Arts and Livelihood: The Case of Sculpturing and Weaving in Kedjom Chiefdoms in the Western Grassfields of Cameroon

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Abstract

**Purpose:** Arts is a source of livelihood in all societies and one of the major reasons artists produce objects is to sell and raise an income. This paper is on arts and livelihood: the case of sculpturing and weaving in Kedjom chiefdoms. Kedjom is one of the centres of wood carving in the Grassfields with the artists producing all sorts of carvings which include beds, thrones, stools, walking sticks and many more. This trade was regarded by the young people in the past as a job reserved for old people. But today, youths have found out that the trade is lucrative and many of them are currently engaged in it. This paper therefore explores the significance of these economic activities (sculpturing and weaving) in the livelihood of the people in particular and the chiefdom in general.

**Methodology:** Data for this paper was collected using both the qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative method was employed through participant observation, in-depth interview, focus group discussions, life histories and photography. The quantitative method was used through the questionnaires.

**Findings:** Weaving in general is an important art in Kedjom chiefdoms and cane basket production in particular is considered the traditional craft of the Kedjom people, a skill that everyone in the chiefdom ought to know. This trade (cane basket activity) is learned free of charge because the missionaries who introduced it to the first persons free of charge.

**Conclusion:** These two domains of art (wood carving and weaving) are income generating activities and the finances obtained from the sales of art objects is used to build houses, send children to school, provide medical services for the family and much more.

**Recommendation:** The people of Kedjom could benefit more if they could create arts’ cooperatives or common initiative groups to market their products. Considering the fact that arts is a source of employment, the government of Cameroon could provide subsidise to the artist to perfect as well as improve on their production.

**Key words:** Arts & livelihood, sculpturing, basketry, Kedjom Chiefdoms, Western Grassfields
INTRODUCTION

Western Grassfields people in general and Kedjom people in particular are engaged in several economic activities ranging from farming, wood carving, weaving, to hunting. All these occupations help the people alleviate poverty as well as increase the people’s living standards. This paper concentrates on two of the above listed arts domains: sculpturing (wood carving) and weaving. Art is an activity or a product that portrays human creativity, simply put art is the manifestation of human creativity. Arts is a very important part of every culture as Boas (1927) notes the man and arts are inseparable. Tylor (1871/1958:1) defines culture as ‘…that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.’ Livelihood is defined as a set of activities essential to everyday life that are conducted over one's life span. Such activities could include securing water, food, medicine, shelter, and clothing. An individual's livelihood involves the capacity to acquire aforementioned necessities to satisfy the basic needs of themselves and their household. The activities are usually carried out repeatedly and in a manner that is sustainable and providing of dignity (https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/accessing-community-rights-and-livelihood-through-tourism/17274). For instance, an artist’s livelihood depends on his or her artistic creative.

The Western Grassfields is a region that corresponds to the Anglophone North West Region of the Republic of Cameroon as shown in figure 3. The part of Grassfields that was under English Administration known as the ‘Bamenda Grassfields’¹ (Warnier, 1975: 43). The territory is characterised by high plateau with an altitude ranging from 1000m to 1800m which lay on either side of a volcanic mountain range – running south-west and north-east from the Gulf of Guinea to the Tibati, whose highest regional peaks are Mount Bamboutos (2740m) and Mount Oku (3008m). With a surface of roughly 16,800 square kilometres. The Western boarder is separated from the Upper Cross River basin by a sharp escarpment. A range of hills runs north-east to the Gayama gap and divides it from the basin of the Katsina Ala River. It is partially marked off from Takum area and south-western Adamawa by an arc of mountains (Eyongetah & Brain, 1974). The natural vegetation of this region consists of short and tall grasses with raffia and oil palms growing along the courses of the rivers and streams and banana trees surrounding the compounds.

¹ ‘Bamenda Grassfields’ after World War 1, Cameroon a former German colony was divided into two: one part (the greater part) was put under French administration under the League of Nations Mandate, while the Western remaining part was mandated to the British who administered it as part of Nigeria. The part of the Grassfields that was under English rule was called ‘Bamenda Grassfield.’
Figure 1: Map of Cameroon in Africa

Figure 2: Map of Western Grassfields in Cameroon

Source: Helvetas Cameroon
Drawn by Paul Mbadi on 14/09/2011

Figure 3: Map of Tubah Sub Division in the Western Grassfields

Source: Helvetas Cameroon
Drawn by Paul Mbadi on 14/09/2011
NkwI and Warnier (1982: 12) note that most chiefdoms in the Grassfields have traditions regarding their origins. According to these traditions, the chiefdoms of the Western Grassfields can be classified under five headings, depending on their origins: the Tikar, the Widekum, the Bali-Chamba, those who claim yet other origins outside the Grassfields and the aborigines.

