International Journal of Innovation and Applied Studies
ISSN 2028-9324 Vol. 18 No. 2 Oct. 2016, pp. 494-501

http://www.ijias.issr-journals.org/

Challenges facing the traditional smock industry in the Upper East Region of Ghana

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ABSTRACT: The smock/fugu industry in the Upper east region of Ghana is one that offers employment opportunities to many both educated and non-educated alike. Though successive governments have made several pronouncements to help boost the industry, it is still bedevilled with many challenges. This paper therefore seeks to unveil some of the challenges that this industry face. This survey was conducted in the Bongo District, Bolgatanga Municipal and the Kassena-Nankana Municipal of the Upper East region of Ghana. The survey used questionnaires and interviews to gather data. In all, 90 manufacturers and 75 customers were questioned. The study found out that the smock weaving and sewing industry though employs many equipment challenges. Many manufacturers do not have enough equipment to cover all apprentices. Also when the smock is woven or sewn into smocks, the selling of the products become difficult due to non-availability of markets. The study therefore recommends that the District Assemblies should provide some assistance to the manufacturers' in the form of markets and a festival to showcase these products.

KEYWORDS: Fugu, Smock, weaving, Upper East, textile, Bolgatanga, Bongo, Kassena-Nankana.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 GHANA SMOCK

The smock/fugu which is one of the garment designs exclusively manufactured in Ghana which is made up of aggregates of single strips of hand woven cloth produced on a horizontal loom, and sewn together by hand or machine [1], [2]. Though produced in the northern parts of Ghana (Northern, Upper East and Upper West regions), the value of the smock/ fugu transcends the boarders of the three northern regions. In the same way as the traditional value of the smock is central to the people of the Northern Ghana, it is also the pinnacle of some traditional customs in the southern parts of the country [3]. The smock/fugu is an important feature in the chieftaincy institution in Ghana among almost all the ethnic groups including those in the south. Among the Akans in the southern part of Ghana, the smock is decorated with small packets of leather and some inscriptions, and these are worn by the paramount chiefs and war chiefs for ceremonies. This therefore makes the smock/fugu an attire for all Ghanaians and not only northerners as alluded by [4],[5].

The exact year when weaving commenced in Ghana is not known but Mensah asserts that the skill of weaving was learnt in the 17th century [6]. The skill is believed to have been learnt from the Arabs. Reference [7] indicates that during the ancient times, the Ghanaians made contacts with the Arab traders and many skills in the area of textiles were imparted to the Ghanaians.

Reference [3] asserts that the weaving of the smock/fugu centred on the Moshie, Kokomba, Dagomba, Mamprusi, Lobi and Gonja ethnic groups and was the preserve of the men. In today Northern Ghana, the weaving of smock/fugu is practiced in almost all communities in the three northern regions and women have grown to take a fair share of the business.

The smock/fugu is the only Ghanaian traditional attire which has been extensively marketed by many Presidents of Ghana. On Independence Day 1957, Osagyefo Dr Kwame Nkrumah and his compatriots were adorned with smock when he declared the independence of Ghana at the Polo grounds in Accra. The President then went ahead to encourage all educated nationalists to wear the smock as a move to unite all the people in the country and also as a move intended at having a national dress like all the new republics during that era [8]. To make the fugu visible on the international stage, President Jerry John Rawlings make it a point to constantly wear smock both locally and internationally [9].

The latest of attempts at making the smock prominent was made by the current President of Ghana, His Excellency John Dramani Mahama, who hails from the Northern Region of Ghana. Aside the fact that he wears the smock/fugu for state functions as well as some international ceremonies, he urges all Ghanaians to do same. In 2015, the Ministry of Trade and Industry in collaboration with the Savannah Accelerated Development Authority and the World Bank launched an initiative which is that 'smock should be worn on the first Friday of every month in Ghana [10]. With these and many other presidential appeals and support for the industry, one would expect the industry to thrive and flourish, however this is not the case. Reference [3] avers that there is little or no support from Government towards the growing of the business. There is no training on how to improve quality nor to improve the tools and equipment used. The study again cites a claim made by Council or Technical and Vocational Education and Training-Project Support Unit (COTVET-PSU) outreach teams of having given support to smock manufacturers in Tamale in the areas of skill training and support for tools while facts on the ground revealed that these artisans have not received any such training or support for tools.

