

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Indigenous Basketry Furniture Art in Upper West Region of Ghana: Opportunities and Sustainability

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Abstract

Basketry, as an artistic discourse, is one of the enviable indigenous heritage arts that evolves with society and is still of great relevance in contemporary African civilisation. Although the primary historical reason for the perpetuation of basketry art in many ancient African societies was largely utilitarian, the scope of basketry has since metamorphosed beyond its functional focus to include aesthetic, economic, and many opportunities that are geared toward meeting the sociocultural and economic needs of African societies. The focus of this qualitative case study was to investigate the opportunities and sustainability of indigenous basketry furniture artistic practices in the geographical context of the Upper West Region of Ghana. Thematic analysis of triangulated data generated from twenty-seven (27) conveniently sampled experts reveals the use of local technology and ingenuity in the indigenous basketry furniture artistic practices in the Sissala West District, Sisaala East and Jirapa Municipalities in the Upper West Region. The study also

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found that the indigenous basketry furniture products (lounge chairs, beds, dining tables, local market tables among others) the ready market thereby providing lucrative economic gains to the artisans. The study concludes that the indigenous basketry furniture art in the Sissala West District, Sisaala East and Jirapa Municipalities in the Upper West Region of Ghana is an economically viable vocation that provides decent livelihood to its practitioners. The artisans are, therefore encouraged to seek governmental and non-governmental funding to expand the frontiers of the vocation within global sustainability dictates for massive employment and industrial production.

Introduction

In the field of Visual Arts, basketry is a three-dimensional art that involves the weaving of pliable materials and their allies into suitable (decorative and utilitarian) artefacts for the benefit of a given society. Historically, basketry is one of the oldest crafts and owes its roots to the evolution of human society (Okay, 1932). It is for this and many other reasons that the production of indigenous basketry artefacts such as; hats, mats, domestic containers, furniture, and others still abound in many, if not all, contemporary African (Ghanaian) societies. Although the primary historical reason for the perpetuation of basketry art in many ancient African societies was largely utilitarian in nature (for winnowing, carrying the harvest from the farm, serving dry foods, and storing/preserving farm produce), basketry art has since metamorphosed beyond its functional focus to include aesthetic, economic and other benefits (Musiza, 2022; Witkamp, 2013). It could, therefore, be said without any iota of contradictions that basketry has evolved with many opportunities that are geared toward meeting the sociocultural and economic needs of African societies. In contributing to the scope of scientific knowledge on basketry as ancient art and its metamorphosis, studies have contextually examined the functionality, aesthetic, economic, cultural, and other opportunities associated with basketry art (Wemegah, 2022; Baskets of Africa, 2022; Wemegah, Asante & Kquofi, 2020; Wemegah, Kquofi & Asante, 2020; Mutungi, 2017; Ayuure, 2016; de Vletter, 2001) as well as the materiality and alternative production techniques of basketry art (Raycheva & Angelova, 2017; Asmah, Vyas & Koomson, 2016; Wemegah, 2014; Osei & Osei-Poku, 2014; Osei, 2011). Motivated by the regular exportation of Basketry products in Bolgatanga in the Upper East Region of Ghana, Asmah et al.

(2016) study adopted a pragmatic approach aimed at introducing new technologies and practices to the artisans in Bolgatanga to help improve the quality of Bolgatanga basketry products that meet the ever-changing demands of the export market. Although Asmah et al. (2016) study introduced a new technological approach to Bolgatanga basketry art to boost export incomes, neither did the scope of the study cover all the regions in Ghana nor did the study involve indigenous basketry furniture production creating geographical and contextual gaps. Filling the geographical and contextual gaps associated with Asmah et al (2016) study is to variously examine basketry practices in the other remaining regions of Ghana from diverse dimensions including a focus on the economic and sustainability of the indigenous basketry furniture artistic practices in Ghana which is the focus of the current study. Also, Wemegah's (2022) study took an ethnographic approach to document the miscellanea of basketry artefacts produced over the years by the Gurene people in the Upper East Region of Ghana. The author established fascinating basketry artefacts produced in the study area including; "jewellery baskets, laundry baskets, shopping baskets, trays, rattles, fans, pouffes, and fruit baskets. Others are; décor baskets, waste paper baskets, sweet baskets, pot baskets, baby baskets, wine baskets, umbrella baskets, pet baskets, bags and coasters" (Wemegah, 2022, p. 13). It was reported that the afore-stated basketry products received (inter)national patronage thereby creating "employment opportunities for the manufacturers, leading to income generation, foreign exchange earnings for the country [Ghana] and the promotion of tourism in the Gurene communities (Wemegah, 2022, p. 27). Since the scope of Wemegah's (2022) study was delimited to the documentation of miscellanea of basketry artefacts of Gurene people in the Upper East Region of Ghana, as in the geographical scope of Asmah et al. (2016), re-echoes the call for various studies to be conducted on basketry practices in other regions of the country to bridge both the geographical and contextual gaps. From a cultural viewpoint, Wemegah, Asante and Kquofi (2020) investigated the repertory of basketry motifs and their symbolism in the Gurene socio-cultural system. It came to light that the basketry motifs reflected coded pieces of information regarding the cultural thoughts, creativity, heroic achievements, cosmological leanings, and philosophical thoughts of the Gurene people of the Upper East Region of Ghana. Since Wemegah, Asante and Kquofi's (2020) study is geographically delimited to the Upper East region, it suggests that similar semiotic studies could be conducted on the basketry art of the other regions in Ghana to equally reveal their diverse cultural repositories. In experimental perspectives, Osei and Osei-Poku (2014), and Osei (2011) studies, conducted in Kumasi Metropolis in the Ashanti Region of Ghana, focused on how domestic loom could innovatively be used to weave basketry structures and products from natural and man-made materials. Their studies open up the need for further research to be conducted on alternative and innovative materiality and production techniques of basketry practices in Ghana which forms part of the current study. From an economic purview, Noren's (2013) study, observed that single mothers in

the Upper East Region of Northern Ghana have taken advantage of the economic opportunity associated with basketry art to rake in lots of income through the production and sale of various categories of indigenous basketry articles. Similarly, Ayuure's (2016) study, which assessed the contribution of the basket weaving industry to poverty reduction, established that the art is economically productive although high interest rates and stringent collateral requirements involved in accessing bank loans and other challenges affect the development of the basketry industry in the Bolgatanga municipality in the Upper East Region of Ghana. In concurrence, the Ghana Investment Promotion Authority (GIPA) (2019) observes that the basketry vocation contributes to reducing rural-urban migrations among the women folks of Bolgatanga in the Upper East Region of Ghana. It has also been argued that basketry craft production and exportation is a major source of foreign exchange revenues, accounting for 20% of Ghana's export trade (GIPA, 2019). If properly harnessed, the basketry vocation can contribute to transforming Ghana's economic fortunes by eradicating poverty in rural areas where the art is practiced (Ali & Davis, 2018).