**Geography of Kedjom Fondoms**

Kedjom chiefdoms commonly called Babanki² are located in Tubah Sub Division in Mezam Division in the Western Grassfields of Cameroon. There are two chiefdoms that make up Kedjom: Kedjom Keku and Kedjom Ketingu as demonstrated in figure 4.

![Map of Kedjom chiefdoms in Tubah Sub Division](image)

**Figure 4: Map of Kedjom chiefdoms in Tubah Sub Division**

*Source: Helvetas Cameroon*

*Drawn by Paul Mbadi  14/09/2011*

² Babanki is a degenerated form of the nickname Banki that is derived from ‘nki’. During their war with neighbouring villages, apart from traditional weapons of guns, bow and arrows, cutlasses, they used occult powers too. A critical code phrase could be used during the war, ‘vulu a vu-nki’ or vu-nki lu’ which means ‘let’s attack them like the whirlwind’. The word ‘Nki’ means whirlwind’. Later on, neighbouring villages also nicknamed the Kedjom people as ‘Ba-nki’ – ‘those people who attack like a whirlwin’. The name further degenerated to Babanki. When Germans came to Cameroon, especially in the Grassfield, they attached the prefix ‘Ba’ to most villages to mean ‘the inhabitants of’ in the Mungaka (Bali) language. The original name of these people is Kedjom. The misinterpretation of Babanki to mean ‘basket makers’ as would be translated from Mungaka is false (Mundi, 2000: 55).
Kedjom Keku literally means ‘Kedjom in the forest’ as the area they settled in was forested. She is situated in the north-east of Bamenda some 15 kilometres from Bamenda, the regional capital of the North West Region. With an estimated population of about 20 000 inhabitants, she is bounded to the north-west and south-east by Bafut, to the east by Bingo (Kom) and the south by Bambui. Kedjom Ketinguh on the other hand literally means “Kedjom under the rocks, or under the stones.” She is located in a fertile valley surrounded by steep mountains of volcanic rocks. She is situated in the Ndop Plain, east of Bamenda, 18 kilometres from Bamenda. Bamessing, bounds Kedjom Ketinguh to the east, to the south by Balikumbat, to the north-west by Bambili, and to the north by Bambui.

History of Kedjom Chiefdoms

Oral tradition holds that Kedjom people came into the North West Region from the north-east. They had migrated from an area east of Lake Chad, settled by Lake Chad, then moved southwest to the Adamawa Plateau, north of Bankim, then migrated into the North West Region through Nso, Oku, Ndop Plain, Kom and are now settled where they are. Kedjom people are of the Tikari stock which also includes Bafut, Banso and Kom among others. Kedjom chiefdoms split into two following the squabbles surrounding death celebration and the organisation of the fon’s dance – the annual dance.

The Political Organisation of Kedjom Chiefdoms

All the peoples of the Grassfields are organised in chiefdoms of different sizes. Most of them are independent (Warnier, 1975: 42). There is distribution of power between fons, regulatory societies and lineage heads. Kedjom chiefdoms are all patrilineal and highly ranked societies. The political system is based on hereditary traditional authority and access to power is highly determined by direct descent. On the political strata of these chiefdoms therefore, the kwifon comes first followed by the fon, notables and quarter-heads.

The kwifon is a distinctive feature of the political system of all Grassfield states. Among its duties is the recruitment of boyhood of the palace retainers from freeborn commoners. Its authority is of an impersonal kind and its agents cannot be held to account by the populace. In some parts of the Western Grassfield, especially in Kedjom, it takes decision and gives instructions on very important matters about the chiefdom. It has prerogative powers to enthrone or depose a fon and to exile evil-doers from the chiefdom. The removal of pollution is the prerogative power of the kwifon.

