The SMOCK: Exploring an Indigenous Industry in Tamale Metropolis of Northern Ghana

Abdul-Rahim Abdulai1, Abdul-Wadudu Adam Mohammed2*, Nkrumah Isaac Kwadwo1

1Department of Planning Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology.
2Department of International Development, London School of Economics and Political Science.

*For Correspondence: Email: a.adam-mohammed@lse.ac.uk

Abstract

Textile industry has been an important source of livelihood in Ghana; however, little attention has been given to the traditional textiles sub-sector. Traditional textiles form sim portant enterprises built on cultural lines. This study assesses the traditional textile industry in Ghana, specifically the smock industry. The study examines the operations of the smock industry in Tamale Metropolis to understand its production structures. Explorative approach was adopted to get a deeper understanding of the industry. In this study, multi stage sampling involving the stratified, purposive, accidental and snowballing sampling techniques were adopted. The study revealed that, the smock industry is largely traditional and male dominated. The industry is built around its traditional structure in terms of weavers (producers of smock textiles) and merchants (producers and traders of smock garments). The main form of skill acquisition in the industry is inheritance with the dominant enterprise form being largely informal sole proprietorship. Though built on traditional structures, the industry is opening up to many people as females and different ethnicities now participate in various sections of its value chain. The drive to open up the industry also manifest in apprenticeship training giving by weavers and merchants. There is also the use of synthetic strings to weave as a way of responding to growing demand. Operations of the industry have been flexible enough to respond to changing demand of modernization to ensure it stays competitive enough in the market. Sustained efforts must therefore be made to understand the structures of indigenous industries to inform decision making.

Keywords: Traditional textiles, Smock, Tamale Metropolis, Indigenous Industry.

Introduction

The Textile and Clothing (T &C) industry is said to be one of the oldest and largest industry in the world [1]. It is the typical ‘starter’ industry for countries engaged in export-orientated or led industrialization [1]. The industry has grown in many countries like India, Pakistan and many other Asian countries and its growth is backed by its contribution to socio-economic development [2]. The textile and clothing sector has played such an important role in economic development of many countries as it create employment to absorbs large numbers of unskilled labour, typically drawing from the rural agricultural households and locations [3].

In relation to the key role played by the entire textile sector, it can be established that, its success is from the contribution of both the modern textile industry and the traditional or cottage or indigenous textiles sub-sectors. Connor emphasized that, “the performances of all industries together determine the performance of a nation’s economy” [4]. That is to say, the development of a larger entity results from the growth of its components. The traditional textile industry is a component of the broader textile industry and the development of the textile industry can be attributed to the traditional textile industry as well.
Traditional in this case refers to an inherited pattern of thought or action with its specific practice of long standing history [5]. The traditional textile industry comprises textiles that have traditional and indigenous origins. This includes textile products passed on from generation to generation. It includes textile traditions inherited from ancestors and passed on to descendants. Textile craft have always had an important social, cultural and economic impact on individuals and societies. The cultural heritage of textiles does not end with preservation and collection of costumes and other textiles in museums [6] but goes beyond to represent cultures. In the indigenous set-ups, textiles are one of the aspects of art by which people’s culture is expressed through the use of traditional fabrics. Textile and cloth production and decoration forms an important craft in many Ghanaian societies since it provides clothing to the society as a whole [7]. In Ghana, there are various textiles associated with different cultural groups. In the Ashante kingdom, the kente is known, in the Ewe land “Agbamevo” is known and in the Dagomba land and the entire Northern Region of Ghana, the smock or fugu is known. These textiles represent the people and their cultures.

The drive of modernization has always stood as a test to most traditional products including smock. Growing competition to these textiles is threat to their survival in many African countries [8-10]. Traditional textiles industries, in response to modernization, are beginning to change structures in many ways to ensure their sustainability. Considering modernization and growing dynamics in traditional textile industries, it is important to explore them to understand their states. Many research works have been carried out in this direction. In Ghana, studies related to traditional textiles have however focused on the kente industry or the general view of the entire traditional textile industry [8, 11]. However, little is known about the smock industry. This study addresses the research gap by exploring this striving traditional textile industry (The smock). Earlier study by Abdulai and Mohammed in 2015 reveals the thriving nature of the industry. It is able to expand and compete in the broader textile industry despite growing competition. The study therefore examines the smock industry to understand its operations in the context of an urban market in Tamale Metropolis. This study presents the structures that has controlled and manage its operations as well as current activities in the industry.