Although the empirical evidence, herein discussed, reveals the cultural semiotics, employment, and economic opportunities of basketry art with specific reference to the Upper East Region and Ghana at large, there is a paucity of scholarly documentation on the indigenous basketry furniture artistic practices in the context of the Upper West Region of Ghana. To fill the geographical and contextual gaps herein revealed in literature, the current study explores the opportunities and sustainability of the indigenous basketry furniture artistry of selected Sisaala and Dagara craftsmen in the Upper West Region of northern Ghana. Specifically, the study investigates the materiality and production techniques of the art; its economic opportunities; cultural manifestations, and sustainability.

Literature Review

Theoretical Model

In examining the indigenous basketry furniture production in the Upper West Region of Ghana, which has environmental sustainability implications, the study was situated within the global sustainability context. Historically, sustainability as a concept of global concern emerged in the 1970s but attained a substantial shape in the report issued in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development - WCED (Liu & Shu, 2020; Herath & Rathnayake, 2019; Klarin, 2018; Dryga, et al., 2016; Muhanna, 2006; WCED, 1987). In that report, WCED (1987) raises global awareness and concern for the negative impact of humans' socioeconomic activities and their negative implications for the natural environment and human survival, thereby, requiring the setup of long-term sustainable development goals that prioritise environmental protection and

conservation in all human sociocultural and economic developmental endeavours. This offers the vision of a well-balanced complement between human socioeconomic growth and environmental sustainability as opposed to the view that more of the former and less of the latter (Muhanna, 2006). In this wise, sustainability requires humanity’s deliberate move to obtain desirable socioeconomic development without endangering the natural environment. Therefore, pursuant to WCED’s (1987) pioneering advocacy on the need to prioritise environmental sustainability in all spheres of human endeavours, a plethora of divergent environmental innovation, eco-innovation, green innovation, and sustainable innovation theoretical and conceptual frameworks abound (Barghouti & Chiva, 2022; Pichlak & Szromek, 2021; Loučanová & Olšiaková, 2021; Tamayo-Orbegozo et al., 2016; Díaz-García, González-Moreno & Sáez-Martínez, 2015; Joller, 2012). However, the study was framed in the eco-innovation strategic model promulgated by Tamayo-Orbegozo et al. (2016).

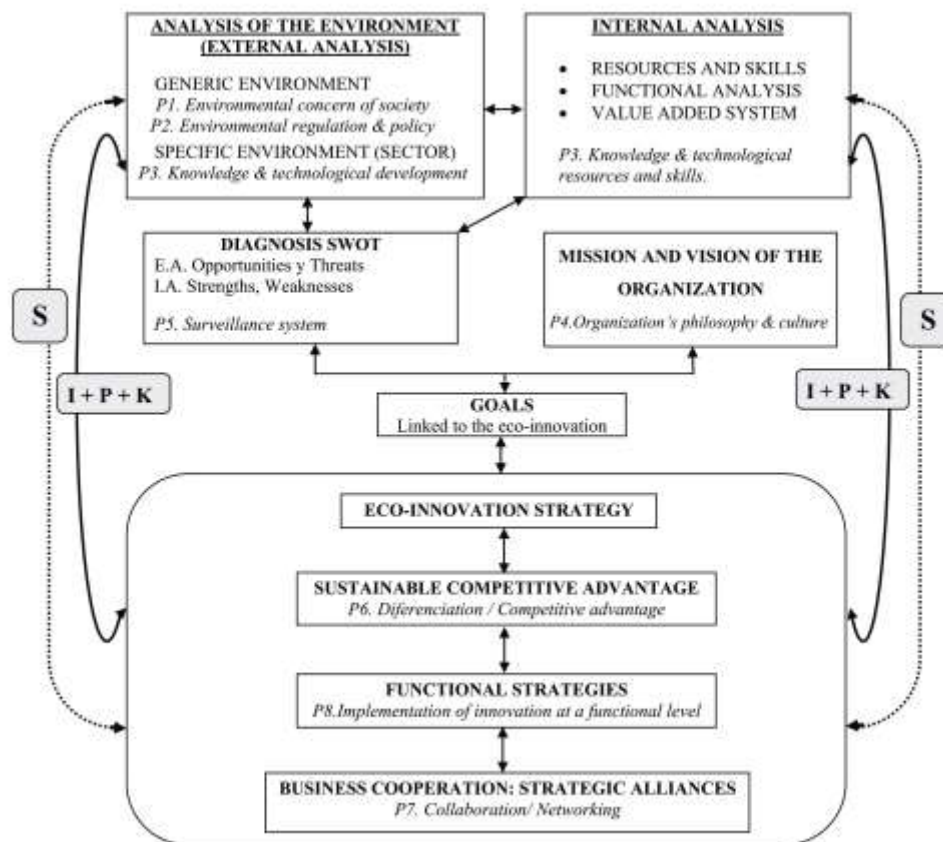


Figure 1: Eco-innovation Strategic Model (Source; Tamayo-Orbegozo et al., 2016).

