

INDIGENOUS CRAFTSMANSHIP AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NGWALAND: A HISTORICAL APPRAISAL OF CULTURAL PRESERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

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Abstract

This study examined the historical and socio-economic significance of indigenous craftsmanship in Ngwaland, with the main objectives of tracing its historical evolution, identifying its socio-economic contributions, and assessing its role in cultural preservation and sustainable development. The research adopted a qualitative analytical method, which involved content analysis of relevant documentary sources on the subject. The approach was also thematic. Findings revealed that craftsmanship historically functioned both as an economic enterprise and as a form of cultural expression, fostering trade, inter-community relations, and social cohesion. It economically empowered men and women, promoted self-reliance, and enhanced communal development. However, challenges such as declining interest among youths, the influx of imported goods, and scarcity of raw materials threaten its survival. The study concludes that indigenous craftsmanship remains a vital instrument for cultural preservation and sustainable development, and recommends renewed policy support, skill acquisition programmes, and institutional recognition to revitalise traditional industries in Ngwaland and beyond.

Keywords: Indigenous Craftsmanship; Ngwaland; Cultural Preservation; Socio-Economic Development; Sustainable Growth

Introduction

The role of indigenous craftsmanship in the socio-economic development of traditional African societies cannot be overstated. In Ngwaland, as in other parts of Igboland, craftsmanship served as both a cultural expression and an economic enterprise that sustained livelihoods before the advent of colonialism and industrialisation. From textile weaving and wood carving to basketry, broom making, and mat weaving, these crafts were integral to the daily life and economy of the Ngwa people. They reflected not only creativity and skill but also the ingenuity with which the people interacted with their natural environment. Each craft was a product of deep-rooted cultural knowledge passed from one generation to another, serving both utilitarian and symbolic purposes in traditional society. Thus, the study of indigenous craftsmanship in Ngwaland provides a window into the people's history, economy, and social organisation.

The earliest evidence of textile production among the Igbo, such as fragments recovered from the Igbo-Ukwu archaeological site (9th century AD), shows that textile technology was highly developed long before European contact.¹ The Ngwa people, as part of this cultural continuum, practiced weaving with both bark fibre and cotton, reflecting a long tradition of experimentation, innovation, and adaptation. Before the introduction of industrial fabrics, the Ngwa produced Aji (bark cloth) from the inner bark of trees such as ogbu, ojianwu, and achi.² These cloths were used for clothing, belts, and ceremonial purposes, highlighting the people's self-reliance and creativity. Such crafts were not only expressions of material culture but also indicators of social status, gender roles, and local economies. As the society evolved, weaving, carving, and basketry became major economic activities that sustained both individuals and communities.

Indigenous craftsmanship also played a central role in fostering local trade and inter-community relations. Weavers, carvers, and basket makers produced goods that were exchanged in local markets, thereby strengthening economic networks within and beyond Ngwaland. For example, cotton and raffia products were traded with neighbouring communities such as Ukwa and Akwete, while carved objects like drums, stools, and doors found value in both domestic and ritual contexts.³ The availability of raw materials—wood, fibre, cotton, and palm products—encouraged self-sufficiency and created employment within rural economies. Thus, craftsmanship was not merely a form of artistic expression but an important pillar of the traditional Ngwa economy, ensuring that skills and resources were effectively harnessed for communal well-being.

In contemporary times, indigenous craftsmanship continues to hold socio-economic and cultural significance despite the pressures of modernisation and industrial competition. Crafts such as basketry, broom making, and mat weaving remain vital sources of income for many rural dwellers. Furthermore, the revival and preservation of these crafts have become essential for promoting cultural identity, youth empowerment, and sustainable development. Indigenous industries are increasingly recognised as avenues for local innovation and environmental sustainability, aligning with global calls for heritage-based economic growth. This study, therefore, examines the historical and contemporary significance of indigenous craftsmanship in Ngwaland, highlighting its role in cultural preservation and sustainable socio-economic development.