**Profile of Study Area**

The Tamale Metropolis is one of the 26 districts in the Northern Region, Ghana. The Metropolis is located in the central part of the Northern Region and shares boundaries with seven other districts namely the Savelugu- Nanton to the North, Mion District to the East, Tolon-Kumbungu and Sagnarigu to the West, Central Gonja to the South West and East Gonja to the South. Metropolis has a total estimated land size of 646.9 km². Geographically, the Metropolis lies between latitude 9°16 and 9° 34 North and longitudes 0° 36 and 0° 57 West [12].

The Metropolis is a Cosmopolitan area with Dagomas as the majority. Other minority ethnic groupings are Gonjas, Mumprusi, Akan, Dagaabas, and tribes from the Upper East Region. The area has deep rooted cultural practices reflected in activities such as annual festivals like “Damba” and “Bugum” which set stages for display of cultural costumes. The cultural composition of the district has a historical linkage to the smock industry in the area. The smock is a textile mostly associated with the tribes from Northern Region and with the area dominated by these people, the activities of the smock industry is not surprising. The cultural significance attached to the smock by these ethnic groups creates a great potential for the growth of the industry.

About 21.5 percent of the working force in the Metropolis is engaged in craft and trading activities [12] and the predominant craft is smock making. There are five major markets in the Metropolis namely: the Central Market, Aboabo, Kalpohini, Kukuo and Lamashegu markets. There are other satellite markets in other communities which are not very active. While the Central market is currently occupied with mini shops and stalls, efforts are being made to
upgrade the market with modern facilities and more stores to enable it meet the demands of the informal sectors including the growing smock industry

**Methodology**

In this study, the qualitative approach is largely used with a little quantitative because social as well as cultural phenomena are being studied. The choice of this method is also based on the fact that the study is explorative in nature. Exploratory study was adopted to understand how the entire industry operates. The adoption of exploratory was due to the new and limited knowledge of the nature of the industry. The study population entailed all relevant stakeholders in the smock industry within Tamale Metropolis. It included the craftsmen, merchants and consumers. Institutions like the Metropolitan Assembly and the National Board for Small Scale Industries (NBSSI) were also included.

The study made use of a multistage sampling technique. The stratified sampling, purposive sampling, accidental sampling and the snowballing technique were adopted. The industry is built around different actors; hence, strata were created for each actor category. Three main strata were considered and they included the craftsmen, merchants and consumers. Accidental sampling was employed in selecting respondents for the merchants while the snowballing was employed in selecting weavers due to their scattered nature and difficulties in locating them in the area. The study covered 120 smock merchants, 50 weavers of smock textile, and relevant institutions like National Board for Small Scale Industries and the Metropolitan Assembly selected purposively.

Both primary and secondary data sources were used for the study. Primary data was collected through interviews and observation. Primary data collected bordered on characteristics and nature of operation of the industry from various actors. Secondary data was collected by reviewing relevant materials on the subject matter already in existence. This was used to triangulate primary data and to help presenting findings in the context of previous works. Data collected was analyzed using SPSS to collate and draw frequencies for analysis. Qualitative data was analyzed through deductive inductive and deductive reasoning.

**Results and Discussions**

The section discusses the operations of the smock industry in the Tamale Metropolis of Ghana.

**Background of Respondents**

Understanding the background of respondents is relevant to give a general overview of the nature of people involved in the production and consumption of smock products. On the part of the weavers, all respondents were males indicating that the weaving sub-sector of the industry is male-driven confirming the male dominance of African textile industries [13]. Findings were not different on the part of the merchants as 98.3 percent of the respondents were males and 1.7 per cent being females. The tedious process of sewing smock garments was the main reason attributed to this. The smock industry is clearly male dominated especially in the weaving sector.