The model (Figure 1) employs a dynamic set of externally and internally interdependent series of diagnostic factors that prioritise environmental sustainability in every human socioeconomic endeavours (Tamayo-Orbegozo et al., 2016). While the external diagnostic factors take into

consideration the environmental concerns, legislation, knowledge inflow, and level of technological development; the internal factors encapsulate resources and skills analysis, value-added systems, opportunities, threats, and the general organisational surveillance to establish strategic axes of eco-innovation that favours human sociocultural and economic development in a much more naturally conserved environment. Based on the aforementioned dynamism of the eco-innovation strategic model (Tamayo-Orbegozo et al., 2016), it provided a suitable framework for the study which focused on the economic and sustainability of the indigenous basketry furniture art in the Upper West Region. The adoption of the eco-innovative strategic model was imperative because the materiality of the indigenous basketry furniture art in the Upper West Region is primarily sourced from the natural environment which requires the deployment of strategic eco-innovation dynamism, as outlined by Tamayo-Orbegozo et al. (2016), to sustain the art for economic gains while prioritising environmental sustainability for posterity. By so doing, the indigenous basketry art in the Upper West Region of Ghana would have been well-situated within the expected threshold of eco-innovation which incorporates innovative production processes and eco-friendly cyclical management methods to produce novel or improved artefacts that prevent and/or substantially reduce environmental risk, pollution and other negative impacts on the natural environment (Barghouti & Chiva, 2022; Tamayo-Orbegozo et al., 2016; Sarkar, 2013; Joller, 2012; European Commission, 2010).

Basketry Art and its Opportunities

Basketry, as an artistic discourse, is one of the enviable indigenous heritage arts that evolves with society and is still of great relevance in contemporary civilisation. Studies corroborate that basketry is one of the ancient Visual Arts primarily utilised by all aboriginal groupings of human civilisation (Wemegah, Kquofi & Asante, 2020; Kepe, 2003; Okay, 1932). The term, basketry, is generic in nature and transcends the weaving of baskets as may be loosely misconstrued. Wendrich (1991) affirms that basketry “is used by experts as an umbrella term to encompass varied woven articles crafted from assorted vegetative fibres of limited length” (as cited in Wemegah, Kquofi & Asante, 2020, p. 17). Generally, basketry represents a type of handicraft associated with the processing of local plant materials (grass, stalks, leaves, willow, cane, corn stalk, rice stalk, mulberry, and others) to produce woven products in the form of household utensils (storage baskets, basket trays, basket bowls, and others); furniture (tables, chairs, foot rests, and cradles); architectural accessories; fashion accents; traps; cages; hats; mats, sandals, and others (Wemegah, 2022; Wemegah, Asante & Kquofi, 2020; Wemegah, Kquofi & Asante, 2020; Food and Agricultural Organisation-FAO, 2019; Kepe, 2003; Terry, 1999). Some of these hand-woven basketry articles are revealed in Figure 2 A, B, C, D, E & F. However, in this contemporary creative worldview, the scope of basketry materiality and production methods has widened to include the use of synthetic pliable materials such as plastics and others (Raycheva & Angelova, 2017; Osei & Osei-Poku, 2014; Osei, 2011). Just as the scope, materiality, purpose, and

production methods of basketry have situated basketry beyond its ancient limitation to utilitarian and cultural relevance to include economic and employment opportunities. Studies concord that the basketry industry in contemporary civilisation has become an economic venture for many people, hence, reducing unemployment, underemployment, and poverty in societies that prioritised commercial basketry production (Wemegah, 2022; Wemegah, Asante & Kquofi, 2020; Wemegah, Kquofi & Asante, 2020; GIPA, 2019; Ali & Davis, 2018). This sector has effectively absorbed jobless labour, clearly including both primary and secondary sources of employment in both urban and rural locations (Baskets of Africa, 2022). According to Terry (1999), craftwork, including basketry, accounted for one-third and 40% of the labour force in Abidjan and Colombia, respectively. Artisans and craft pursuits supplied income to 30-50% of the people in rural villages (GIPA, 2019). This, unequivocally, demonstrates that the craft sector, including the basketry business, offers abundant employment and generates an income-active labour force for nations. Similarly, 5% of Namibian women who work full-time in the official sector make extra money through basketry (Terry, 1999). The World Bank (1978) reveals that the revenue inflows from commercial basketry production are substantial. For instance, in Zimbabwe, one appliqué sewing effort pays women the minimum urban industrial wage, while sellers of baskets, pottery, and brooms earn far more than those who participate in petty selling (Terry, 1999).



A. Leather-decorated Basket
(Source: Wemegah et al., 2020).



B. Hand-woven Hats
(Source: Wemegah et al., 2020).



C. Bucket-shaped Basket
(Asmah et al., 2016).



D. Basket Bowl
(Source: Asmah et al., 2020).



E. Shopping Basket
(Source: Wemegah, 2022).



F. Basket Tray
(Asmah et al., 2016).

Figure 2(A,B,C,D,E&F): Assorted Hand-woven Baskets Produced in Upper East Region of Ghana .

In summary, basketry is one of the oldest Visual Arts with diversified opportunities in view of its massive job creation, economic significance, and sociocultural dimensions.

Basketry Furniture Art

Basketry furniture art entails divergent materiality and creative stylistic designs. Common basketry furniture artefacts found at resort centres, restaurants, homes, offices, and other places include but are not limited to; lounge chairs, garden sofas, rocking chairs, swing or hanging chairs, children's chairs, coffee tables, book étagères, coat hangers, flower stands, wickerwork stands, television stands and beds (Keico, 2022; Sika-Design, 2022; Raycheva & Angelova, 2017; Osei, 2011) as observed in Figures 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 &12. These aforementioned basketry furniture artefacts are made of natural and synthetic materials such as; wicker, webbing, cane, rope, rattan, bamboo, straw, stakes, leather strips, polyethylene strips, felt, laser-cut, leather, and others (Sika-Design, 2022; Ali & Davis, 2018; Koico, 2022; Osei & Osei-Poku, 2014; Osei, 2011). Because basketry furniture art is based on the core notion of basket weaving, some of the designs produced bore a strong similarity to basket weave patterns and designs such as plaiting, twining, plaiting, and others. Some design makeup of basketry furniture art includes; closed spherical, open basket, floral basket designs, tubular, mesh patterns (Raycheva & Angelova, 2017), and many other contemporary design makeups.