The Ngwaland and Its People

Ngwaland occupies an area of about 832 square kilometres and lies within the tropical rainforest zone of southeastern Nigeria.⁴ It is located between latitude 5° and 5°30' North and longitude 2°30' East, in the present Abia State.⁵ The area is bounded on the north by Ubakala and Olokoru in Umuahia South Local Government Area, on the west by Aboh-Mbaise and Owerri, on the south by the Ikwerre and Ndoki communities of Rivers and Abia States, and on the east by the Annang and Ibibio peoples of Cross River State.⁶ The land is largely a rolling plain, though the northern areas such as Ngulu, Ntigha, Nvosi and Ngwa-Ukwu are more undulating. The elevation rarely exceeds fifty feet above sea level, and this flatness has allowed for the development of a network of ancient roads, paths and tracks which predated colonial rule.⁷ These routes facilitated the movement of goods, ideas and people, thereby enhancing social and economic interactions among Ngwa communities and their neighbours.

The climate of Ngwaland is typically tropical, with an average annual rainfall ranging between 203 and 254 centimetres, and a mean temperature of about 80°F.⁸ The rainy season spans from April to October, with a brief dry spell in July and August, while the dry season extends from November to March. The area's vegetation, once a thick rainforest, has been considerably altered by continuous cultivation and infrastructural development, leaving it today as a modified rainforest type. The land remains very fertile, watered by rivers such as the Imo, Aba, Otamiri, Okpo and Ojii. The Imo River forms the western boundary with Owerri and Mbaise, while the Aba River, originating from Umuoba village near Aba town, flows southward to Opobo.⁹ These rivers not only serve as sources of domestic water but also provide natural routes for transportation, especially during the rainy season. Economically, Ngwaland is richly endowed with a variety of crops and economic trees. The palm tree and raffia palm dominate the landscape, placing Ngwaland within the famous palm belt of southern Nigeria. Palm produce from the area attracted early European traders and coastal middlemen from Bonny, Ndoki and Opobo, who sought to tap directly from the source of supply.¹⁰ Apart from palm produce, Ngwa people also cultivated and traded yams, cassava, cocoyam, maize, beans, pepper and vegetables. Palm wine tapping and trade, particularly the renowned Umuoba wine, became a distinctive feature of Ngwa economy and culture. These agricultural and trade activities not only sustained the people's livelihood but also strengthened inter-community relations across the region.

The Ngwa people form a significant sub-group of the Igbo nation, one of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria. Oral traditions and historical evidence suggest that the Ngwa trace their origin to Umuoha in the present-day Owerri zone of Imo State. According to tradition, a group of migrants left Umuoha in search of new land and, upon reaching the Imo River, were divided by a sudden rise in water level. Those who hastily crossed the river were referred to as "Ome ngwa ngwa," meaning "those who act swiftly," from which the name "Ngwa" was derived.¹¹ Their first settlement was at Okpuala Ngwa, which became the cradle of subsequent migrations within the region.¹² From this centre, eight original villages—Okpuala Ngwa, Okpu Ngwa (Ovugwu), Orié Afo (Umuoha), Amaku-Nvosi, Eziala-Nsulu, Ntigha-Okpuala, Amuokwu (Mbutu), and Amauha (Ovukwu)—were established.¹³ These communities laid the foundation for the growth of Ngwaland as known today. Oral history and migration patterns indicate that the Ngwa people are a product of several waves of migration rather than a single ancestral origin, making Okpuala Ngwa the acknowledged ancestral home of the Ngwa nation.

