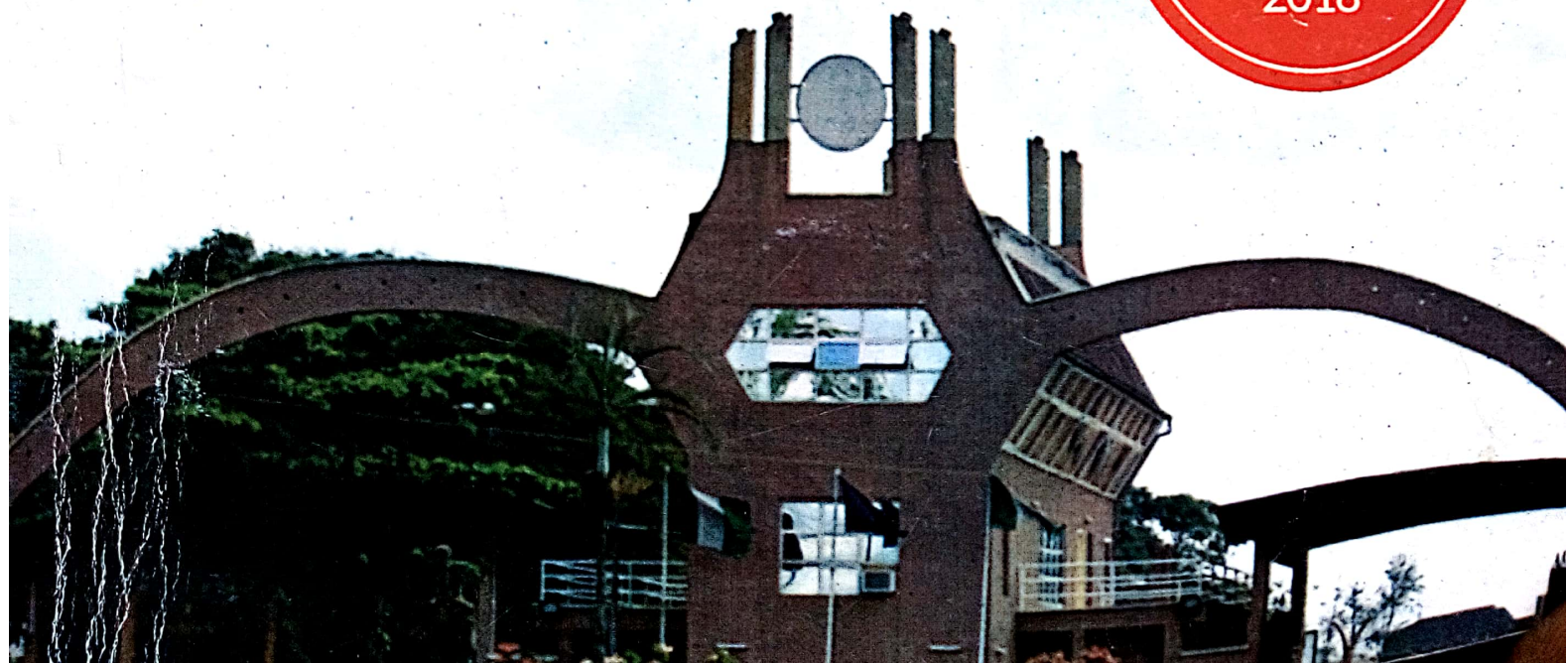


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SOURCES AND SOURCING OF LOCAL MATERIAL FOR TRADITIONAL TEXTILES AMONG THE YORUBA PEOPLE