A. Television Stand



B. Chair

Figure 3(A&B): Hand-woven Rattan Furniture produced in Kumasi of Ghana (Source: Osei, 2011).

In the Kumasi Metropolis in the Ashanti Region of Ghana, Osei and Osei-Poku (2014), and Osei (2011) established that rattan canes of varied sizes are the primary raw materials used in weaving television stands, living room furniture, and other types of basketry artefacts. While Figure 3A shows a hand-woven rattan television stand with a basket tray placed atop, Figure 3B is a rattan chair both of which are produced in Kumasi (Osei, 2011). It was also revealed that

cane, Bamboo, and rattan are popular non-timber forest products (NTFPS) that have been used in rural communities in Ghana for several decades in the production of household items including furniture stools, tables, beds, chairs, and many others (Pentsil, Tekpetey, Owusu, Appiah-Kubi & Acquah, 2017). Figure 4 (A&B) displays some hand-woven cane furniture products in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana (Pentsil, Tekpetey, Owusu, Appiah-Kubi & Acquah, 2017).



A. A Set of Living Room Cane Furniture



B. Artisans Weaving Cane Furniture

Figure 4(A&B): Cane Furniture Production in Accra of Ghana (Source: Pentsil et al., 2017).



A



B

Figure 5(A&B): Hand-woven Alanis Dining Chair of Indonesia (Source: Sika-Design, 2022).

Figure 5 (A&B) presents a hand-woven Alanis dining chair sourced from the original collection of Sika-Design (2022). Alanis is a luxurious wicker chair in Danish design and part of Sika-Design's original collections (Sika-Design, 2022). As observed in Figure 5A&B, the Alanis chair is fully hand-woven in sustainable Indonesian rattan (Sika-Design, 2022). Sika-Design argues that the use of rattan to produce the Alanis dining chair (Figure 5A & B) ensures the highest quality and durability of the furniture. Rattan is described as being a solid and indestructible material much more suitable and sustainable for basketry furniture production as compared to bamboo which

is hollow (Sika-Design, 2022). Sika-Design adds that the chair (Figures 5A & B) is suitable for the ordinary home, conservatory, and cottage as well as for hotels and restaurants.



Figure 6: Ratta Hand-woven Nanny Rocking Lounge Chair designed by Nanna Ditzel in Indonesian (Source: Sika-Design, 2022).

Nanny rocking lounge chair, as observed in Figure 6, is designed by Danish distinguished furniture designer, Nanna Ditzel, and handcrafted in Indonesian sustainable rattan (Sika-Design, 2022). Sika-Design explains the rocking lounge chair (Figure 6) which is the handiwork of skilled wicker workers was designed in 1969 but had never previously been in production until Sika-Design launched it in February 2013 at the Stockholm Furniture Fair. The Nanny rocking chair could be used in the living room or in a cottage (Sika-Design, 2022).



A



B

Figure 7(A&B): Franco Albini Hand-woven Rattan Ottoman. (Source: Sika-Design, 2022).

Ottoman (Figure 7) is designed by Franco Albini and handmade in Indonesian sustainable rattan (Sika-Design, 2022). Franco Albini (1905-1977) was a classic architect and furniture designer who produced a wide range of worldly-renowned furniture designs such as the ottoman (Sika-Design, 2022). Sika-Design clarifies that the ottoman type of hand-woven furniture was initially

made of rattan by skilled wicker workers in nature colours making it suitable for every occasion. It could be used in the living room or in a summer cottage, but also adds atmosphere to any hotel lobby (Sika-Design, 2022).



Figure 8: Anna Exterior Side Table (Source: Sika-Design, 2022).

The hand-woven anna exterior side table with glass atop (Figure 8) is designed by Sika-Design. It is part of Sika-Design's romantic Georgia Garden collection and was inspired by the British colonial style and classical Danish wicker furniture (Sika-Design, 2022). Sika-Design explains that the handcrafted side table (Figure 8) was made of weather-resistant art fibre which makes it very strong and suitable for outdoor private, hotel, and/or restaurant use. It was stressed that the side table could be left outdoors all year round and requires no maintenance, and that, its 8 mm tempered glass makes it easy to clean and more durable than ordinary glass (Sika-Design, 2022).



Figure 9: Michelangelo Daybed (Source: Sika-Design, 2022).

Michelangelo (Figure 9) is a Danish-designed elegant daybed suitable for use in homes, cottages as well as hotels (Sika-Design, 2022). The detailed and beautiful winding design makes the Indonesian handmade rattan furniture (Figure, 9) a cozy, quality, and durable indoor and/or outdoor artefact.



Figure 10: Woven Coffee Table



Figure 11: Woven Side Table

(Source: Keico, 2022).

While Figure 10 displays a beautiful vintage Keico coffee (side) table, Figure 11 reveals a Keico's side table. Keico is a renowned manufacturer of rattan and bamboo products in Vietnam (Keico, 2022). Both tables (Figures 10 & 11) are handmade of rattan. Keico notes that Figure 10 could be used as a coffee or dining table as well as for decorative purposes, whereas, Figure 11 is used in the living room, bedroom, and outdoors. Besides their durability, the two hand-woven rattan furniture are eco-friendly, and natural in colour (Keico, 2022).



A Rocking Chairs



B Accent/Arm Chair

Figure 12(A & B): Vietnam Hand-woven Rattan Chairs (Source: Keico, 2022).

Figure 12 A and B are Keico's 2022 collection of a variety of elegantly hand-woven wicker rattan furniture models for both indoor and outdoor usages (Keico, 2022).

Methodology

The study sought to examine the Indigenous basketry furniture production in the Upper West Region of Ghana. Geographically, the Upper West Region is located in the Guinea Savannah Zone of northern Ghana consisting of eleven (11) Municipalities/Districts. These include; Sissala West District, Sissala East Municipal, Jirapa Municipal, Lambusie District, Daffiama-Busie-Issah District, Nandom Municipal, Lawra Municipal, Nadowli-Kaleo District, Wa East District, Wa West District, and Wa Municipal as observed in Figure 13. The region is chiefly populated by Sisaala, and Dagara/Wala ethnic folks as well as other minority ethnic groupings. Out of the aforementioned eleven (11) Municipalities/Districts, the Sisaala ethnicity largely resides in Sissala Sissala West District, East Municipality, Lambusie District, Wa East District, and parts of Daffiama-Busie-Issah District with the remaining districts/municipalities in the Upper West Region being majorly domiciled by Dagara/Wala ethnicity (Navei, 2022).