The key actors in the smock industry varied across different age groups. Considering the part of the weavers, 8 percent were within ages 0-14 while those above 65 years formed 4 percent. The remaining 88 percent of the weavers were in the workforce group (15-64) who are expected to be actively engaged in economic activities. In terms of the ages of merchants, children below 15 years were 5 percent while those above 65 formed 8.3 percent. Merchants between 14 and 65 years formed 88 percent of the merchants. This shows that, the industry provides livelihood opportunities for different categories of people including children who are currently in school and only help outside school time. The aged is not exclusion to the benefits of gained from the industry. The recording of the aged in the industry also means the industry provides some sort of safety net for the old age to improve on their living conditions. On this note, the industry provides sustainable livelihood for many people in society including the vulnerable.
Analysing the ethnic background of the respondents is very important because it is believed to form an integral part of the success of all development decisions that policy makers take. From the study, the key actors varied across different ethnic group despite the belief that the industry is cultural and so one would have expected only Northerners. About 80 percent and 63 percent of weavers and merchants were Dagombas respectively. Despite the fact that the industry is dominated by the Dagombas, other ethnic groups since other groups like the Mumprusi, Gonjas, Akan and the Moshis are not left out. The Dagombas are believed to have gotten the knowledge of smock-making from the Moshis (Field Interviews, 2014). The smock industry is open for any person to benefit from regardless of one’s ethnicity. The study findings shows that, the smock is getting acceptance and patronage from different people who are not even part of the indigenes of the North who value smocks as their cultural heritage. This is very important for the industry since it expands its market base beyond the indigenous groups of the North to a broader and wider market.

The “Fugu” /Smock of Northern Ghana

The smock or fugu is a product that is exclusive to Ghana, being fully hand woven and has its origins in the Northern regions. The smock is produced in many towns in Northern part of Ghana but most of its trading activities are concentrated in Tamale, Bolgatanga and Wa; the regional capitals of Northern, Upper East and Upper West Regions respectively. There are also established smock activities in smaller towns like Yendi, Daboya and many others spread across the three Northern regions. The smock industry has a historical origin and provides the traditional clothing of the people of the North [11]. The smock historically served as the traditional wears of people in northern Ghana but has now gotten attention in the entire country and the globe. Smocks traditionally were worn by Chiefs and king makers of Northern Ghana. They were also worn during specially occasions like festivals and casually in few areas. In these modern times, smock has become designer clothes worn by Ordinary men, women and children in Ghana and beyond [14].

“Fugu” or smock is a variety of loose garments sewn from strips of cloth woven on traditional looms in Northern Ghana. The Smocks of Northern Ghana are made of fabrics of pure cotton. Textiles of every country and tradition on earth have its own decorative Textiles [5] which make it unique. The smock mostly has white background having captivating colour stripes of different kinds and is not as complex as the “Kente” [11] found in Southern Ghana. Colours generally seen in the “fugu” fabric are formed by the warping design of the cloth with white being the predominant. This is attributed to indigenous knowledge of the relevance of colours as white colour reflects the sun rays so as to limit the heat generated. The use of white was therefore a measure to give comfort to users in the warm savannah climate in Ghana. Colours mostly used or mixed with white include blue, black and white with occasional choice of green, red, violet, yellow and brown [11]. Modern day demands are however expanding the colour choices of smocks to include almost all possible preference of users.