1.2 CHALLENGES OF TEXTILE MANUFACTURERS

The textile industry in Ghana mainly produces textiles for the purpose of garment construction. The Ghanaian textiles industry, as part of the country's history, has been a key source or means of providing employment opportunity to many of its citizens [11]. Ghana is now joining other countries in the sub-region who also have collapsing textile industries like Kenya and Zambia [12],[13]. Although there has been the establishment of a number of small to medium size enterprises, they are mainly in the garment manufacturing sector [14]. Even though multiple factors have contributed to the decline in production by the textile companies, the influx of textile imports has been a major factor. Additionally, the higher import duties on raw materials for production, and the lack of investment in newer equipment for production by the local textile industry are recognized as deterrents to the textile industry [15].

Reference [16] makes it clear that about 75% of textile manufacturers had reduced production by 20% to 50%. Various reasons account for this reduction. Chief among them are low demand for local textiles, high production costs, high wages, high cost of raw materials, and the influx of imitated textiles which are sold cheaply. Another factor contributing to the decline is the influx of second-hand clothing on the local market. Though the trade offers great benefits to the sellers and even buyers because it is cheap, it does not allow people to purchase textile materials made in Ghana because of the cost factor [17].

Reference [17] noted that even if second hand clothing is totally banned from Ghana, there is no sure way the local textiles industry would begin to increase production capacity because second hand clothing has been taken over by textiles and clothing imports from Asian countries which is a big competitor on the Ghanaian textile market. To counteract this, some of the revenues generated by the second hand clothing trade be distributed to support the textiles industries in countries with low purchasing power and declining textile economies. Another recommendation was for improvement in the customs enforcement so that second hand clothing related frauds can be reduced. They are sure that these recommendations if followed will improve the condition of the local textile industries.

The smock/fugu industry in the Upper East region which is a subsector in the Textile industry in Ghana is not witnessing speedy growth though many people including women now engage in the weaving. Since the smock industry in the Upper East region of Ghana is not immune to any of the challenges afore mentioned it is the aim of this study to identify the peculiar challenges facing the smock industry.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 BACKGROUND OF POPULATION

The study was conducted in the Upper East Region of Ghana which is located in the north eastern part of the country. It is bordered to the north by Burkina Faso, the east by the Republic of Togo, the west by Sissala in the Upper West Region and the south by West Mamprusi in the Northern Region. The region has 13 Districts and these are Bawku Municipal, Bawku West, Binduri (new), Bolgatanga Municipal, Bongo, Builsa North, Builsa South (new), Garu-Tempane, Kassena Nankana West, Kassena Nankana East, Nabdam (new), Pusiga (new) and Talensi [18].

Historically, the Region gained the Regional status in 1983 but hitherto was part of the Northern and Upper Region. The economy of the Region is based on agriculture and related work (65.9%), production and transport equipment work (14.5%), sales work (9.5%) service work (3.9%), and professional, technical and related work 3.8%. The five together make up 97.6% of all occupations. The region is also known for its handicrafts [19]. The region has 1,046,545 inhabitants but those between ages 15-65, which is the active age group within which a person can engage in a meaningful work are 540,345 out of this number, 59,493 lives in the Bolgatanga Municipality; 38,542 are in the Kassena Nankana West; 59,751 are living in the Kassena Nankana East whilst 42,449 are in the Bongo District [20].

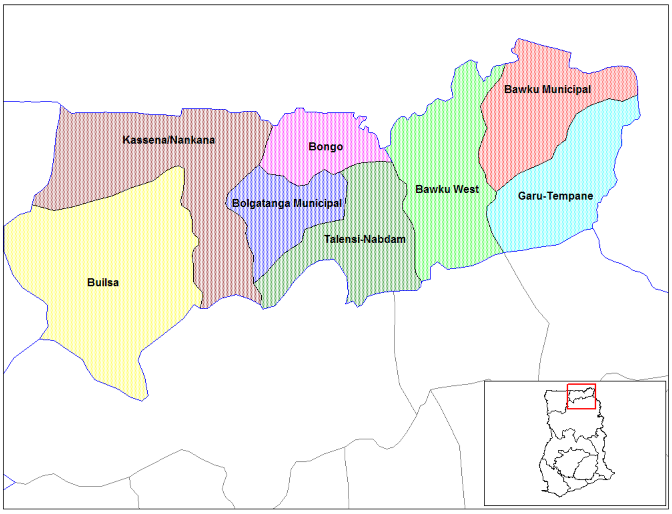

Figure 1: Districts in the Upper East Region

The researchers employed the survey form of qualitative research for the study. Survey research refers to the set of methods used to gather data in a systematic way from a range of individuals, organizations, or other units of interest [21]. The researchers collected data together with research assistants. This enabled them to record on a daily basis, the occurrences through different data gathering instruments.