Although a feasibility study conducted by the researchers evidently revealed that indigenous basketry furniture art has been in practice in the Upper West Region of Ghana for several decades, the study narrowed its lenses to focus on selected indigenous basketry furniture art establishments in the Sissala West District, Sisaala East, and Jirapa Municipalities as mapped out in Figure 13. Specifically, the study investigated the materiality, production practices, economic opportunities, sociocultural relevance of the art as well as its sustainability. Since the study focused on different indigenous basketry furniture production establishments in the Upper West region, qualitative multiple-case study design was befittingly employed. The deployment of qualitative multiple-case study design allowed the study to compare and contrast the uniqueness and diversities (Yin, 2018; Creswell, 2014) associated with the indigenous basketry furniture artistic practices between and among the selected cases under investigation. Twenty-five (25) indigenous furniture artisans, two key officials of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) responsible for Sissala West, Sissala East, and Jirapa Municipalities in the Upper West Region totaling twenty-seven (27) participants were sampled using expert and convenient types of sampling. All the sampled indigenous basketry furniture artisans were seasoned practitioners with at least two decades of field experience. The inclusion of the EPA officials was to seek their expert views and required technical support regarding the environmental sustainability implications of the indigenous basketry furniture artistic practices in the study area. With such caliber of seasoned practitioners as the respondents of the study, triangulated instruments (interview, observation & photography) were utilised for empirical data elicitation. The use of multiple data collection instruments (triangulation) enhanced the trustworthiness and authenticity of the findings of the study as contended by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Data collected were thematically analysed employing Creswell's (2014) thematic data analysis procedures of organising, transcription, reading, and familiarisation, generating themes, coding, and short quotations. During data analysis and/or presentation, research participants were

pseudonymised to protect their confidentiality and anonymity, a practice that is ethically in tandem with qualitative research methodology (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012).

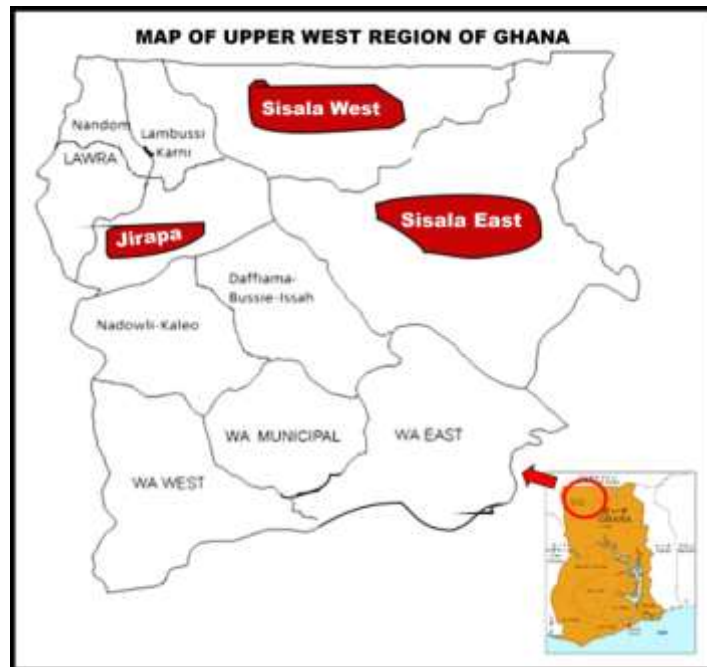


Figure 13: Upper West Regional Map with the Study Areas Marked in Red (Source: Adapted from JICA, 2016).

Results and Discussion

This section of the study presents an analytical discussion of the key findings of the study. The discussion is empirically presented in themes regarding the materiality, production practices, sociocultural relevance, economic opportunities, and sustainability challenges of the indigenous basketry furniture artistic practices in the Sissala West District, Sisaala East and Jirapa Municipalities in the Upper West Region of northern Ghana.

Tools and Materials

The study found that the tools and materials used in weaving indigenous furniture in the study area are locally sourced. Table one presents some of the basic tools and materials and their uses in the furniture art production processes.

Table 1: *Tools and materials*

Tool/Material	Uses
Cutlass	A tool used in harvesting and smoothening the weaving stakes.
Hacksaw	A tool used for cutting stakes to the desired length.
Carving axe	A tool used in trimming excess stakes after weaving.
Hammer	For nailing thick stakes into a skeletal framework of the furniture.
Plier	A tool used in cutting bicycle spokes into improvised nails.
Mitragyna parvifolia	The primary material used in weaving the indigenous furniture.
Neem Stakes	An alternative material for the furniture construction.
Nails	For nailing the skeletal framework of the furniture.
Leather Thongs	The primary weaver used in weaving the furniture. Furniture woven with leather thongs is stronger and more durable.
Nylon/Rope	An alternative weaver used nowadays due to scarcity of leather.
Binding Wire	An alternative binding material used in place of leather thongs or Nylon rope.

(Source: Fieldwork, 2022).

Some of the basic tools and materials and their associated uses, as outlined in Table 1, are variously observed in Figure 14 (A, B, C, D, E & F). The study observed that all the twenty-five (25) artisans used the identified tools and materials (Figure 14 A, B, C, D, E & F) at various stages of the indigenous furniture production at their respective weaving establishments, thus; at Jirapa in the Jirapa Municipality, Tumu in the Sissala East Municipality, and Wiiro in the Sissala West District in the Upper West Region of Ghana.



A: Plier, Hammers and Cutlasses



B: Hacksaw



C: Nails/Improved Bicycle Spoke-Nails



D: Nylon Rope



E: *Mitragyna Parvifolia* Stakes



F: Neem Stakes

Figure 14 (A, B, C, D, E & F): Basic Tools And Materials Used in Constructing Indigenous Furniture in the Upper West Region of Ghana (Source: Fieldwork, 2022).