Historical Background of Indigenous Craftsmanship in Ngwaland

Indigenous craftsmanship in Ngwaland is rooted in the broader historical development of Igbo material culture, which long preceded European contact. Archaeological and oral evidence suggests that the Ngwa people, like other Igbo subgroups, developed a complex system of crafts and technologies suited to their environment. Craftsmanship in this context was not a leisure activity but a means of livelihood and survival, reflecting the ingenuity of a people who transformed local resources into useful and beautiful objects. The earliest known Igbo textile evidence from the Igbo-Ukwu archaeological site, dated to the 9th century AD, attests to an advanced knowledge of weaving and fibre processing in ancient Igboland.¹⁴ This discovery underscores the depth of experimentation and refinement that occurred over several centuries before reaching such levels of sophistication. Among the Ngwa, this tradition evolved through local innovations in bark cloth production (Aji), raffia weaving,

and later, cotton spinning and weaving. The historical significance of these crafts lies in their connection to both the ecological and cultural environment of Ngwaland, which provided abundant raw materials and inspiration for artistic expression.

Before the introduction of European textiles, the earliest form of clothing in Ngwaland was the bark cloth known as Aji. This cloth was made from the inner bark of trees such as ogbu (wild fig), ufuku, ojjanwu, and achi, which were readily available in the surrounding forests. The process involved peeling off the bark, beating it into soft fibres, drying, and stringing it into belts or wrappers.¹⁵ Beyond being a garment, Aji served ceremonial and practical purposes — used as waist girdles for dancers, masquerades, and warriors. Such multifunctionality demonstrates how craftsmanship intertwined with cultural identity and spiritual life. It is noteworthy that similar bark-cloth traditions existed in other parts of Igboland, reinforcing a shared cultural heritage of textile innovation. The adaptation of bark cloth to local needs shows the ability of Ngwa craftsmen and women to work creatively with natural resources, long before the adoption of cotton as the main raw material for weaving. This early textile tradition laid the foundation for later developments in cotton weaving and contributed to the self-sufficiency of Ngwa communities in clothing and trade.

With the gradual introduction of cotton weaving, Ngwaland became an active participant in the expanding network of indigenous textile production in the Igbo region. Oral traditions recall that some Ngwa communities adopted and adapted cotton weaving techniques from their southern neighbours, particularly the Akwette people, who were famous for their intricate loom work.¹⁶ Unlike Akwette, where weaving was a major female occupation, in Ngwaland the practice was less widespread and concentrated in communities close to Ukwu and Akwette borders. Nevertheless, Ngwa weavers produced distinctive cotton fabrics using upright frame looms made from hardwood and raffia poles.¹⁷ The looms, heddles, beaters, and shuttle systems used reflected a high degree of technical understanding of tension, pattern, and design. The primary material—cotton wool—was locally cultivated, with cotton farms flourishing between May and June and harvested between December and March. Oral sources confirm that cotton was grown both as an intercrop and in plantations, ensuring a constant supply of raw material for spinning and weaving.¹⁸ The products served domestic needs and were exchanged in local markets, enhancing Ngwa participation in the regional economy of artisanal trade.

Beyond weaving, other crafts flourished in precolonial Ngwaland, notably wood carving, basketry, broom-making, and mat weaving. Wood carving held both artistic and religious significance, as carvers were often regarded with reverence akin to priests and diviners. Using hardwoods like iroko, mahogany, and obeche, craftsmen produced stools, doors, drums (igba), slit drums (ekwe), and handles for agricultural tools. These objects were both functional and symbolic, representing social rank and spiritual beliefs within the community. The production process required various tools such as knives (nma-odu), chisels (okuka), and axes (egbugbu), and was carried out by skilled men or apprentices working under masters.¹⁹ Basketry, on the other hand, was a widespread household craft largely practised by both men and women. Baskets (ekete) were made from palm fronds, canes, and raffia, serving as containers for food, market goods, and domestic items.²⁰ The variety of designs — round, flat (nkpo), and rectangular (avo) — demonstrated both practical ingenuity and aesthetic sensibility. The adaptability of such crafts over generations ensured their continued relevance in everyday life, even as new materials and tools became available.