Similar to what prevails in many other traditional textile, smocks also have names that differentiate one weave from another. The names are assigned to different colour combinations. The most popular design is the guinea fowl pattern which is made of a pattern of white and light black or ash mix-up. Tettehﬁo notes that, apart from the guinea fowl pattern popularly known as “kpankobri”, other patterns include: “tupal-zie”, “kutorfa”, “bon-zie”, “VIP”, “bon-sabinli”, “cedi”, “tupal-sabinli”, “sanda”. The commonly known ones also include “alkila”, “abin mako”, “obarko”, “minister”, “Angelina” and many more. There are many other designs and patterns which this study cannot exhaust. These names are mostly based on the colour combinations, event for production, objects, names of persons and nature of usage. Individual weavers also assign names of their choices to designed patterns based on their own discretion [22]. Plate 1-6 shows some smock textile designs in Northern Ghana and their names [11].
Smock garments are also made in different styles and lengths with each having its distinct name. Some of the distinct types include; “banaga” (short smock with sleeves), “dansiki” (short smock without sleeves) and “kutunbi” (long outer smock with long sleeves). Combinations of these fugu types with a corresponding hat are also made and generally referred to as “kutunbi suit” (long outer smock (kutunbi) with long sleeves, short sleeveless inner smock (dansiki), trousers and hat. In some instances smock goes with a corresponding trousers referred to as “kpakoto” [22]. Below are a series of smock types with their names.
Overview of the Smock Industry

This section presents an overview of how the smock industry operates. Key actors involved in the supply of smock products are discussed. A discussion on its supply/value chain is therefore presented along with actors at each stage. The smock industry supply/value chain starts with the cultivation of cotton, mostly grown in rural areas of Northern Ghana. Cotton serves as the basic input transformed to smock textiles. Harvested cotton is turned into strings at homes. This is termed as spinning. This act is mostly done by aged women. At this stage of smock input supply, women’s role in the art of producing smock starts with the planting of the cotton seed and ends with spinning of harvested cotton into thread. In spinning, great deftness and skill are displayed by old women in the process (See Plate 9). Spinning of raw cotton is done on a spindle called “jeni” [11]. Value is therefore added to raw cotton at this stage. Modernization is beginning to catch up with this stage of the supply chain. It is virtually extinct in present days as imported synthetic strings are rather preferred to naturally spinned ones despite the superior quality of the later. This is due to the inability of the traditional style of string making to supply adequate inputs for the growing industry.

More to this, additional value is added to strings by weavers turning strings into smock textiles using generally hand looms (See Plate 10). This involved the use of techniques of interlacing longer threads with a set of crossing threads. Weavers play important roles in the smock industry. In general, all weavers in the smock industry are males. This confirms the male dominance of African textile industries [13]. This however different from what exist in the traditional weaving industry in Yorubaland where both men and women participate in the cloth weaving process [15]. The smock weaving sector gives a sense of design to the final product. It at this stage the design of the textile is determined. It is mostly based by the discretion of the weaver and to some extent, recommendations and demands by users. This is the final stage which provides the actual smock textile (See Plate 1-6) which serves as the inputs to garment section of the industry.

Smock textile, in the form of cloth or materials is transformed into garment normally called smock or fugu. There are two main actors involved in this stage (smock making) and together referred to as “smock makers/merchants”. The making of smock garment is done by individuals with the specialties and experience. Smock making is mostly carried out at homes or markets or roadside stalls by children or male adults in the form of contract with merchants who themselves are makers. It is done using hand stitching to put together materials to form the garments (See Plate 11). Recent trends in the industry are however moving towards the use of sewing
machines to perform this task (See Plate 12). This is because; the increase in demand patterns of smocks has compelled merchants to use improved technology to support hand making to improve productivity. Actors of the industry however believe in the quality of handmade smocks than machine made. This is because of the techniques and styles used by hand sewing are unique for which the machines are not able to perform. This is also because hand sewing enables smock makers to stitch materials which are thick for which the machines are unable to do.

Plate 11: Hand Smock Making

Plate 12: Work Place of Smock Merchant with displayed smocks and Swing Machine

Finished smock products are displayed for sale in several forms in the market. Merchandise of smock products is either by freelance sales or display in market stalls. Supply of smock based on individual consumer demands is also one of the commonest ways of smock trade. Recent trends have shown that smocks are sold in conferences and special gatherings in all parts of the country. The current situation however reflects that of the kente industry where modernization and changing social structures have opened up an originally sacred prohibited area to all sexes [13]. Smock trading in the Tamale Metropolis therefore includes women who sell smock like any other commodity in the open market.

Operational Characteristics of the Smock Industry

This section elaborates on the profile of the smock industry from the perspective of the key actors interviewed. Major areas of concern have to do with source of skills, forms of ownership, apprenticeship, source of startup capital, sources of raw materials, production among other key issues in the operation of the industry.