Indigenous Furniture Weaving Processes

The synchronic analysis of the field notes and the interview data revealed three primary phases in the construction of indigenous Furniture amongst all the artisans contacted in the Upper West Region of Ghana. These included the pre-production phase; the production, and the post-production phase.

Pre-Production Stage

The pre-production stage entailed harvesting the stakes from the required plants in the bushes and preparing them into the desired shape and length of stakes. It came to light that after the harvesting of the weaving stakes in the bushes, they were conveyed home in donkey carts, on motorbikes, and sometimes on bicycles. The artisans consensually contended that it is not every plant's stakes that are suitable for indigenous basketry furniture construction. Rather, the *Mitragyna parvifolia*, known in Sisaali as *vokeh* and *yilaa* in Dagaare, was mentioned as the notable plant suitable for indigenous furniture construction mostly found in valley areas or river

banks. However, due to the overwhelming demand and the case that it takes several seasons to regrow, the *mitragyna parvifolia* plant is becoming extinct and remains uncommon to support the indigenous furniture weaving activities. As a result of the uncommonness of *mitragyna parvifolia* plant, the *azadirachta indica* (neem) stakes are alternatively utilised, which in most cases are also harvested at distanced places. Freshly harvested stakes (Figure 15 A) are left for a few days to desiccate before they are scrapped, peeled, and sized (Figure 15 B) with a cutlass ready for the production phase. While the selected indigenous furniture artisans in Sissala West District, Sissala East and Jirapa Municipalities in the Upper West Region largely rely on the use of neem stakes in the absence of *mitragyna parvifolia* stakes, which sustainability is not guaranteed, Indonesian, Danish and Viennese furniture artisans utilise cultivated bamboo and rattan plants in producing a variety of basketry furniture which are found to be durable, solid and easy to access (Sika-Design, 2022 & Keico, 2022). In the instance of the durability and easy accessibility of bamboo and rattan in the case of Indonesia, Denmark and Vietnam, the indigenous furniture producers in the Upper West Region could seek EPA's expert assistance to embark on a sustainable means of cultivating the plants primarily used for their furniture construction while also exploring the possibility of rattan and bamboo cultivation to sustain their furniture weaving vocation.



A Freshly Harvested Neem Stakes for the Construction of the Skeletal Framework of the Furniture.



B. Prepared Neem Spokes to be Woven onto the Skeletal Framework of Indigenous Chairs.

Figure 15 (A & B): Neem stakes (Source: Fieldwork, 2022).

Production Stage

During the production stage, the artisans vividly demonstrated the various weaving activities involved in indigenous furniture production. Basically, the weaving processes appear similar across all the artisans observed in the study area. The study herein photographically presents a step-by-step production of a basketry chair as demonstrated by one of the artisans in the Tumu township (Figure 16 A, B, C, D, E, F. G. H. I. J, K, L & M).



A. Measuring and Cutting of Stakes Using Old Furniture as a Guide



B. Construction of the right Arm Stand



C. Construction of the Left Arm Stand



D. The Right and Left Arm Stands Nailed Together



E. Ready for the Construction of the Backrest



F. Construction of the Backrest with the Two Back-posts



G. Fixing the Top Rail



H. Finishing the Skeleton by Nailing all Seat Rails



I. Completed Skeleton Ready for Weaving



J. Twine-Weaving of Small Spokes onto the Skeleton



K. Trimming the Top of the Chair with a Carving Axe



L. Trimmed and Ready for Top and Apron Rails Fining



M. The Finished Lounge Chair.

Figure 16(A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H,I,J,K,L,&M): Step-by-Step Production of a Basketry a Chair as Demonstrated by an Artisan in Tumu (Source: Fieldwork, 2022).

Post-Production Stage

This stage of the indigenous basketry furniture production in the Upper West Region of Ghana centres on the marketing and sale of the products. The study ascertained that all the artisans contacted were in commercial production. While others, after weaving, market the artefacts by exhibiting them along main roads, other artisans carry the furniture to market centres and other social gatherings for sale. None of the artisans had adopted an online marketing strategy contrary to the artisans of Indonesia, Denmark and Vietnam which market and sell their bamboo, and rattan basketry furniture online (Keico, 2022; Sika-Design, 2022). The online sale strategy could also be adopted by the indigenous furniture producers in Sissala West District, Sissala East, and Jirapa municipalities to attract both national and international patronage. Some of the indigenous basketry furniture produced and marketed in the study area are herein presented in Figure 17(A, B, C, D, E & F).



A. A set of Indigenous Lounge Chair with Dining Table for Sale in Tumu



B. Indigenous Lounge Chairs Displayed for Sale in Jirapa



C. Indigenous Dining Chair Produced in Jirapa



D. An Indigenous Bed Produced in Jirapa for Sale



E. Local market Table Produced in Tumu for Sale



F. Dining Table Produced in Tumu for Sale

Figure 17 (A, B, C, D, E & F): Some Selected Indigenous Woven Furniture Produced for Sale in the Upper West Region of Ghana (Source: Fieldwork, 2022).

Sociocultural Relevance of Indigenous Basketry Furniture Products in Upper West Region

The analysis of the accounts of all the respondents indicates that the indigenous basketry furniture products are common to members of the society and do relate to the daily sociocultural affairs of the people of Sissala West District, Sisaala East, and Jirapa Municipalities. With specific reference to the locally woven Lounge chairs (Figures 16M, 17A, 17B), the respondents variously corroborate that such chairs provide comfort to users as their design structure appears similar to some of the rattan and bamboo fashioned lounge chairs of Vietnam, Indonesia and Denmark, as observed in Figures 6, 9 and 12A (Keico, 2022) 7 Sika-Design, 2022). One of the respondents postulates that:

The locally woven lounge chairs I produce are the much-talked-about furniture due to their sociocultural utilitarian relevance. Users attest that they are very relaxing and comforting for which popular reason they are commonly referred to as lazy chairs. If you want to see the social and cultural relevance of the chairs, visit rural households and you will note elderly folks and other respected people commonly relaxing in

them. Also, patients suffering from specific sicknesses preferably seek comfort in these chairs. Additionally, as part of the mourning rites of Dagara funerals, corpses are customarily staged in these local chairs for three (male) or four (woman) days and mourned before burial is conducted. (Dagara respondent 1, Personal Communication, January 20, 2022).