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Abstract

The study investigates sources and sourcing of local material for traditional textile among the Yoruba people in Nigeria and how history never mentions nakedness among the Yoruba as a norm. The importance of textiles to human sustenance and the socio-cultural and economic development of a nation cannot be over emphasized. Apart from food and shelter, textile (clothing) has been identified as the most important in the hierarchy of man's need and clothing is generally made of cloth. The paper discusses local materials from which traditional textiles was made, sources of raw material and types of traditional textiles in Yoruba land. Types of aso-oke and Adire clothes were identified as well as local sourcing raw material for loom construction, weaving and dyeing process of those fabrics. The paper further discussed local sourcing material and

modernization as well as the benefits was highlighted. The paper concludes that cultural heritage can survive only and when we attach proper value to it and further making sure that the culture of weaving and dyeing does not die off completely in the nation. The survival and continuity of traditional textiles production and use is very important to the socio-cultural growth of the Yoruba people of Nigeria. The paper recommends among others that the use of Aso-Oke and Adire as troupe costume for our contingents going on international outings should be encouraged in order to project our image abroad and popularize the traditional fabric.

Key words: Raw material sources, local sourcing, traditional textiles (Aso oke and Adire) Yoruba people.

Introduction

Textile is a general term which refers to any material made of interlacing of fibers such as fabric, cloth, carpet, and belt among others. Generally, it is a flexible woven material consisting of a network of natural or artificial fibers which are often referred to as thread or yarn. The importance of textiles to human sustenance, and the socio-cultural and economic development of a nation cannot be over emphasized. Apart from food and shelter, textile (clothing) has been identified as the most important in the hierarchy of man's need and clothing is generally made of cloth.

Nigerian traditional textiles can be classified as woven, non-woven, dyed or patterned which are decorated and designed structurally at the surface. These include; "Aso Oke" (Yoruba) Akwete, (Igbo) "Okene, (Ebira) Ashiasha (Tiv) and Adire (Yoruba) among others. Basically, these textiles are structurally decorated and produced on both vertical and horizontal looms that are exclusively handled by women and men weavers in the society. These fabrics have age long qualities such as high durability, unique textures and traditional designs. They are traditionally used on special occasions such as burial, wedding, naming, house warming and chieftaincy installation ceremonies among others. The production of traditional handcrafted textiles among the people of Africa is long rooted in their culture.

Yoruba culture has a textile history dating back as far as documented history of foreigners' visits to Yoruba land exist, in other words, none of the accounts in history mention nakedness among the Yoruba as a norm. So, as far back as the 1400s at least, Yoruba have been manufacturing (and wearing) indigenous fabric. While felted backcloth acclaimed to be the oldest form of indigenous African cloth, woven cotton fabrics dating to the eight century have also been found in burials in Niger (Clarke 1998), and fragments of plain patterned strip woven cloth dated to the eleventh

century were also discovered at the Tellem burial cave in the Dogon region of Mali. Thus, both provide evidence of a long standing clothing tradition in Africa (Bolland 1992). Although the origin of textiles productions and usage in Nigeria, most especially among the Yoruba remain unknown, there are evidences of Yoruba's long use of textile as apparel as reflected in ancient sculptures, which has been dated back to the 10th and 12th century A.D.

Clothing among the Yoruba is important in several different ways. The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria are renowned for their vibrant cultural environment; they have made significant contributions to the world culture through their great artistic traditions in wood carving, stone and metal sculpture, bead making, mat weaving, leather work, gourd decoration, cloth weaving and pattern cloth dyeing known as *Aso-oke* and *Adire* respectively. Cloth is used to signify wealth and status, particularly those of high quality. The Yoruba people often times will cover themselves in beautiful, colourful garments that drape and fold over the body, giving the impression of a person of high stature. Yoruba traditional setting maintains a reputable environment for the production of high quality and various textiles because the Yoruba culture has its scheme of values (Williams, 1998).

The Yoruba have various forms of textiles; dyed fabrics, woven fabrics, printed fabrics as well as embroidered works (Adewale, 2011). Consequently, hand-woven and the handcrafted garments are very valuable in the Yoruba culture which made textile industries flourish in many parts of the Yoruba land. It started centuries ago amongst the Yoruba's but predominantly amongst the Iseyin's in Oyo, Ede in Osun and Okene in Kogi states. Cloth weaving at Ilorin, Iseyin, Okene, Ibadan, Ondo; Cloth dyeing at Oshogbo, Abeokuta, Oyo, Ibadan, Ede. These textiles are produced from locally sourced materials ranging from cotton, local silk, bark, goats wool to raffia, commonly used in weaving (Renne, 1995). The production of various handcrafted and hand woven textiles are made possible because of the availability of raw materials. The textile artisans have access to cotton, silk, dyes and imported yarns (Amubode, 2006).