These indigenous crafts played an integral role in shaping the socio-economic and cultural structure of Ngwaland. They were embedded within a system of apprenticeship and informal education that transmitted skills from elders to younger generations. Craft production also encouraged communal cooperation, as most crafts depended on group activities, especially during fibre processing, dyeing, and weaving. Furthermore, indigenous industries promoted trade and interdependence among Igbo communities. For example, Ngwa traders exchanged cotton products, carved items, and baskets for salt, fish, and pottery from neighbouring regions. Such interactions helped sustain a vibrant local economy that did not rely solely on external trade. Over time, these crafts became part of the cultural identity of the Ngwa people, symbolising resilience, creativity, and continuity. The persistence of these practices into the present day, albeit in modified forms, illustrates how indigenous craftsmanship has remained a vital component of Ngwa cultural heritage and a potential pathway for sustainable rural development.

Types and Techniques of Indigenous Crafts in Ngwaland

The range of indigenous crafts practised in Ngwaland reveals a society endowed with remarkable creativity and technical skill. Among these crafts, textile weaving, wood carving, basketry, broom-making, and mat weaving stand out as the most prominent. Each of these crafts developed from the people's interaction with their immediate environment and their need to meet both material and aesthetic requirements of life. The Ngwa people transformed ordinary natural materials—bark, wood, fibre, raffia, and cotton—into useful household and ceremonial objects. These crafts were not mere economic activities but also expressions of cultural identity and artistry. They provided

clothing, household equipment, musical instruments, and tools, thereby sustaining both domestic and communal life. The diversity of crafts also reflected a division of labour: men were mostly engaged in carving and heavy crafts, while women were dominant in weaving and lighter handicrafts. Through these crafts, the Ngwa people preserved indigenous technologies that have survived the test of time and continue to define their cultural heritage. Textile weaving was perhaps the most sophisticated of all Ngwa crafts. The earliest form, Aji (bark cloth), was made from the inner bark of trees such as ogbu, ufuku, ojjanwu, and achi. The bark was carefully peeled, beaten, and softened into fibrous material, then dried and tied with string to form a waist cloth or wrapper. This early textile served multiple functions—it was used as clothing, as belts for fastening weapons during warfare, and as decorative girdles for dancers and masquerades. Later, with the introduction of cotton, Ngwa weavers adopted the use of an upright frame loom made from hardwood and raffia poles. Cotton yarns were starched and sometimes dyed before being wound into spools for weaving. The loom included various components such as heddles, beaters, swords, ropes, and warp spreaders. The weaving process involved careful warping, tying of threads, and manipulation of heddles to create sheds for passing the shuttle that carried the weft. Decorative effects were achieved by combining threads of different textures and colours. The result was a firm, durable fabric that served both economic and aesthetic purposes. The techniques required patience, concentration, and a deep understanding of material behaviour, making weaving one of the most respected crafts in traditional Ngwaland.

Wood carving was another important craft practised mainly by men in Ngwaland. It involved the use of local hardwoods such as iroko, mahogany, okwe, and obeche, which were abundant in the environment. Carving was regarded as both a practical and spiritual vocation, as many carved objects had religious or symbolic meanings. The carver began his work by first conceptualising the desired object and sketching its outline on the wood.²¹ Tools such as knives (nma odu), chisels (okuka), hammers (nku), saws, files, and axes (egbugbu) were essential. The wood was sun-dried to ease cutting and prevent splitting. Through careful chiselling, scraping, and smoothing, the carver produced items such as wooden drums (igba), slit drums (ekwe), doors, stools, and handles for agricultural tools. These products were valued for their functional utility and artistic beauty. In some cases, carvings were commissioned for shrines or ceremonies, reflecting the sacred status of the craft. The carvers worked individually or with apprentices, passing down their knowledge orally and practically. The durability and artistry of Ngwa woodwork illustrate the people's mastery of form, proportion, and symbolism in material production.