2.2 SAMPLING

All eligible participants who meet the study criteria are said to be the population. There is the need to find the right respondents in order to get the right information so as to accomplish set objectives [21]. In order to do this, the researchers had to constitute a heterogeneous sample involving master weavers, dyers, smock manufactures and customers of these products from three Districts/ Municipalities namely: the Bolgatanga Municipality, Kassena/Nankana Municipality and the Bongo District.

Due to the heterogeneous nature of the population, the researcher made use of different sampling techniques for the various sectors of the study. Using purposive sampling technique, three areas where smock is manufactured and/or sold were selected and these are the Bolgatanga Municipal, the Kassena/Nankana Municipal and the Bongo District. Snow ball sampling was then used to arrive at ninety (90) manufacturers which comprised of smock weavers, smock sewers, and sellers. Simple random sampling was used to arrive at forty (75) customers and these customers were from diverse backgrounds across the length and breadth of the region.

Table 1: Population distribution table for manufacturers and customers

Municipality / District	Number of manufacturers	Number of customers
Bolgatanga Municipal	50 (55.6%)	41
Kassena/ Nankana Municipal	19 (21.1%)	14
Bongo District	21 (23.3%)	20
TOTAL	**90**	**75**

Source: *Field work, 2016*

2.3 Data Collection Instruments

In order for the researcher to congregate precise data on the challenges facing the fabric producers in the Upper East Region of Ghana to be able to have meaningful analysis for answering the set research questions effectively, and also to draw incisive conclusion, the researcher employed both questionnaires and interviews as tools for gathering data.

The questions were a mixture of open-ended questions which required respondents to provide reactions and fixed response questions with 'Yes' and 'No', or with options from which the respondents could choose from. One set of the questionnaire was designed and administered to the manufacturers' whiles a second set was also designed and administered to customers of textile products in the region to solicit responses to questions which were sensitive for which other instruments might not be suitable since questionnaire as an instrument offers the comfort of anonymity [22]. The questions were pretested on a sample of respondents in Bolgatanga and questions which were difficult to understand by respondents were modified. To gather the data, five (5) research assistants were recruited and trained on to administer questionnaire and conduct interviews on both the manufacturers and the customers. Bolgatanga Municipality was the first to be visited and areas visited in Bolgatanga include Bolgatanga new market, Soe, Sumbrungu, Yikene, Bukere and Atulbabisi. The next was Bongo District and areas visited include Bongo Township and Bongo-Soe Township. The third to be visited was Kassena-Nankana Municipal and the areas visited include Navrongo, Paga and Nayagnia.

3 Results

3.1 Background Data of Textile Manufacturers

There were 62 female manufacturers representing 68.9% while the remaining 28 (31.1%) were males. The manufacturers came from varied educational backgrounds. Majority of the respondents (41.1%) were Junior High School graduates. 16.7% were Senior High graduates,13.3 were middle school certificate holders and 7.8% were polytechnic graduates. 6.7% had had no formal education while 7.8% respondents did not indicate their educational level.

When asked to indicate their age, 14.40% were below the age of 25 years, 33.3% were between ages 31-35 years. 21.1% were between 26 -30 years while only 3.3 % of the respondents were above age 50 years. This is an indication that the business of manufacturing textile is dominated by youthful men and women in the Upper East Region. It is also indicative of the future of the local textile industry which could be said to be bright.

Majority of the manufacturers were experienced in the textile industry with only 8.9% having less than a year's experience. 36.7% had 1-3 years' experience in manufacturing while 17.8%, 16.7% and 20.0% of the respondents had 4-6 years, 7-10 years and above 10 years' experience respectively in the manufacture of textiles in the Upper East Region of Ghana.

3.2 Challenges facing manufactures

The challenges were divided into three areas in order to aid in the orderly organisation of the results and these are: production, marketing and finance.

3.2.1 Production

The researchers began by finding out whether the master manufacturers had apprentices who help in the production of the textiles. The findings indicated that 28.9% of the manufacturers did not have apprentices and for those who had apprentices, a chunk (40.0%) had less than 3 people as apprentices while 26.7% had 4-7 apprentices. 1.11% had between 8-11 apprentices while 3.33% of the respondents had above 11 apprentices. This indicates that not many people are learning the fugu/smock manufacturing. The interviews with the manufacturers revealed that the youth perceive the industry as labour intensive and as such they shy away from it.