The fon in Kedjom chiefdoms is called fon. He lives in ntoh or palace, the storage place of village property and cultural heritage. He is father of all and unifies the people around himself. The fon is exceedingly prestigious and regarded as being quite apart from other human beings. He is sacred; he performs rituals and ensures that they are appropriate conducted to guard against outside threats (Nkwi and Warnier, 1982: 61). The fon is assisted by a few senior titleholders such as tiloh – sub chiefs and mvifon – titular mother of the fon. The tiloh is usually referred to as the hereditary rulers, council of elders or clan heads. Being very instrumental in their various chiefdoms, they work hand in hand with the fon in the management of the chiefdom. They are the fon’s advisers; they appoint and crown a successor when a fon is ‘missing’ and they are equally the core of the kwifon society. Mvifon supervises the royal wives and also exercises significant leadership over the women of the entire ‘country’.
The Socio-Economic Activities of Kedjom People

The Kedjom people are engaged in diverse socio-economic activities. These activities which keep them busy every day is a source of livelihood to many. Some of these economic activities include farming, arts, livestock and hunting and gathering.

Arts

Kedjom people were essentially blacksmiths, woodcarvers and weavers. The art of blacksmith has died out leaving only sculpturing and weaving. These arts are among the main economic activities of the Kedjom people coming after farming. In this area, craft has been developed to a remarkably high level. Almost everyone is involved in it - young and old, males and females. The craft industry in these chiefdoms used to be very lucrative providing self-employment to many people. The two art aspects this paper handles are sculpturing and weaving.

Sculpturing

Wood carving or sculpturing is a prominent art practiced in Kedjom today. Authors have commented on the artistry of Kedjom sculpture. Northern (1973:66), Nkwi and Warnier (1982: 49) and Knopfl (1999: 14) assert that best-known carving centres in the Western Grassfields were and still are, the two Babanki (Kedjom) chiefdoms. This domain of art is done mostly by the men producing objects ranging from bas-relief on board, masks, stools to thrones. These different items they produce bear various symbols. Stools and thrones, for example are designed with motifs of the lion, the tiger, the elephant, the leopard and many others.

Weaving (Basketry)

Weaving is one of the domains of art that Kedjom people are engaged in, producing woven objects of all sorts; fibre bags, cane, raffia bamboo and Indian bamboo baskets, cane jars, dishes, palm wine pots, caps and thatches. The production of cane objects is a male activity. Cane basket production as already mentioned above is considered the traditional craft of the Kedjom people, a skill that everyone in the chiefdom ought to know. This trade is learned free of charge because when it was introduced by the missionaries, it was taught to the first persons free of charge so too it has been handed down from generation to generation. Indian bamboo baskets are produced by the men and used mostly by women. Woven items such as palm wine pots and dishes are done exclusively by the women.

The Religion of the Kedjom People

Kedjom people are polytheistic, that is, they belief in multiple religions. In these chiefdoms, there is the African traditional religion, Christianity and Islam. The majority of Kedjom people are animists, a religious belief which consists of worshipping gods, spirits and sacred forces. They believe that these spirits could bless them as well as harm them. They have gods such as the gods of the rain, harvest, water, fertility, protection and the village god. Some of these gods could be reached through various forms such as stones, trees and carved objects which are well protected.

Christianity, brought in Kedjom by white missionaries is the belief in the Almighty God. Those who practice this religion are called Christians. They believe that God is the creator of the
world and everything therein. By so doing, we have to give praises to Him. Christianity is propagated by many religious bodies such as the Catholics, the Presbyterians, the Baptists and so on.

The Fulani population here, mostly located at Sabga, practice the Islam religion. The word Islam means voluntary “Submission” or “Surrender” to the will of God (Allah). Those who practice this religion are called Muslims. They believe that God sent prophets to teach mankind how to worship Him, and the last of the messengers was Muhammad (peace be upon them all). (http://www.whyislam.org/submission/prophethood-in-islam/prophet-muhammad-pbuh/). The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that arts especially sculpturing and weaving is a means of livelihood to very many Kedjom natives both the young and the elderly.