Basketry was a widely practised craft that met both domestic and commercial needs in Ngwaland. Locally known as Eket, baskets came in various shapes—round, flat (Nkpo), and rectangular (Avo). They were made from flexible plant materials such as palm fronds, canes (apipia), and willow (igu nkwu), valued for their strength and elasticity. The techniques employed in basket making were intricate, including rending (for speed and economy), pairing (for base decoration), and wailing (for strength). The process began with preparing the materials by drying and trimming the palm fronds or canes. The stakes formed the basket's vertical framework, while the weavers filled in the sides using rhythmic crossing of fibres. Some baskets were fitted with wooden bases—especially the Avo type used for carrying heavy goods. Tools such as knives, pliers, drills, and hammers were used to shape and assemble the baskets.²² Beyond their domestic use, baskets were traded in local markets and served as storage containers, market carriers, and even ornamental art. Basketry demonstrated the resourcefulness of Ngwa craftsmen, who were able to transform natural fibres into functional and durable household objects.

In addition to these major crafts, Ngwaland was known for several small-scale industries that complemented the local economy. Broom-making, for example, utilised the midribs of oil palm leaves (aziza) and fibres from the wine palm (ngwo). These brooms were used for sweeping homes, compounds, and removing cobwebs, and were sold widely in local markets. Mat weaving was another important craft, employing leaves of ngwo, screw pine (ute), and alakara to produce mats for roofing, sleeping, and fencing. These materials were also used for constructing walls when mixed with clay, particularly in rural dwellings. The craftsmanship involved in making mats and fences combined both utility and environmental sustainability, as materials were locally sourced and biodegradable. Collectively, these crafts provided employment, strengthened family economies, and fostered interdependence among different occupational groups. They also reflected an ecological balance between human needs and the sustainable use of natural resources. The continuity of these crafts to this day underscores their economic and cultural resilience in Ngwaland.

Socio-Economic Contributions of Indigenous Craftsmanship in Ngwaland

Indigenous craftsmanship played a pivotal role in shaping the economic foundation of Ngwaland long before the advent of modern industry and colonial influence. It served as a vital source of livelihood for many families, providing both men and women with opportunities for self-reliance and economic stability. Crafts such as weaving, carving, basketry, and mat-making enabled individuals to convert locally available raw materials into valuable goods for domestic use and trade. This not only ensured self-sufficiency but also reduced dependence on

imported goods. Weavers produced textiles for clothing and household needs; carvers made furniture, tools, and ritual objects; while basket and mat makers created essential items for farming, storage, and daily life. These activities strengthened the local economy by generating income and encouraging small-scale trade. In a predominantly agrarian society, craftsmanship complemented farming by providing an alternative source of revenue, particularly during the dry season when agricultural activities were minimal. This economic balance contributed to social stability and the overall prosperity of Ngwaland.

Furthermore, indigenous craftsmanship contributed significantly to trade and inter-community relations within and beyond Ngwaland. Local markets such as Ahia Ngwa, Ahia Uratta, and Ahia Umuocham became centres for the exchange of craft products and agricultural goods. Weavers, potters, and carvers exchanged their crafts for food items, livestock, and other commodities, fostering a vibrant barter economy. Through such interactions, craftsmanship helped build commercial networks between the Ngwa and neighbouring communities like Ukwa, Akwette, and Asa. For instance, Akwette weavers were known to exchange fine textiles for Ngwa palm produce and carved goods. These trade relations promoted peaceful coexistence, cultural exchange, and regional integration. In some cases, Ngwa artisans travelled to nearby villages to sell their crafts or render services such as stool carving and cloth weaving.²³ Such mobility extended the influence of Ngwa craftsmanship and enhanced the people's reputation for creativity and industriousness. Therefore, craftsmanship was not merely a local economic activity but a channel for regional cooperation and the development of communal interdependence.