Source of Skill of Artisans

The smock industry is a traditional industry and its artisans are generally believed to belong to a particular group or family [11]. Based on this, respondents were asked about their source of skill which has made them part of the industry. The study revealed 72 percent inherited the act of weaving from their forefathers while 24 percent and 4 percent acquired the skill through apprenticeship and vocational/technical training respectively. In the case of merchants, 47 percent inherited the art of smock making, 52 percent underwent apprenticeship training while the rest (2 percent) learned the skill from vocational/technical training institutions.

The data shows that, the mode of acquisition of skills in the smock industry within the Tamale Metropolis is through inheritance and apprenticeship with an insignificant number through of vocational training. The industry, thus, involves indigenous practices that may not require formal education to acquire. One only needs to understudy someone through observation over time and through experimentation. Though this seem disorganized, it is still good for the growth of the industry as it requires less effort to learn. However, efforts to incorporate traditional textile making into formal systems could also prove beneficial to the industry.
Forms of Business Ownership in the Industry

Respondents were also asked on the forms of business ownership. Sole proprietorship was the common form of ownership as it formed 84 percent and 85 percent in the weaving and merchandise sectors respectively. Other forms of ownerships were the partnership and the family owned which recorded 16 percent and 3 percent among the weavers and the merchants respectively.

Sole proprietorship forms the basis of the industry just like many other small scale enterprises where management normally is personalized rather than being institutionalized [16,17]. These sole proprietors in the industry work on informal bases [18] and this reflects the general business operations in the country were 80 percent of labor force is in the informal sector [19, 20]. The implication of the dominance of sole proprietorship is that, decision making process will not be delayed since the businesses are mostly operated by one person. This is because; their management style is more intuitive than analytical. It is also more concerned with day-to-day operations rather than long-term plans [16] and this could prove important in decision making.

The one man show nature of the industry limits operators from getting necessary support functions that helps business with the operational depth to grow [16]. It could also affect the capital base for operation of businesses in the industry because dominance of sole proprietorship has the tendency of limit access to credit. This was confirmed by the fact that only 22 percent of the actors in the industry had ever taken a loan. In this regard, informality of the sector has resulted in the inability of operators to access loans to expand production.

Source of Raw Materials for the Industry

The success of every industry depends on the availability of raw materials. In the case of the smock industry, raw materials needed differ among the key actors. The weavers depend on strings as their raw material for production while the merchants depend on the woven textile of the weavers as their raw material. In assessing the supply of raw materials for the weavers, it was realized that all the weavers acquire their raw materials within the township of Tamale. They depend on strings sold on the open market where they buy through direct payment. One thing that was realized about the supply of raw materials to the weavers was the extinction of locally made strings which is believed to be of high quality than the imported ones.

On the part of merchants, only 15 percent of the merchants solely depend on textile within the district while the remaining 85 percent depend on those within and outside the district. In general, the smock industry in the Metropolis gets about 82 percent of its raw materials outside the Metropolis. These external raw materials come from Yendi and Daboya which are known to be the hub of smock weaving in the Northern Region. The fact the weavers get much of their raw materials from outside has a tendency of fostering corporation between the smock industry in the area and other areas. This is good for the industry in the area as interactions lead to exposure and sharing of knowledge. However, it could serve as a hindrance to smooth running of the industry due to the distance and cost of transporting raw materials. This was confirmed by merchants who cited shortage of materials as a key challenge to their operations.

Productivity and Production in the Industry

As part of assessing the operations in the industry, the production levels of the weavers and the merchants were recorded. From the study, it was realized that productivity among the weavers was very low with an average weaving of two yards per day depending on the quality of weave. Again, considerable number of factors influences the productivity and production of weavers include demand for textile, weather conditions, price levels, frequency of social occasions, availability of strings and, more importantly, the quality and type of material to be weaved.

On the part of the merchants, the number of garments made per day was one and three...
for hand sewing and machine sewing respectively. This means the productivity depends on the method of production. It must, however, be noted that, smocks sewn by hand has higher value than those sewn by machine. Other factors that influenced productivity and production of merchants were supply of textiles, demand for smocks, number of apprentices and the nature of smock to be sewn.