METHODOLOGY

Data for this paper was collected using both the qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative method was employed through participant observation, in-depth interview, focus group discussions, life histories and photography. Under participant observation, being an artist himself, the researcher took part in the production of some sculptured works such as stools, thrones and houseposts. This permitted him to have first-hand information on the length of time taken by an artist to produce an item. He also participated in the marketing of some of the objects manufactured by these artists. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with 60 artists; 40 wood carvers and 20 weavers to understand the economic benefits derived from arts, that is, the amount of money an artist raises from a single object and how this money is used in the upkeep of the family. The researcher brought together some artists in a Focus Group Discussion to throw light on arts as means of livelihood. A digital camera was used to snap the several activities of the artists, production and marketing of art objects. The pictures snapped gave more credibility to the information collected in the field. Questionnaires were established for both sculptors and weavers and the questions on the questionnaires had to do with the production of articles, the length of time taken to produce an object, the cost of the different items and the varied ways the income raised in the art activity is used. Data for the paper was analysed soon after field work was over, using content analysis. Data was interpreted using the theory of cultural materialism of Marvin Harris. The theory was used to demonstrate how artists in Kedjom use art objects to satisfy their needs, that is, they use arts as a means of livelihood.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This paper handles two major art activities (wood carving and weaving) which serve as income generating occupations to both male and female artists. It is true that those involved in these activities also do farming and other economic activities alongside arts. Income generated from sculpturing and weaving is used to educate the children, construct houses, take care of the health of family members as well as pay bills. In the paragraphs which follow, I am going to demonstrate how arts serve as a means of livelihood to Kedjom artists.

Arts as a Means of Livelihood to Kedjom Artists

This portion of the paper deals with two aspects, the activities of sculptors and weavers and how these activities are a means of livelihood. The majority of artists in Kedjom are sculptors and weavers, with carvers making up about two-thirds of the population of artists. Wood carvers, who are all men, do carving as their major jobs although at some periods they do other odd jobs like farming, tapping, barbing and business to supplement their income. Most of the artists testified (focus group discussion, Wednesday 24th February 2020) that wood carving has been and is still an admirable job in Kedjom chiefdoms. In the days of old, the carver was held
in high esteem in his community, he was showered with honours and wealth by the fon, notables and customary societies not only because of his craftsmanship but also because of the people for whom he worked. The carver enjoyed the protection and the privileges of the palace (Knopfli, 1999: 14). Certain fons, were carvers themselves, a fact that provided further evidence of the high esteem in which wood carving was held in Kedjom.

Northern (1973: 66) and Blackmun et al. (2001: 349), observed that some fons have had considerable reputations as carvers. For instance Fon Vugah 1 and Fon Phuonchu Aseh of Kedjom Ketinguh (Notue, 2000: 60) and Fon Vibangsi of Kedjon Keku of Kedjom Keku. Fon Vibangsi trained many Kedjom people, in the trade of woodcarving. Another fon in the Western Grassfields who was a famous carvers was Fon Yuh of Kom (the author of afo-a-kom - ‘thing of kom’). All these fons are ‘missing’ but before their loss, they had initiated or handed down this knowledge to some of the princes and village folks who are the main promoters of this aspect of culture in their different cultural milieus.

Important to note is the fact that apart from the fons, princes, some notables, other people involved in this trade were mature men, men of a certain age (50 years and above who were ordained by the chiefdom to carve. At such an age therefore, the people considered that this or that person could make a good carver because of his mastery of the culture. One’s knowledge of the culture thus was one criterion for the recognition of a good sculptor. Added to this, it was very rare and almost impossible to find a carver or the son of a commoner engaged in the profession. Carvers had to come from the royal lineage (Notue and Triaca, 2000: 58/ 2005: 52).

The arts of Kedjom especially wood carving and weaving have gained a lot of reputation that even some Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) found interest in sculpturing and made some attempts to encourage the carvers in the domain of tree provision and planting. Heifer International Cameroon in 2003 offered some young germinated trees for carving to the people of Kedjom keku most especially to the sculptors. These trees consisted of fueh or coridial platithyrsa, maesopsis, notonia and others. Interested persons were free to take as many as one hundred trees. Heifer International Cameroon bought these trees from some sculptors and famers in Kedjom who nurse and sell to sculptors, NGOs and individuals interested in planting them. Moses Toh, a carver resident in Kedjom Ketinguh (figure 5) and Ernest Vugah, a non-carver residing in Kedjom Keku usually nurse these trees in large numbers – three hundred, five hundred and even one thousand of them.