According to history, *Adire* and *Aso-Oke* is made predominantly by Yoruba men and women. *Aso oke* fabric, is a hand loomed cloth woven by the Yoruba people of western Nigeria. *Aso oke* means *top cloth* in the English language. Usually woven by men, the fabric is used to make men's gowns, called Agbada, women's wrappers, called iro, and men's hats, called fila, while the *Adire* using a variety of resist dye techniques, resist-dyeing involves creating a pattern by tying away designed parts of the fabric with raffia or coating with starch to prevent them absorbing dye. The two of them remains the traditional wear of the Yorubas. At present, the fabric is more popular among both the Yoruba and other ethnic groups in Nigeria (Oloyede, 2006).

This is a cloth that is worn on special occasions by the Yoruba's usually for chieftaincy, festivals, engagement, naming ceremony and other important events.

The production of Aso-oke textiles is a costly and time consuming procedure yet this process is part of what makes them important to this culture (Cordwell, 1983). Today many indigenous entrepreneurs are in the textile production business especially the traditional weavers. They are located in states such as Edo state, Delta state, Akwete town in Iro state, Benue state and others. Fabric dyeing is done at Abeokuta, Aso-Oke weaving at Ibadan, Okene and Ilorin. Prints such as Abada and Ankara are manufactured at Aba, Kano, Asaba and Onisha (Elkanem 1987).

Today the range of designs in these traditional woven fabrics has expanded and many of the designs have metamorphosed from ordinary plain weaves to advanced and complicated weaves that imitate diamond, sateen, and twills patterns of industrial woven textiles among others. Wider strips of Aso-oke are produced from cottage foot powered looms which are now in vogue while yarns of different colour shades are skillfully used in its production. This is advancement over the limitation of indigo dyes and its shades as earlier practiced, these developments, as noted by Okeke (2002) might not be separated from Nigeria's contact with foreign culture and materials in her developmental history.

Culture has been noted to be the totality of all the knowledge and values shared by a society. However, the traditional textile production grew so rapidly in many Yoruba community, as it became not only a source of revenue but also a source of the production of Aso-oke and Adire textiles. It was also used for some social and ritual purposes especially now that modern technologies have been introduced into the weaving technology, so that different designs and colours of those cloths can be produced. This paper therefore sets to feature the origin and significance of traditional textile (clothing) among the southwestern Yoruba, raw material sources and sourcing, benefits of local material sourcing, weaving methods, dyeing process, types of hand woven and hand crafted patterned designs.

Sources of Local Materials for Traditional Textile

Historically, clothing is and has been made from many material and these materials ranges from grasses to furs to much more elaborate and exotic materials. Some cultures, such as the various people of the Arctic Circle, until recently, made their clothing entirely of prepared and decorated furs and skins, other cultures have supplemented and replaced leather and skins with cloth. The raw materials that make up fabric can be divided into three distinct sources: those derived from natural plant sources, those from animals and those that are man-made (petrochemical sources).

Cloth is either woven or knitted and can be made from a large variety of fibers, which in turn can be natural, cellulose, or synthetic.

Natural Clothing Materials from Plant sources

Cotton - This material comes from the cotton plant and is harvested by machine, then sent to a cotton processing plant. There, it's run through a series of rollers, which remove the seeds, clear away any debris or impurities, and separate the material into bales.

Flax - The flax plant is used to make linen. The plants are pulled from the ground by hand, flattened to remove seeds and combed through to separate the fibers in preparation for fabric production.

Rayon - Invented in the late 19th century, this material is a popular alternative to silk. It's made by forcing cellulose through a machine called a spinneret. This machine is similar to a showerhead, and it forms the cellulose from liquid to a solid filament. Cellulose itself is a simple sugar polymer derived from plants.