**Duration/Years of Experience in Business**

The smock industry is traditional and is believed to be run in the family line. As a result, people tend to be engaged in the industry from childhood. With regard to this, questions were asked to find out how long the key actors had been in the industry. About 44 percent of the weavers had been in the profession for more than 15 years. The remaining distribution years in the profession among the weavers were as follows; 0-5 years (16 percent), 6-10 years (12 percent), 10-15 years, (28 percent). In the case of the merchants, only 24 percent have been in the profession for more than 15 years. The average years of experience of weavers was 11 years while that of the merchants was 8 years.

The above explains why the weaving sector of the industry is more of a hereditary profession. Despite modernization and restructuring in the industry, the weaving sector is still more hereditary and confined to family lines. People pass on the skill to their children as they grow. The limited changes in the sector were also attributed to its non-lucrative nature which serves as a disincentive to people trying to learn it. The hereditary nature of it can make it a good avenue for investment since there is more stability in the industry.

**Apprenticeship in the Industry**

The pre-requisite for entry into the labour market is skill development and one way of achieving this is through apprenticeship. Respondents were therefore asked whether they had apprentices working under them. This was to assess how the skill is transferred to others who had not inherited it. From the assessment, 20 percent of the weavers had apprentice learning the trade under them while 92 percent of the merchants also had apprentice learning under them. A total of 58 actors had apprentices. The total number of apprentices recorded from the 58 weavers and merchants were 201 with 29 for the weavers and 198 for the merchants.

Recording of apprentices among weavers and merchants reiterates the significant role of apprenticeship in informal sector development in developing countries [21]. The industry is open to people and this is very good for its growth as literature shows that apprenticeship is a source of cheap labour, especially for small and micro enterprises. Besides, apprenticeship has a great potential of increasing capacity of a business with the advantage of using the apprentices tools and services which comes at a lower cost to the owner. The smock industry therefore has a great potential in increasing employment levels in the future.

**Advertisement and Marketing of Smock Products**

One important component of business is advertisement. Products appeal to the senses of consumers through advertisements. Advertising and marketing of goods have the tendency of creating employment [22]. In the case of the smock industry in TAMA, the artisans were assessed to know whether or not they advertise their products. From the study, it was revealed that, 20 percent of the weavers advertised while 80 percent did not advertise their products. On the part of the merchants, 47 percent advertised while 53 did not advertise their products. From the above, it is obvious that advertisement is not so common in the smock industry. With the weavers, those who advertised did it through display and personal interaction with merchants who buy their products. On the part of the merchants, the forms of advertisement included personal interaction, displays in store, exhibitions and use of sign boards. The use of personal interactions by both weavers and merchants confirms the use of informal channels as a way of advertisement by informal sector actors in developing countries [22].
Weavers who did not advertise think it is not necessary since they always have ready market for their products. Merchants who did not advertise appeared to share the same view as those weavers who did not advertise their products. The low advertisement of products in the industry limits the exposure of its products. This explains why its counterpart, the kente is more known than the smock textile. However, the situation is beginning to change considering the growing interest of NGOs like CLIP and government agencies like NBSSI in the activities of the industry in urban Tamale.

Information on marketing of products is very important because it forms the basis for determining how much is realized from the economic venture. Respondents were asked their source of market for their products. Marketing of the product used to be in the local market but recent development is opening it to foreign markets. With the weavers, their output is used within the local market; hence they only market their products within the Metropolis. However, the case of the merchants is different such that 76.7 percent market their products within the Metropolis with the remaining 23.3 percent marketing their products outside the Metropolis. Out of the 23.3 percent, 3 percent, 13 percent and 7 percent market their products within the region, within the country and outside the country respectively. The difference in net of marketing among the merchants has a greater potential of generating more revenue to the internally generated funds of the Metropolis as well as promoting the growth of the smock industry in the area. It can also generate foreign exchange for the country.