Figure 5: Nursed fueh (Cordia platithyrsa) and other tree types.
Source: Tikere 10/7/2020
Young boys got involved in wood carving due to two major reasons, unemployment and the fall in coffee prices. Lack of jobs was one of the main motives why many young men got involved in the occupation of wood carving. In the mid-1980s, there was an economic crisis in Cameroon. This had so much influence on the finances of people; civil servants and non-civil servants alike. Parents in Kedjom who could only manage to send their children to school (primary and secondary) started finding life difficult, considering the large family sizes as many parents gave birth to up to nine children. Another depressing event that happened during this same period was the fall in the price of coffee (on the World Market), the major cash crop of Kedjom people. Due to this drop in coffee prices, the cooperatives were abandoned to themselves with almost if not all coffee farmers converting their coffee plantations into plantain and banana farms. This again was a serious blow to the local Kedjom man who could only struggle to live from hand to month, depending only on crops obtained from the farm, for survival.

These two events, made many parents to encourage their children from secondary school, and those who were to go to college for the first time to learn wood carving and weaving. Parents saw a trade at the time to be a better option, where their children could gradually after seven or eight years of training depending on the trade to become self-employed. They saw the fees that they were charged for apprenticeship affordable since some masters asked their trainees to pay 50,000 francs annually. The number of youngsters who came into the trade increased drastically. Knopfli (1999: 22) notes that many young people were interested in it because they found this job to be an income generating activity. Sculpturing that was considered by young people, as a job that did not have any value, a job that was tedious, mean and dirty, suddenly became one they could rely on for livelihood. Before then, handicraft especially carving was looked down on.

Artists engaged in arts production, note that, they are in the first place commodities; products which can be traded, bought or sold mainly to acquire income. But before pre-colonial times, carvings were not manufactured for economic purpose, they were mainly to serve the chiefdom in varied domains, with most of them having political and magico-religious functions. This explains why many of the palaces in the Grassfields of Cameroon had to ordain those who carved objects in the tribal style, articles which conformed to the tribal tradition of designs, motifs and symbols. With colonisation, carved items were highly priced by tourists and art collectors and this made these cultural artifacts to become highly in demand that many sculptors and chiefdoms started using them as commodities.

The economic importance of trade in sculpture is therefore a very recent development per say, and this could largely be due to the fact that Grassfields carvings including those of Kedjom are famous for their aesthetic qualities. These elaborately carved articles, made for both daily and ceremonial use, are objects of frequent exchange among the various chiefdoms of the Grassfields. The commercialisation of these art items is done exclusively by the male folk just like the activity itself. The female do not take part in this line of business because of the taboo that surrounds the production and usage of such articles. But the latter are highly engaged in the production and commercialisation of arts in the likes of embroidery and basketry. That is, women make up the bulk of those involve in the manufacture and selling of embroidered costumes, and woven vessels except for the cane basket fabrication.

There are several types of woven objects produced in Kedjom, these include dishes, baskets (bamboo baskets and cane baskets), trays, bowls and flower jars. This paper lays emphasis on baskets made from cane and those fabricated with bamboos. Cane baskets production is an activity performed exclusively by the male folks. These artists carry out their job in an open
space usually around the market where their articles could be exposed for people who come to the market can see (figure 6).

Figure 6: Cane baskets production

Source: Tikere 29/12/2021

The prices of these baskets vary depending on the style used in its fabrication. Baskets which are loosely woven are less expensive as compared to those that are tightly woven. The figures 7, 8 and 9 is a demonstration of a few of the cane baskets produced in Kedjom and their approximate prices. The first cane basket in figure 7 which is loosely woven, costs 2500FCFA and according to some of the weavers, three of these baskets can be produced a day. Two of the tightly woven (figure 8) can be manufactured in three days. This means that if an artist devotes all his time in the production of the first loosely woven cane basket, he will earn about one hundred and twenty thousand (120,000) francs a month and he will earn approximately one hundred and fifty (150,000) francs a month if he is engaged full time in the fabrication of the tightly woven basket.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit price = 2500 FCFA</th>
<th>Unit price = 7500 FCFA</th>
<th>Unit price = 5000FCFA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7: loosely woven basket</td>
<td>Figure 8: Tightly woven basket</td>
<td>Figure 9: Tightly woven basket</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Source: Tikere 29/12/2021
The male as already discussed above are those engaged in the making of cane baskets but the female are the principle manufacturers of bamboo baskets except for the basket in figure 9 which is produced only by the male. The baskets in figures 10 and 11 are tightly woven baskets, the prices of these baskets may vary from one weaver to another but most of them testify that the unit price is five thousand (5.000) francs. Although they may cost the same, the basket in figure 11 requires much more work than the basket in figure 10. A full time weaver can produce the basket found in figure 10 in two days meanwhile it will take three days to fabricate the basket in figure 11. The artist engage in the making the basket in figure 10 will earn about a sixty thousand (60.000) francs and she who produces the basket in figure 11 may earn about forty thousand (40.000) francs.