In addition to its economic significance, craftsmanship played an essential social role by reinforcing family and community bonds. Craft production in Ngwaland often took place within households, where skills were transmitted through apprenticeship and observation. Fathers trained their sons in carving or blacksmithing, while mothers instructed their daughters in weaving, mat-making, and pottery. This system of informal education not only preserved technical knowledge but also strengthened moral discipline, patience, and diligence among the youth. It served as a form of socialisation that prepared young people for adult responsibilities. Skilled craftsmen gained respect and recognition in society, as mastery of a craft was regarded as a mark of intelligence, creativity, and perseverance. Successful artisans who accumulated wealth through their crafts often used part of their income to support communal projects such as road construction, church building, or festivals. In this way, craftsmanship became an instrument of community development and mutual support.²⁴ The emphasis on hard work, self-reliance, and skill transmission also ensured the survival of traditional values in a changing socio-economic environment. Moreover, indigenous craftsmanship contributed immensely to gender inclusion and the empowerment of women in Ngwaland. Women were particularly active in the production of brooms, mats, and baskets—items that were both useful and marketable. Many rural women combined these crafts with farming, enabling them to earn income to support their families.²⁵ The proceeds from the sale of mats and baskets were often used to pay school fees, buy food, and contribute to family welfare. Through these activities, women achieved a degree of financial independence that enhanced their social standing within the community. In addition, women's participation in crafts fostered social interaction, as they often worked together in cooperative groups or during leisure gatherings. This collective spirit not only enhanced productivity but also promoted solidarity and mutual assistance among women. The inclusion of women in economic production through crafts challenged patriarchal economic structures and demonstrated the egalitarian tendencies inherent in Igbo traditional society. Thus, indigenous craftsmanship in Ngwaland offered both men and women avenues for self-expression, economic participation, and empowerment.

In the modern context, the socio-economic contributions of indigenous craftsmanship continue to manifest in new and adaptive forms. With increasing global interest in cultural heritage, local crafts have gained recognition as part of Nigeria's creative economy. In Ngwaland, artisans still engage in wood carving, mat weaving, and basketry, though on a smaller scale. Some of these crafts are now produced for urban markets and tourist consumption, linking traditional skills to contemporary economic opportunities. Government and non-governmental organisations have also begun to appreciate the value of indigenous industries for rural development and poverty reduction. Craftsmanship provides employment for youths who might otherwise migrate to urban centres in search of jobs, thereby helping to reduce rural-urban drift. It also promotes environmental sustainability, as artisans depend on renewable natural resources and traditional methods that minimise waste. In essence, indigenous craftsmanship remains a dynamic sector that connects the past with the present—preserving cultural identity while fostering economic resilience and sustainable growth in Ngwaland.

Cultural Preservation, Challenges, and Prospects for Sustainable Growth

The preservation of indigenous craftsmanship in Ngwaland is crucial for maintaining the people's cultural heritage and historical identity. Crafts are not merely economic products but living symbols of the Ngwa worldview, reflecting their values, aesthetics, and interaction with the environment. Every woven mat, carved stool, or basket tells a story of creativity, endurance, and social meaning. The continuity of these crafts across generations has

enabled the Ngwa people to retain a tangible connection to their ancestors. Through craftsmanship, knowledge systems are transmitted orally and practically, ensuring that traditional skills remain part of collective memory. Ceremonial items such as carved masks and wooden stools continue to feature in traditional festivals, marriages, and burial rites, thereby preserving cultural rituals. Even in the face of modernity, many communities in Ngwaland still uphold these traditional crafts as expressions of pride and cultural distinction. As such, indigenous craftsmanship functions as a bridge between past traditions and modern aspirations, keeping alive the essence of Ngwa identity in a rapidly globalising world.