The next area of concern was equipment for production. Only 47.8% of the manufacturers had all the equipment and accessories needed for production. In shops where equipment were lacking, work for apprentices had to be scheduled in such a manner that while some apprentices are weaving, the remaining workers will be engaged in other processes which precedes the main production or they may be sent on errands, or in a worst case may be idling about. This reduced production capacity of the manufacturers.

Another challenge was the availability of raw materials for production. Manufacturers in the Bolgatanga municipality purchased most of their raw materials from market in Bolgatanga whiles those from Kassena-Nankana purchased mostly from Bolgatanga which is 36 km away. The people of Bongo also did not have market for raw materials so they had to travel to Bolgatanga which is about 30km away or travel to neighbouring Burkina Faso to purchase yarns from there. Other areas where yarns and other raw materials are purchased by manufacturers are indicated in table 2. The non-availability of raw materials in the production areas increases the production cost of the textile and thereby increasing the cost price of the product after completion.

Table 2: Source of raw materials

		Tamale	Bolgatanga	Accra	others	Total
District	Bolgatanga	13	21	10	7	51
	Kassena-Nankana	4	14	1	1	20
	Bongo	1	15	1	2	19
Total		18	50	12	9	90

Source: *Field work, 2016*

Regarding the quantum of materials the manufacturers could produce in a week, 46.7% indicated that they are only able to manufacture less than 25 yards, 30.0% could produce 26-50 yards, while only 7.8% could manage above 50 yards per week. A cross tabulation between the yardage of production and the District indicated that manufacturers in Bolgatanga Municipality were able to produce more per week than the others. This is probably because of the fact that those manufacturers in Bolgatanga have access to raw materials easier and also have more apprentices than their counterparts in the other parts of the region.

3.2.2 MARKETING

When asked who their customers were, 47.40% of all the products were purchased by individuals while 36.08% were purchased by tailors and seamstresses. The others were 11.39% by Government agencies and 5% by private organisations. This indicates that there is no firm which buys the materials in bulk for the export market known to these manufacturers.

On the sales per week, majority of the manufacturers (54.4%) are only able to sell less than 25 yards as indicated. 20% are able to sell 26 – 50 yards, while only 7.78 are able to sell above 50 yards worth of goods. 17.78 people did not respond to this question. A cross tabulation to find out which Municipality sold more smock products per week revealed that manufacturers in the Bolgatanga Municipality were able to sell more per week than those from the other areas. Manufacturers in the other Municipalities were only able to sell less than 25 yards in a week. This could be due to the fact that the market in Bolgatanga is bigger than the markets in the other areas and more so because Bolgatanga is the regional capital, people travel from nearby towns and villages to shop for retailing and personal use. More so, tourists from both the southern part of the country and overseas end up in Bolgatanga before proceeding to their tourist destination and some these tourist make purchases while in Bolgatanga.

The manufacturers were also asked whether they have cut down production within the past two (2) years, 50.6% responded in the affirmative. A cross tabulation with the Districts revealed that manufacturers have indeed cut down on production in all the districts with the worst affected being Bongo District. In Bolgatanga, 25 out of the 50 respondents responded in the affirmative, nine (9) out of the twenty (20) respondents from Kassena-Nankana responded ‘yes’ while nine (9) out of the fifteen (15) respondents from Bongo said ‘yes’.

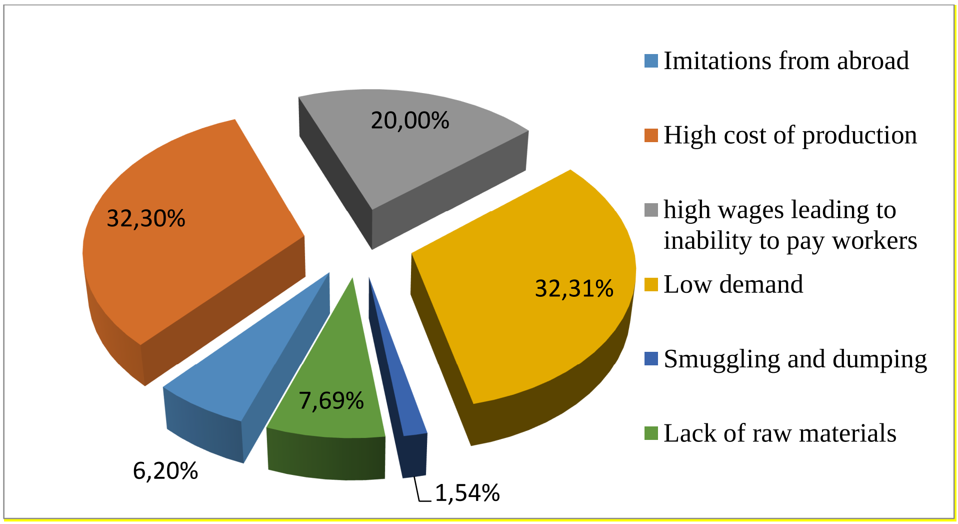

Figure 2: Reasons accounting for the reduction in production

Reasons accounting for this cut down on production as shown in figure 2, indicates that high cost of production and low demand for the products are the two main causes for the cut down.