The exposition suggests the day-to-day interrelatedness of the indigenous basketry chairs to the sociocultural life of the Jirapa (Dagara) people of the Upper West Region of Ghana. Although the Sisaala respondents corroborated the comfortability of the locally woven lounge chair and its lazy chair nomenclature, its usage in staging corpses is not universally the case in Sisaala culture. The Sisaala respondents revealed that although cross-cultural influences have led some Sisaala communities to conveniently stage corpses in the locally woven lounge chairs in contemporary times (Figure 18), the actual indigenous corpse-staging furniture, known in Sisaali as *suudaboreh*, is a long flat wooden carved bench.



A. A Dagaaba local Chair
Produced in Jirapa Municipality



B. Sissala Local Chair Produced
in Wiiro, Sissala West District

Figure 18 (A&B). Dagaaba and Sissala Local Chairs used in Staging Corpses during Traditional African Funeral Rites (Source: Fieldwork, 2022).

Also, other basketry furniture products such as beds, dining tables, and local market tables (Figure 17 D, E, F), are commonly used by both the Dagara and Sisaala people in the study area. In general, the social relatedness of the indigenous basketry furniture art to the daily lives of the Sisaala and Dagara people of the Upper West Region of Ghana resonates with some of the basketry furniture produced in Kumasi, Accra, Denmark and Vietnam suitably used in living rooms, conservatories, hotel's lobby, restaurants, and cottages (Sika-Design, 2022 & Keico, 2022; Pentsil et al., 2017; Osei-Poku, 2014; Osei, 2011).

Economic Opportunities of Indigenous Furniture Art in the Upper West Region

The study found that the indigenous basketry furniture art engaged by the people of Sissala West District, Sissala East and Jirapa municipalities in the Upper West Region of Ghana provides massive economic opportunities for their livelihood. The respondents variously and verily corroborated that the art provided both direct and indirect employment to many people in the Upper West Region.

Frankly, I make reasonable economic gains from indigenous furniture production. Yes! I make lucrative earnings from it. In fact, customers' orders for various basketry furniture products are overwhelming and I find it difficult to meet. People think that I am wasting my time as I am engaged in this vocation little do they know that its income is enough to fund my wards' education and cater for my family's basic necessities. Look! Though the prices of my woven furniture do vary from time to time, as we speak, a single lounge chair [Figure 16M] costs GHC50 but GHC 75 when paired with a dining or coffee table [Figure 17A]. Also, a bed [Figure 17D] costs at least GHC80 depending on the size and customer's preference. The cost of a coffee table [Figure 17F] is GHC25, whereas a local market table [Figure E], depending on its size costs GHC40. (Sisaala-respondent 2, Personal Communication, January 25, 2022)

Although the various categories of prices ascertained in the field regarding the basketry furniture products are generally similar, there appear to be a bit of differences in the price quotations. However, the range of price variations is minimal falling between GHC 40-60 for a single lounge, Ghc 20-30 for a coffee table, GHC 75-90 for a bed, and the local market tables go for GHC 30-45. This makes the indigenous basketry furniture art an economically viable vocation for the Sisaala and Dagara people of the Upper West Region of Ghana. This resonates with the findings of plethora of studies that corroborate that economic engagement in handicrafts production, such as basketry art, creates direct jobs, reduces poverty among artisans, improves the standard of living, enhances livelihoods, reduces rural-urban migration, reduces social vices such as stealing, and provides happy and decent work for the artisans (Wemegah, 2022; Amenuveve, 2021; Wemegah, Kquofi & Asante, 2020; Wemegah, Asante & Kquofi, 2020; Ghana Investment Promotion Authority, 2019; Ali & Davis, 2018; Ayuure, 2016; Asmah, Vyas & Koomson, 2016; Noren, 2013). In furtherance, it is argued that the basket industry has created foreign exchange for Ghana, increased gross domestic product through production, and accelerated the economic fortunes of the country (Wemegah, 2022; GIPC, 2019). Per the economic opportunities revealed, it is imperative for the basketry furniture industry players in Sissala West District, Sissala East, and Jirapa Municipalities to collaborate in devising innovative means to harness the job creation, economic opportunities, and sustainability of the art.

Sustainability Challenges of the Basketry Furniture Art in the Upper West Region

In exploring the indigenous basketry furniture artistic practices in the Upper West Region of Ghana, a critical sustainability challenge emerged as a key finding of the study. Thus, although indigenous furniture production is economically booming in most centres visited in the Upper

West Region, the study generally observed that the primary raw material, *mitragyna parvifolia*, neem stakes, was harvested in the bushes without any sustainable plans for their restoration. A respondent asserted that:

As *mitragyna parvifolia* plants have become uncommon, neem stakes are alternatively used for the production of woven furniture due to their straightness and malleable characteristics. And because the natural environment is the main source of neem stakes, their access has also become a daunting challenge these days. They are now very scarce. I have to travel long distances to get suitable neem stakes for the work. (Sisaala respondent 3, Personal Communication, January 18, 2022).