Natural Clothing Materials from Animal sources

Wool - The coat of a sheep is shorn, and the resulting fleece is washed and carded, or rearrange it into a shape that will be easier to turn into fabric. It can be done by hand or machine, and produces a square mat of fibers.

Silk - This material is made by harvesting the cocoon of the silkworm, which is lined with a thin layer of silk filament that is softened and then removed as one single thread. This thread will be twisted together with several others before it is moved to the next stage of production, as single threads are too thin to work with.

Natural Clothing Materials from petrochemical sources

Some clothing is made from synthetic fibers, which are man-made and generally not biodegradable. These are made primarily from petrochemicals. Common man-made materials include:

Nylon - Nylon can truly be called the first man-made fiber. While it's produced the same way rayon is, the ingredients that go into nylon production are not derived from plant sources. Nylon is made from coal and petroleum by-products, water and air.

Polyester - This material is a step up from nylon and rayon in terms of strength and versatility. While it, too, is made by forcing chemicals through a spinneret, the chemicals used for polyester are derived from alcohols. Polyesters include naturally occurring chemicals and synthetics. Natural polyesters and a few synthetic ones are biodegradable.

Types of Traditional Textiles

1. Adire
2. Aso-oke

Adire fabric (Yoruba: tie and dye or handcrafted patterned fabric) textile is the indigo-dyed cloth made in southwestern Nigeria by Yoruba women, using a variety of resist-dyeing techniques

The surface decorated ones like Adire are produced by the process of dyeing, printing and direct application of other elements of finishing unto the surface of the fabric. These fabrics are often used as daily wears and in rare cases for casual and social outings. Sometimes they equally serve as commercial and domestic items, (furnishing) such as window blind, bed spread, pillow cases, table cover, fashion and school bags, and the likes. These surface decorated fabrics appear in a variety of complimentary, cool, warm, harmonious and contrasting colours with designs that are mainly from traditional sources (Makinde 2005).

There are three primary resist techniques used in Nigeria:

1. Oniko: this process involves tying raffia around hundreds of individual corn kernels or pebbles to produce small white circles on a blue background. The fabric can also be twisted and tied on itself or folded into stripes.
2. Alabere: Stitching raffia onto the fabric in a pattern prior to dyeing. The raffia palm is stripped, and the spine sewn into the fabric. After dyeing the raffia is usually ripped out, although some choose to leave it in and let wear and tear on the garment slowly reveal the design.
3. Eleko: Resist dyeing with cassava paste painted onto the fabric. Traditionally done with different size chicken feathers, calabash carved into different designs is also used, in a manner similar to block printing. Since the early twentieth century, metal stencils cut from the sheets of tin that lined tea chests have also been used.

Aso oke fabric, (Yoruba: Aṣọ oke, or hand woven fabric) is a hand loomed cloth woven by the Yoruba people of western Nigeria. Usually woven by men and women weavers,

the fabric is used to make men's gowns, called Agbada, women's wrappers, called iro, and men's hats, called fila. The way of making Aso-oke cloth has remained the same for centuries, however new techniques and production methods have been looked into to eliminate the weight and thickness of the Aso-Oke cloth, and to make it more accessible for casual wear.

There are different types of Aso-oke clothes. These include prestigious and ceremonial clothes such as *Etu*, *Alaari* and *Sanyan* as well as other basic and ritual clothes.