On the other hand, there were some manufacturers who had increased production within the past two years. In total, 38 manufacturers which is 42.2% of the respondents indicated that they have increased production as indicated in table 4.9

Only 2.2% of the respondents indicated having increased production over 50% in the past two years. This indicates that even though manufacturers have been able to increase the quantum of production, it is not very significant looking at the period of time within which the increment has taken place.

A cross tabulation between the Districts and the manufacturers who have been able to increase production revealed that only the manufacturers in the Bolgatanga Municipality had 14.4% (13 respondents) of the manufacturers having an increment between 26-50%. The rest of the Districts had increments only up to 25% and the 2.2% of the manufacturers who were able to record above 50% increment were from the Bongo District.

The peculiarity of the 2 respondents who recorded more than 50% increase was of concern to the researchers so another cross tabulation was analysed between the years of experience and the manufacturers who recorded increment. The second cross tabulation established that the two manufacturers were among the few people in the area who had been manufacturing for over 7 years. One of the two had been producing for more than 10 years. These years of production could have been a factor which have contributed to them been able to record more increase within the past two years

The researchers wanted to find out from the manufacturers what they thought was contributing to the low patronage of the local textile goods. The responses were varied but the dominant ones were “some customers complain that the local textile fade or change colour after washing”, “customers like to buy local fabric but due to inability to handle it or clean the fabric makes them feel relaxed to purchase them”, “customers prefer foreign goods because they last longer”, “the local fabrics are more expensive than the foreign fabrics”, “some customers complain about the strength of some locally produced fabrics”, “customers don’t trust the quality of local fabrics”. These comments show that customers within the region are interested in buying locally manufactured textile but have few concerns which when addressed may improve the marketability of the local textile.

3.2.3 FINANCING

When the respondents were asked on the amount of money they spend on raw materials per month, the responses of producers in the Bongo District and Kassena Nankana Municipality ranged between GhȻ 200.00- GhȻ 300.00, while those in the Bolgatanga Municipality GhȻ 300.00- GhȻ 700.00 and with this expenditure, the income for the week ranged between GhȻ300.00- GhȻ1,400.00.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The results from the analysis of the questionnaires indicated that few people were interested in training through apprenticeship to become manufacturers of the smock products in the region. This is indicative of the fact that fewer apprentices were recorded in the workshops visited and even 28.9% of the manufacturers did not have any apprentice even though they would have wished to pass on the knowledge of production unto other people.

It was evident that there were no reliable sources for manufacturers to purchase raw materials for production within the areas visited except Bolgatanga which had a market where some of the materials could be acquired. Due to this, manufacturers have to travel to areas such as Burkina Faso, Kumasi, Accra and other areas which increases the production cost significantly.

Manufacturers in Bongo and Kassena Nankana Districts are unable to sell a lot of products within the week and the clients of these manufacturers are predominantly individuals, tailors and seamstresses.

There has also not been support from government to the manufacturers within the catchment area. This is making it difficult for the manufacturers to expand their capacities.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results found in the study, the following recommendations have been put forward.

First of all, the Municipal and District Assemblies and NGO's in the areas visited should organise workshops to educate the younger generation on the benefits that can be derived from engaging in the local textile industry. This will help to increase the revenue base of the local Assemblies since these people will be paying taxes. It will also help more people to be self-employed and as such will not wait on the central Government to provide jobs for them.

Additionally, private enterprise owners and medium-size businesses can invest in the trade of textile raw materials such as yarns, calico, dyes and other accessories which could reduce the cost of production and consequently reduce the cost price of the finished products. The smock manufacturers can also form associations so that they can purchase materials in bulk from bigger markets in order to avoid buying at a higher cost from smaller markets close to them

Furthermore, the Municipal and District Assemblies should help put the manufacturers in groups so that the manufacturers could put their works together and assess bigger markets such as international and even other bigger local markets in the region. This will also help the groups to assess loans from banks to purchase raw materials and equipment for expansion as well as pay other people who work for them.

Also there is the need to establish a smock/fugu festival where weavers and designers could showcase the latest styles and equipment for the production of smock. This will go a long way to boost the market of the product.

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