Unit price = 5.000FCFA
Unit price = 5.000FCFA
Unit price = 2.500FCFA

Figure 10: Tightly woven basket   Figure 11: Tightly woven basket   Figure 12: A loosely woven basket

Source: Tikere 12/09/2018

It is difficult to have women engaged full time in weaving since they have other responsibilities, such as taking care of the home. Many women who weave baskets note that they can produce only two baskets per week. These female weavers told the researcher that the income they acquire form their art works is used to take care of themselves as well as provide some of the needs of the house – food and other items needed in the kitchen, pay some bills and much more. Sometimes they even provides some of the school needs of their children. All the bills and contributions they do are to supplement the income which their husband raise.

Coming back to sculpturing, the researcher found out that some sculptors produce most goods on order and as a result, they never go to the market to sell their goods. People come from far and near to collect their objects at their workshops. Those who do not work often on order, carry their goods to the market where they have to bargain their prices with clients. Others artists supply their products to some handicraft shops in Bamenda such as the Presbyterian Craft Project (Prescraft) and Bamenda Handicraft Co-operative Centre. These two handicraft centres are Non-Governmental Organizations that are aimed at encouraging handicraft in the
Western Grassfield of Cameroon. Some families supply to *Prescraft* Bamenda, Presbyterian Pot Project (*Prespot*) Bamessing and out of Cameroon to Switzerland.⁴ They have a regular client from Switzerland. One of such clients is Hans Knopfli who gives them constant commands through *Prescraft* Bamenda.

The costs of sculpted products vary from one producer to another. Despite the fact that three or more artists may produce the same object for instance a bats’ head stool, their selling prices might vary. Many wood carvers for instance sells a stool of 45 centimetres diameters and 50 centimetres high for seventy-five thousand (75,000) francs meanwhile Oscar sells a stool of the same dimension at eighty thousand (80,000) francs. Sculptures like palm wine pots, thrones, statues and objects which require much work cost higher than simple stools. The palm wine pot in figure 12 costs two hundred thousand (200,000) francs meanwhile the table cost one hundred and fifty thousand (150,000) francs. These objects are splendidly decorated with different types of motifs. These items are proof of the ingenuity of the artists who produce objects with tribal designs.

![Figure 12: A palm wine pot](image1)

![Figure 13: A table adorned with traditional carvings](image2)

*Figure 12: A palm wine pot Figure 13: A table adorned with traditional carvings*

*Source: Photo: Tikere 28/7/10.*

Many of the wood carvers note that majority of the tourists and art collectors are very interested in objects such as palm wine pots (like the one in figure 12), thrones and drums (such as those below) because they are elaborately decorated in traditional motifs. These objects demonstrated in figures 14 and 15 are costly, each costing three hundred (300,000) francs.

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⁴*Prespot* does not deal with sculptures but the poles which are used to decorate *Prespot* was carved by Robert Toh. Clients who visit the place and fall in love with these poles are either directed to Rebert Toh or the *Prespot*. If directed to the *Prespot*, they take the contract and then get an expert sculptor to do the job and that is how he gets to supply goods to *Prespot*. 

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The marketing of sculptures and baskets are done at the local as well as external level. The weekly markets are not the only outlet for local artists to commercialise objects. They also sell their articles directly from their compounds, to art shops, handicraft centres, museum owners and to tourists. Although most sculptors are not full time workers, majority of them, notwithstanding their ages, are able to contribute substantially to the household income, they take care of the medical expenses of the family and relations (children, wives, grandparents, grandchildren, aunts, uncles among others), pay schools fees and apprenticeship fees of their children and other relations who are not engaged in carving.

A few of the carvers own individual art shops in Bamenda and they have employed some persons to sell in the shops meanwhile they go back to the workshop to produce more goods. Bamum traders also serve as a major market for the objects. These Bamums come to Kedjom and buy these goods in large quantities. When bought, they take them back home, modify them with beads and cowry shells and resell them in cities like Yaounde and Douala and to tourists. Some of the carvers have their brothers in Foumban who are sculptors; and such brothers help to secure a market for them there (in Foumban). Museum owners are equally potential consumers of art works. They come from all over the country, buy things that have already been produced and place commands on others. Tourists, missionaries and important personalities in the North West Region also purchase the products of artists. The construction of the Bamenda - Bambui and Fundong road made many carvers in Kedjom Keku to market their arts to the Europeans who worked on this road.