1. *Etu* (fowl) cloth is blue with white stripes; the strips are woven using local wild silk fibers. Thus, *Etu* is dyed repeatedly in traditional indigo blue dye, which is brought out at intervals for dying and stretching. In ancient times, *Etu* was used as important social dress by chiefs and elders among the Yoruba.
2. *Alaari* cloth is crimson in colour. It is traditionally woven with locally spun silk yarns dyed in red camwood solution to achieve permanence in color fastness. The use of *Alaari* is not limited to a particular ceremony but traditionally used for all events among the Yoruba people
3. *Sanyan* is regarded as an expensive Yoruba hand-woven fabric, creamy in colour with a white stripe running through the middle of the cloth. It is traditionally produced from fibers made from the cocoons of the Anaphe silk fibers. They are hand-spun into threads, washed and soaked in corn-starch to strengthen the yarn for fabric production. This was however in ancient times. In addition, *Sanyan* is regarded as the most expensive of all the Yoruba woven fabrics. Thus, the Yoruba refers to it as "*Baba Aso*", that is father of fabrics.

Local Sourcing of Local Materials for Traditional Textiles

The production of traditional handcrafted textiles among the people of Africa is long rooted in their culture. They are either locally sourced or imported from Tunisia, and other Asian countries. To understand how fabric is created, we must first learn how these materials are harvested or created, and what must be done before they are ready to be sent on their journey into fabric production.

The primary raw materials for the production of traditional textile are the cotton, which are used in making the threads for weaving. The cultivation of cotton was taken seriously in some southwestern Yoruba states, so that raw materials for weaving was not lacking. It was an industry dependent on the availability of raw materials, thus weaving became localized in areas where cotton thrive best and where alternative occupation were rare. The Igbomina area is renowned for cotton growing; a material essential for Yoruba aso-oke and that cloth of about a yard in breadth were first imported from Oro or Ila in Igbomina province. Beside, Owu, the historic Yoruba town

in the Igbomina area, founded by Olowu, one of the seven grandsons of Oduduwa, was a famous cloth –producing center. Cotton farming was popular among other Oyo-Yoruba groups, hence the preponderance of weaving in the Oyo towns that emerged after the fall of Old Oyo.

The best period to grow cotton is between May and June while the best period for harvesting is between December and early march (Afigbo, 1985). After planting, cotton may last about seven months before harvest. The growth of the plant is controlled by proper spacing and constant clipping of the branches to avoid vertical shooting to the skies and encourage horizontal growth.

The process begins with the planting of local cotton (*owu tutu*). It takes three months for the cotton to reach harvesting stage when it becomes fully white and the harvesting was mostly done by the women and children and sold to those who process the seed cotton into threads or processed by themselves. On the input material processing, the seed cotton was indigenously processed by hand. During harvest, sharp knives are used to remove the bolls with the stable. This is sunned to split-open, producing the cotton fibre which is needed. Further sunning makes the fibre whiter. The harvested cotton contains the seeds as well as some trash. Small quantities are cleansed at a time using hands to get rid of the trash and seed contents, the latter being stored for future planting.

Getting the cotton prepared for weaving starts with the removal of seed cotton from the cotton seed. To remove the seeds, ginning usually involves placing cotton balls on a block of wood and rolling an iron rod over them. The pressure exerted on the moving cylindrical object pushes the seeds out of the cotton fibres. After the seeds are removed, the fibres must be aligned and this process is called *ginning*. The ginning process was done indigenously through a bow type device called *Okure*. The device is used to fluff the cotton and straighten the fibres, this process produces the fluffy product which is ready to be spun into thread.

Spinning is mostly done traditionally, manually and very cumbersome. The spinner pulls and twists enough fibres to secure it to a spindle; the spindle is sets in motion, draws fibres into a thread and winds them on the spindle. This instrument is called *akowu* which come from a tribe called *Ibariba* over a very long time ago and then modified to suit their purpose. Finally the thread gotten after spinning is wound into a skein called *akate ekowu*.

Local Sourcing Material (Dyeing Process)

On the dyeing process, the desired colour of the thread is obtained with particular leaves and plants depending on the colour. In the case of blue colour, dyeing starts with the collection of *eluu* leaves (*Indigofera*) which produces indigo blue. The

leaves are fermented and dried in balls.

The indigo cakes are then placed in a perforated pot (*elekiti*) which contains ash (as source of soluble alkaline). Water is poured into the top filter through the perforated holes into the bottom pots to obtain dye (*omi aro*). Preparation of dye in other colours however demands more specialized skills.