However, the preservation of these traditional crafts faces numerous challenges in the modern era. One major challenge is the growing neglect of indigenous industries due to the influx of cheap, mass-produced goods from urban centres and abroad. Plastic mats, factory-made baskets, and imported furniture have largely replaced handwoven and handcrafted items in many households. This has led to a decline in demand for local crafts, discouraging younger generations from learning traditional skills. The migration of youths to cities in search of white-collar jobs further compounds this problem, as craftsmanship is often perceived as outdated or unprofitable. Additionally, deforestation and environmental degradation threaten the availability of raw materials such as raffia, palm fronds, and hardwoods, upon which artisans depend. Without conscious efforts to replenish these resources, the ecological foundation of indigenous craftsmanship will continue to weaken. The absence of institutional support, coupled with poor market structures and limited access to credit, has also hindered the expansion of craft-based enterprises in Ngwaland.

Despite these challenges, the prospects for reviving and sustaining indigenous craftsmanship in Ngwaland remain promising. The global appreciation for handmade and eco-friendly products offers new opportunities for local artisans to access wider markets. Craftsmanship aligns closely with contemporary ideas of sustainable development, which emphasise the use of renewable resources, waste reduction, and the empowerment of local communities. With proper organisation and support, indigenous crafts can become viable enterprises that contribute to the local and national economy. Establishing cooperatives and vocational training centres can encourage youth participation and skill transfer. Government agencies, cultural institutions, and private investors can play vital roles in promoting traditional crafts through exhibitions, craft fairs, and tourism initiatives. Integrating craft education into school curricula can also help reawaken interest in indigenous knowledge among young people. Such initiatives will not only preserve cultural heritage but also create employment and strengthen local economies.

Moreover, indigenous craftsmanship has significant potential as a tool for cultural diplomacy and national identity building. Nigeria's diversity of crafts—from Akwette weaving to Nok terracotta and Ngwa carving—represents a wealth of artistic traditions that can project the nation's image positively to the world. In this regard, Ngwaland's craftsmanship can contribute to cultural tourism by attracting visitors interested in authentic local experiences. Craft villages and heritage museums can be established to showcase the techniques, materials, and symbolism of Ngwa crafts. This would create a platform for both preservation and innovation, allowing artisans to adapt traditional designs for modern tastes without losing their cultural essence. Encouraging collaborations between artisans and designers could lead to new products that blend heritage with functionality, appealing to both local and international markets. Through such creative adaptation, indigenous craftsmanship can thrive as both an art form and a sustainable economic venture.

Conclusion

This study examined the historical and socio-economic significance of indigenous craftsmanship in Ngwaland, with specific objectives to trace its historical evolution, identify its socio-economic contributions, and assess its role in cultural preservation and sustainable development. The findings revealed that craftsmanship in Ngwaland is not merely an economic activity but a central pillar of the people's cultural identity and communal life. From early bark-cloth production to cotton weaving, wood carving, mat weaving, and basketry, indigenous crafts evolved in response to environmental conditions, social needs, and technological innovation.

The study also established that craftsmanship contributed immensely to the local economy through trade, employment generation, and inter-community relations. It served as a medium for transmitting traditional skills and values across generations, reinforcing self-reliance and family cooperation. Furthermore, it empowered both men and women economically, provided alternative sources of income during agricultural off-seasons, and fostered community development through mutual support and social cohesion.

The research further found that while indigenous craftsmanship in Ngwaland continues to play a meaningful role in cultural preservation, it faces significant challenges such as modern competition, environmental degradation, and declining youth interest. Nonetheless, the study identified strong prospects for revitalisation through skill

acquisition programmes, cooperative organisation, and integration into Nigeria's expanding creative and tourism sectors.

The findings affirm that indigenous craftsmanship embodies both cultural continuity and economic resilience. By preserving and promoting traditional crafts, Ngwaland can strengthen its cultural heritage while contributing to local and national sustainable development. The study therefore concludes that indigenous craftsmanship should be recognised as a vital resource for economic empowerment, cultural diplomacy, and environmental sustainability in contemporary society.

Endnotes

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16. Interview with Uche Ihenukwumere, Clan Head, 76 years, at Mbutu Ukwu village, Isiala Ngwa South, Abia State, 24/8/2025.
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