The reason why practitioners are left with no option but to glean fresh neem stakes at distanced bushes for basketry furniture production is that it takes seasons for previously pruned (harvested) plants to regrow. This threatens the sustenance of the art as well as contravenes the eco-innovation advocacy framework that calls for a well-balanced complement between human socioeconomic activities and environmental sustainability as opposed to the overly focus on the former to the detriment of the latter (Barghouti & Chiva, 2022; Pichlak & Szromek, 2021; Loučanová & Olšiaková, 2021; Liu & Shu, 2020; Herath & Rathnayake, 2019; Klarin, 2018; Dryga, et al., 2016; Tamayo-Orbegozo et al., 2016; Díaz-García, González-Moreno & Sáez-Martínez, 2015; Joller, 2012; Muhanna, 2006; WCED, 1987). In affirming the environmental sustainability implications associated with indigenous basketry furniture production, the regulatory officials of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) responsible for the study area revealed that such small-scale economic activities do not warrant permits from their outfit. However, the EPA respondents indicated their readiness to offer the required technical support to the artisans to ensure that they operate within the environmental sustainability threshold. This includes EPA liaison with the forestry department for seedlings of varied species under the *Green Ghana* flagship policy of the government of Ghana for the artisans to restore the already degraded lands. Under the circumstance, the EPA respondents added that it falls within the mandate of EPA to assist the artisans to deliberately indulge themselves in eco-innovation strategic practices that incorporate a dynamic set of externally and internally interdependent series of diagnostic factors that prioritise environmental sustainability as canvassed by Tamayo-Orbegozo et al. (2016). Some of these external diagnostic factors would have to take into consideration the environmental concerns, existing legislation, knowledge, and technological expertise of the artisans, whereas, the internal factors should focus on resources and skills analysis, value-added systems, opportunities, threats, and the general organisational surveillance of the indigenous basketry furniture artistic practices in the study area to establish a practically sustainable axes of eco-innovation that favours the sociocultural and economic benefits of the art in a much more naturally conserved environment (Tamayo-Orbegozo et al., 2016). One such eco-innovation strategies worthy of adoption by the artisans is the cultivation of *mitragyna parvifolia* and neem plantations to serve as a ready source that guarantees the sustenance of the art. The EPA-respondents consensually contended that establishing raw material plantations is in the right direction, particularly, neem plantation would be an easy establishment considering the case

that neem plants are not attractive to animals and so could easily survive, multiply within a short period of time and grow naturally provided the artisans are willing to embark in such an environmental sustainability exercise. The willingness of the artisans to establish raw material plantations would require EPA to liaise with the forestry department to raise adequate seeds/seedlings of such suitable plants for planting/transplanting. Alternatively, rattans, and bamboo could be explored as such materials are variously and conveniently sourced for furniture production in Kumasi and Accra in Ghana (Pentsil et al., 2017; Osei & Osei-Poku, 2014; Osei, 2011), Indonesia, Denmark, and Vietnam (Sika-Design, 2022 & Keico, 2022). Rattans and bamboo would have been suitable, however, the EPA respondents observed that though small quantities of bamboo are dotted in some communities, interest in bamboo propagation is relatively new to the locality of the Upper West Region as compared with southern Ghana.

Even under the Ghana Landscape Restoration Project that EPA is implementing, this year [2023], we are supposed to plant bamboo but we did not get bamboo cuttings to plant in the communities where we are planting other trees. Although soil, landscape, and climate suitability factors are matters of important consideration, we are currently challenged with how to get the sustainable supply of bamboo cuttings to attempt large-scale propagation across the region (EPA respondent 1, personal communication, August 10, 2023).

It means that establishing bamboo plantations to sustain indigenous furniture production is a challenge in the Upper West Region as a result of the difficulty involved in accessing bamboo cuttings for propagation. It, therefore, suggests that EPA will have to do further engagements with the necessary authorities to ensure that the Upper West Region gets its fair share of bamboo cuttings for propagation under the Ghana Landscape Restoration Project. The successful propagation of bamboo, neem and other suitable plants by EPA, with the support of the artisans, would practically and strategically situate the indigenous basketry furniture art in the Upper West Region of Ghana within the best confines of eco-innovation practices.

Conclusion and Implications for Practice

The focus of this study was to investigate the opportunities and sustainability of indigenous basketry furniture artistic practices in Sissala West District, Sisaala East, and Jirapa Municipalities in the Upper West Region of Ghana. An in-depth discursive analysis of the results reveals that the tools and materials used in weaving the indigenous furniture are locally sourced. Examples of such basic tools and materials include; axes, cutlasses, hacksaws, hammers, pliers, stakes, nails, leather thongs, nylon, among others. It was also observed that the twined weave style was commonly used by all the practitioners to produce articles which include but are not limited to; lounge chairs, beds, dining tables, and local market tables. The aforementioned basketry furniture products meet ready market thereby providing lucrative economic gains to the artisans for a decent livelihood. It could therefore be concluded that the indigenous basketry furniture

art in the Sissala West District, Sisaala East, and Jirapa Municipalities in the Upper West Region of Ghana is an economically viable vocation that provides decent livelihood to its practitioners. The artisans are, therefore, encouraged to seek governmental and non-governmental funding to expand the frontiers of the vocation to employ many people in the region for industrial production.

Although the indigenous basketry furniture vocation is economically booming in all the centres studied, for which reason its frontiers need expansion, the sustainability of the vocation is not guaranteed. This is because the suitable primary raw materials, *mitragyna parvifolia* or neem stakes, are difficult to come by as it is gleaned in the bushes without any sustainable restoration plans. This threatens the sustenance of the art as well as negatively impacts the conservation of the forest ecology of the natural environment. Considering the socioeconomic impact of the art, there is a need for the indigenous basketry furniture practitioners of the study area in the Upper West Region to seek EPA's expert assistance to either cultivate *mitragyna parvifolia* or neem tree plantations to serve as a ready material source, or explore the feasibility of rattan and bamboo propagation for alternative raw materials, as conveniently practiced in other parts of Ghana (Kumasi & Accra), Indonesia, Denmark, and Vietnam. To ensure the sustainability of the art for massive job creation and economic empowerment of many people in a much more naturally conserved environment, EPA's expert intervention is critical but with the absolute support of the artisans to take advantage of the Green Ghana flagship programme, and the Ghana Landscape Restoration Project and other environmental sustainability schemes that focus on planting many different plant species including those needed for the indigenous furniture production in the Upper West Region of Ghana. For future research endeavours, state-of-the-art studies could be variously conducted in the remaining districts/municipalities that were not covered by the current study for a more comprehensive understanding of the economic opportunities and sustainability of the indigenous basketry furniture artistic practices in the Upper West Region of Ghana. Such studies could focus on various aspects and types of basketry artefacts produced in the region, their functional, aesthetic and tourism opportunities as well as the readiness of governmental and non-governmental agencies to support the industrialisation drive of the art for economic gains and job creation in the region.

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