The finesse with which the Yoruba produce dye has led so many researchers to the conclusion that indigo dying probably originated from the southwestern Nigeria. Apart from the bark, roots and leaves are used in making dye stuff in the traditional *aso-oke* industry, it was further revealed that these plants formed the source of numerous dyes (colours) produced. In those days (pre-colonial era) we used to produce red colour from leaves of guinea corn (*ewe oka baba*), black and roots of African rosewood (*aga tree*)... black from physic nut tree (*opo owon*) beige from bark of mango tree (*epo igi mongoro*).

Local Sourcing Implements (Weaving)

Weaving flourished in central and northern Yoruba land before colonial contact, thus, scholars of African textile technology (Afigbo and Okeke, 1985) agreed that prior to contact with 'western culture', the traditional Nigerian communities had developed indigenous technology ecological conditions of ingenuity. Four types of loom existed in the Yoruba traditional weaving scene (Williams, 1998; Lamb and Lamb, 1976; Fadipe, 1970; Ojo, 1966; Dodwell, 1955). Among the people of Ado-Ekiti there existed the "bush loom" (*ofi oko*) which was found to be ideal for light weaving. The twilling loom (*ofi elejo*) was agreed to have existed among the people of Ilorin which was said to have shared the same properties with that of Ado-Ekiti. The traditional strip loom was found among the people of Iseyin, Oyo, Saki, Ibadan, Ede, Abeokuta and other former Oyo province (Williams, 1998; Lamb and Lamb, 1976; Dodwell, 1955). The fourth type of loom that existed before colonial contact is the vertical loom, the construction and operation of which was said to be the same in all Yoruba communities. This type of loom is particularly suitable for weaving *kijipa*, *itagbe*, *oja* for example. There is particular interest in the fact that various looms in the Yoruba societies reflect environmental and cultural adaptation and the ability to develop a range of choices suitable for products' manufacturing in the industry.

Local Loom Construction

The raw materials for traditional weaving were largely obtained from the local environment. According to Afigbo and Okeke, (1985), archaeological findings confirm that indigenous technology in carding, spinning, dyeing and weaving had been a product of the peoples' effort to exploit their environment to advantage.

The traditional strip looms were constructed in a house manner (rectangular form) with an open end which was built with mud and bamboo sticks (Fadipe, 1970). Apart from the loom, instruments used in (traditional) weaving industry includes; yarn pegs (*Odaada*), shuttle (*oko*), pattern divider (*Ooya*), thread sorting equipment (*Akata*), *Kokogun*, Heddle (*Omu*), *Agbonrin*, weighted sledge (*Okuku*) and *Sanrin* (long iron for warping process).

The instruments used in the (traditional) weaving and production process were made, mainly, from iron, wood, bamboo, raffia palm and calabash and these instruments were sourced from the local environment and were mostly fabricated by carpenters, blacksmith and forebears of the industry themselves -master weavers for instance-(Lamb and Lamb; Ojo, 1966; Dodwell, 1955; Wilkes, 1946).

Local Sourcing Material and Modernization

changes in the tastes and styles of current users to cope with the dictate of contemporary socioeconomic dictates to remain trendy even in traditional attires, especially among the youths who are the major trend setters also necessitated the modification of the end products. The fact is that *aso oke* is being modified to meet the present expectations of trend and the modification is mainly in terms of adding silk to the raw materials to make it lighter and finer. However, some people even still prefer the original (traditional) type because they last longer and they are made of original cotton. Also, when you wear the original (traditional) type with *to match* (good colour combinations) people fall in love with it and they give you compliments that *this your cloth is fine o o*. Investigation into the raw materials used in the modern *aso-oke* industry as against the traditional brought out appreciable difference. The input materials (yarn, dye) are no more sourced locally, it was generally gathered that the allied industries of the *aso-oke* weaving process which are important auxiliary crafts to weaving in Yoruba land has been atrophied. Based on this atrophy, it is inferred that cotton/yarn used in the industry now are not locally sourced. Threads in the weaving industry are equally either imported or produced by metropolitan industries. Also, it was gathered that the thread used in the industry now comes not only in various colours and textures but also in different fibres.

