

Impact of Visual art on the Teenagers and Children in the Makoko Slum of Lagos State

By

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Introduction

Slums are often viewed as dangerous and no-go-zones thus, people often avoid it. However, slums exist and need the attention and contribution of people outside the environment to get better. The Makoko slum of the Lagos Mainland Metropolis in Nigeria is a community that attracts tens and even hundreds of thousands of curious visitors each year, without a noticeable impact on the community, as observed by the community Chief,

This negligence drew the attention of our group to the community, knowing that creativity can make a difference in the lives of the people particularly the children that inhabit the community. Out of passion and desire to impact our neighboring community, we resolved at using the arts (Music, Dance, and Visual Arts) which are our area of specialty to empower, mentor, restructure the mindset and build up a creative generation of children from the slum.

Our project is timely because children in low socio-economic areas often toll a path filled with violence and hardship (Sheidow, Gorman-Smith, & Henry, 2001). “Due to the inner-city youth’s exposure to violence, more and more adolescents within that environment are settling for what they are accustomed to and simply fall into a pattern of quick solutions that are not always advantageous to their future”. Many children from the slums end up in drugs, and robbery because of negligence by the society and government. Hence the introduction of visual arts to the slum dwellers to adequately engage them positively.

Visual Arts

Visual art is taken to Makoko slum by our group, not for the mere aesthetic transformation of the environment, but for the transformation of the young mind in the bid to catch them young and make them useful to the society. The role and benefits of visual arts cannot be overemphasized. The art serves as a medium of expressing man's understanding and imagination. Art is important as it is a source of fun and education. Kelly (2017) asserts: “Study of arts enhances young people’s intellectual and social development”. Art shapes and defines civilization and serves as a universal language through which individuals can express common aspirations. It also develops an individual opportunity to reason and understand the world at large. The value of arts in a given society is a philosophical assertion that cannot be measured in numbers. Art and culture illuminate our inner being as well as enrich our emotions.

Elçin Yazıcı (2017) writes, “Visual art is a social activity and it also improves the linguistic and thinking skills. Children develop awareness for looking at an artistic study, talking about what they see, using the terminology of visual art language”. Ability to express ourselves and observe other people’s creations helps us to understand that creativity is not exclusively confined to the world of art itself. It rather enables us to see the larger world through different

eyes and teaches us how to be creative and innovative in many fields not necessarily having anything to do with the Arts themselves, thus the Makoko art project is aimed at bringing out the different skill and interests in the children of the community. The visual art section was designed to achieve the following:

Discovering Creative abilities in the Children

The first challenge was meeting with teenagers with doubts about their ability and talent. They were self-conscious and suspicious about their creative abilities as expected. For this reason, we made the drawing more fun rather than competitive to get them relaxed for their potentials to be seen.

Confidence and Self Control

Having discovered their abilities, we try to make the project interesting by not evaluating the works at the end of each training, though the tasks were challenging and fun. With these methods, they got deeply involved in the level of forgetting their self-consciousness for a while. By constant practice, it becomes easy for them to acquire the art skill of drawing, painting, and sculpture which will among other values build their confidence. Also, by creating something that they could call their own, most of them gained determination that could help them overcome other life challenges.

Self-Expression and Sense of Purpose

It is a common saying that pictures speak a thousand words. The Makoko project gave the participants voice through the physical expression of their thoughts. Art formed their medium of communication and with pictures they were able to express themselves freely. Besides, admiring their creation at the end of each training, they realize that beyond art, they could fulfill other purposes in life.

Lifelong Interest

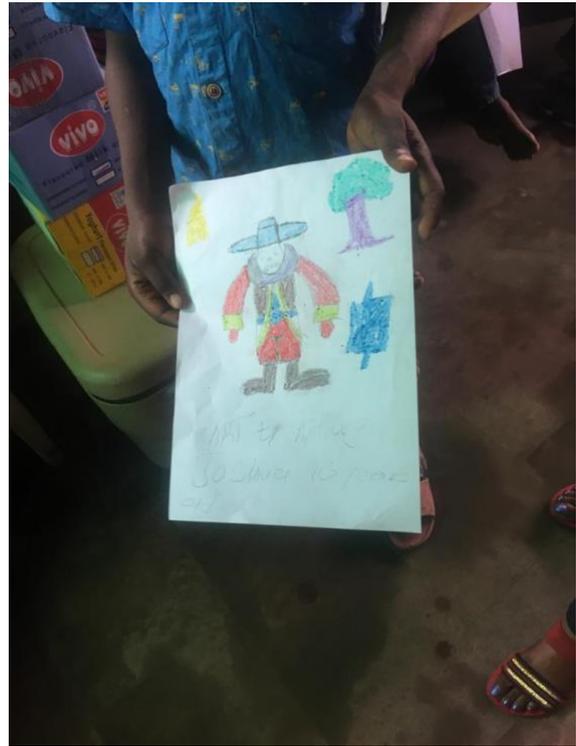
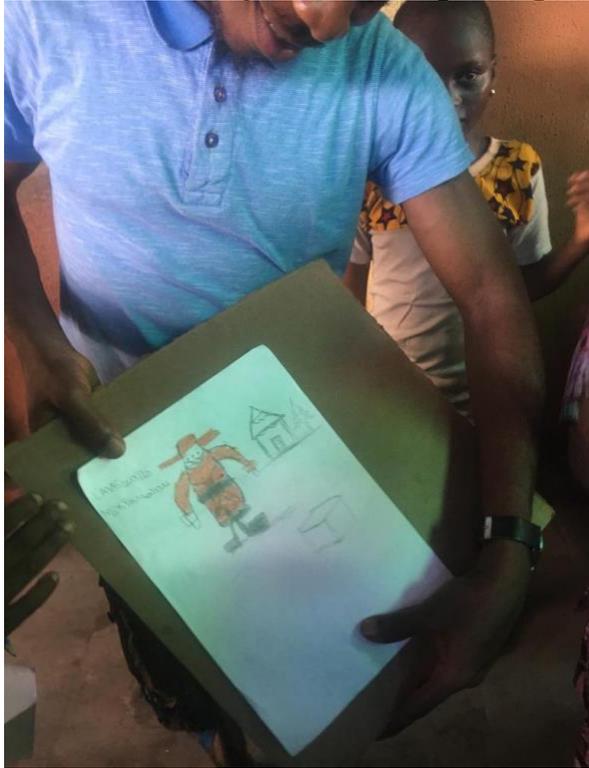
The most interesting aspect of the project is that it has allowed them to discover their interest in life and to some of them, they see it as a career opportunity. This new engagement might persist well beyond the life span of the project. Art is expected to produce a sense of value that will last for a long time in one's life, which among the aim of the project.

Conclusion

The evidence is clear that the project is contributing a great deal to the life of the Makoko dwellers. Its multiple benefits are both fun and academic in away. This project can help teenagers combat the hopeless feelings they get from their deplorable condition of living. The project also has the competence to help teenagers who are struggling with substance abuse, self-esteem, depression, and other psychological issues, positively

Ultimately, acquiring substantial skills and having a platform to develop such skills is of great importance to the psychological well-being of these teenagers. However, what is unclear to the

project coordinators, is the sustainability of the project due to funding. Lack of sponsorship can deter continuity and the teenagers might lose interest and engage in crime.



References

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