Source: Tikere 15/10/2005
Findings in the field reveal that out of above 150 sculptors I met in Kedjom, about 20 are above 50 years and have been involved in the trade for more than 25 years. Most of these elderly carvers, and many others have very good and well-built homes, some of them are on rents and they use some for their businesses.  

That is, they (the elderly artists) live in houses built from money raised principally from the trade. All of them who are married have six and more children with some having grandchildren. About 40 are between 40 and 50 years old. In this category, most are married with children. The rest of the carvers are below 40 years, some of them live in their parents houses while a few of them are on rent. The workshops of most of these craftsmen are found in their compounds but separated from the main building while a few carvers rent places out of their fathers’ compounds, for the workshop. The houses of these people are not poorly built although the predominant materials used are earth blocks and planks or young trees used as rafters. These raw materials for building are very accessible. They have compounds of six rooms and above in the main building and one to two rooms in another building reserved for the storing of carved objects.

It is important to note that carvers equip their houses with some of the stools and thrones that they manufacture. A few of them have upholstery chairs in the living room. Many of them claim that they do not furnish their houses with upholstery chairs not because they cannot purchase them but because they do not see any reason why they should do so when they could equally equip their homes with what they produce, items they will not spend money to buy. To them, sculptured objects can last longer than ‘Western’ chairs. Besides, when they are being used in their living rooms, this enables the articles to ‘done’ (as expressed in Pidgin English) or to become old to be able to fetch them much money.

Majority of the children of sculptors go to primary, secondary and the university. Many of these pupils or students who go to school are sponsored by their parents who are sculptors and weavers. Others are sponsored by their elder brothers and uncles with proceeds from their artistic activities. There are yet a few youths at the university level who testify that they started sponsoring their education since they were in high school till now that they are in the university. The income which they make from the sales of their products permit them to purchase their school needs (text books and hand outs), photocopy notes and documents, equip their rented rooms as well as pay their bills. During the holiday periods, they spend so much time producing objects because they will hardly have time during school period to carve.

Some other children with the complicity of their parents, drop out from school after primary education to learn a trade like motor mechanics, building and construction or electricity while others simply pick up carving as their own trade. Many of the inhabitants in this cultural milieu go in for vocational training. Apprenticeship fees in these different areas of training is paid by their parents for the first three years. From the fourth year till when the apprentices go through his training, his fees and other responsibilities are sponsored by him.

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5 John Chumuh for instance runs an off licence in one of his houses at Chubar (Kedjom Ketinguh), while Peter Achubum has a maize mill in his compound at Chubali (Kedjom Keku). Moses Toh and Cyprain Vibong each own a chain saw which they hire out to sculptors and non-sculptors alike.

6 Kedjom is a village setting and one thing which characterises village life is early marriage where young people marry at the age of 20 years. People who get married at such an age become grandparents even before the age of 50 years.

7 A few young carvers live on rents because to them, it is not proper to live under one’s father’s roof especially when one is doing something to earn a living. Again some of them think that when they are married, not only will their children be a kind of burden to the grandparents, their wives might not support the idea of living under the same roof with their mother-in-laws.
CONCLUSION

Arts is a key economic activity in Kedjom in particular and the Grassfields of Cameroon in general. This paper which examines arts as a means of livelihood in Kedjom chiefdoms, shows that only the male produce and market sculpted objects. The female folks are engaged in the manufacture and sell of some woven objects such as bowls, baskets (especially baskets made from bamboos), and the male are more engaged in cane basket production, an art considered a traditional art of the Kedjom people. This trade which is carried out by some as part time, others do it as their full time job. No matter whether these artists perform arts as part time bases or not, it is an income generating activity which provide money for the artists to build their homes as well as cater for them. That is, send their children to school, provide medical care for their families and ensure that there is constant food in the home. Sculpturing and basketry are highly developed in these two chiefdoms but the artists could have benefited more if these domains were transformed into industries. That is, the people of Kedjom could benefit more if they could create arts’ cooperatives or common initiative groups to market their products. Considering the fact that arts is a source of employment, the government of Cameroon could provide subsidise to the artist to perfect as well as improve on their production.

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