Today, the bulk of our yarns are machine spun. Apart from replacing hand spun yarns, weavers have been much attracted to a variety of synthetic fibres including shining yarns of the silk type (*siliki*) and this has brought a 'great change' to the general appearance of *aso-oke*. The thread now in use in weaving are mostly silk, nylon and 'shine shine' (sheen materials) and a little of real cotton. Importation of various yarns and the 'value' attached to them have changed, determine the taste of consumers and greatly reduced indigenous production methods of threads as synthetic fiber dominate

the industry. With the importation of primary textile materials which runs into several millions of naira into Nigeria yearly, the European countries were able to engage fully their citizens in the production of these primary textile materials at the expense of Nigerian citizens.

Finally, the importation of manufactured and finished textiles from Europe for the interiors as window or door blinds and furniture is another factor that adversely affects our traditional handcrafted textile (*Aso-Oke*) productions. Today, due to urban influence and some agents of civilization, most Yoruba people in the villages now use machine-produced fabrics for their interiors and furniture items in place of *Aso-Oke* the traditional handcrafted textiles of the Yoruba as a mark of civilization. The introduction of these imported yarns brought a change in *Aso-Oke* structure, visual and textural qualities. From 1960 onward, *aso-oke* became softer with lustrous look, which was actually missing in the traditional ones.

The benefits of local sourcing

- ❖ Local sourcing will provide the mass volume a retailer needs and add a point of difference, or to meet customers' environmental and ethical demands for products sourced closer to home.
- ❖ Local sourcing has become an established sales strategy with locally produced goods making up an increasing balance of their business
- ❖ Local sourcing does offer obvious cost benefits in itself. As such, delivery costs are also normally lower.
- ❖ Supply chains are generally shorter with local suppliers, which lead to greater certainty and predictability of delivery times - particularly for those working on a just-in-time basis. "Local suppliers can act quickly, increasing speed to market, but also allow for some agility. During the bad weather over the past few weeks.
- ❖ There is no doubt that the recession has affected local sourcing strategies. But as retailers continue to look for closer and more flexible supplier relationships, local sourcing can certainly deliver in many circumstances.
- ❖ The proximity allows for close relationships to jointly develop the business and products, which could take more management but would reap rewards.
- ❖ Promoting the use of local suppliers can result in large employer of labour in that area, reducing the nation unemployment.
- ❖ It will also boost investment in the community and society at large

Conclusion

Significantly, textiles have relevance in the culture of people. The Yoruba people of Nigeria also have particular clothing for different occasion through local production from indigenous knowledge, innovation from within, local sourcing and technology. The production of *Aso-oke* and *Adire* in traditional Yoruba society was/is effected through simple indigenous technology which was interdependent (among the other actors in the industry by forming a complex whole) and as well independent and developing at its own pace. Our cultural heritage can survive only and when we attach proper value to it and further making sure that the culture of weaving and dyeing does not die off completely in the nation. The survival and continuity of traditional textiles production and use is very important to the socio-cultural growth of the Yoruba people of Nigeria.

Suggestions

- ❖ To ensure optimum production of textile raw materials (cotton and indigo leafs) locally, farmers should be encouraged to go back to the land.
- ❖ The traditional clothing should be sustained for cultural preservation because it is culturally symbolic of the Yoruba tradition and traditional textile technology.
- ❖ Yoruba weavers should change the structure of *aso-oke* to be adaptive to the modern dress forms.
- ❖ The use of *Aso-Oke* and *Adire* as troupe costume for our contingents going on international outings should be encouraged in other to project our image abroad and popularize the traditional fabric.
- ❖ Traditional fabric with its high quality should be encouraged as material for home and car furnishing in addition to its traditional uses.
- ❖ The modern fashion designers should be encouraged to create interesting and attractive designs with the admixture of *aso-oke* and *Adire* textiles.

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