**Business Finance in the Industry**

The progress of any industry is dependent on its financial capabilities. Respondents were asked their sources of funding. Personal saving came up as the major source of financing the smock industry. On the part of the weavers, all respondents financed their operations through personal savings. However, of the merchants, 90 percent finances their business through personal savings whiles the remaining 10 percent finances their business through relatives. None of the respondents acquired their startup capital and finance through financial institutions. Some (7 percent) of actors however took loans from financial institutions at the early stages of their businesses.

Personal saving was the major source of funding for operators in the smock industry. As a result of this, the progress of this industry is basically dependent on individual’s financial capabilities. This explains why they were not able to raise enough capital to increase their output levels especially in the case of the weavers. They have a limited capital base due to their major source of funding being not rewarding. Access to credit is very difficult due to high rate of interest as well as the bureaucratic environment in which the financial institutions operate. There is also general low interest of actors to go in for loans. The dominance of personal savings in financing the smock industry confirms the earlier studies on informal industries as notes that, finance through own savings is more common among informal entities because people either moved into the activity from another economic activity or had a history of income-earning.

**Further Knowledge/Training in the Industry**

The smock industry serves as an avenue for the labour force to engage in diverse economic activities. Training programmes are necessary to enhance technical and managerial skills of merchants and weavers. The study therefore assessed the participation of key actors in training programmes. The study revealed that, only 12 percent of the weavers have ever engaged in training programmes meant to broaden their knowledge on the work with 78.3 percent having ever participated in training programmes.

The low participation of weavers in training programmes is attributed to small opportunities opened to them and the absence of an organized group to champion their course. The proportion of weavers who have had further training took advantage of the smock merchants as they joined them in a training programme organized by NBSSI.
With the merchants, the presence of an organized association helps them get opportunities with one of such being the United Nations Human Security Programme which trained provided training programme and financial aids.

**Associations in the Smock Industry**

One way industries grow is through collective actions and this can be done through associations. Based on this premise, the study researched into the availability of associations within the industry and how key actors patronize these associations. It was realized that, only 12 percent of the weavers belong to an association related to their business with 91.7 percent of the merchants belonging to an association. The disperse nature of smock weaving makes it difficult for them to come together to form an association. This is attributed to the home based nature of the sector. This has a negative effect on the weavers since they are unable to control the prices of their products. This explains why many (63 percent) iterated the need for them to come together to have a force in the smock industry.

The situation with the merchants is however different. About 97 percent of merchants belong to an association. This is due to the organized nature of the smock trade in the two main markets in Tamale metropolis (Aboabo and Central market). These people are able to get together because of the central nature of their trade in the area. High rate of involvement of smock merchants in associations reflects the general nature of informal sectors in diverse areas [23]. The high participation in associations help businesses the access to training programs as well as the benefits derived from the financial support from organizations as exemplified by their network with GDCA.

**Challenges and Problems of the Smock Industry**

The smock industry in Tamale Metropolis faces numerous challenges as gathered from interview with key actors. Some of the major challenges facing the smock industry include;One major challenge from the responses was the inadequacy of market space for smock merchants who form the pivot of the industry in the Metropolis.

Smock merchants at the two main markets (Central Market and Aboabo Market) noted the absence of stores for selling is a major threat to the industry. This is because, it makes it difficult to take up more apprentice to train in smock making and trade. They were also of the belief that, the inadequacy of market stores has resulted in the dispersion of the industry where people are forced to move out of the market after mastering smock making. This makes it difficult to get together to have a common voice.

Relating to the above challenge is the poor working environment of the smock weavers. In the case of all weavers encountered in the study, their environment was not conducive. This was due to the fact that they operated in open spaces outside homes. The few who try to improve raise sub-standard structures to cover their sitting place (See Plate 10). This practice leaves weavers to the vagaries of the weather. This challenge affects outputs since weavers cannot work during raining days, limiting their ability to meet demands of merchants.

Inadequate supply of raw materials to meet the demand of merchants also hinders the industry. The supply chain in the industry moves from the weavers to the merchants but the growing number of merchants in the Metropolis is putting pressure on the weavers. Despite the fact that majority of the merchants (85 percent) purchase the textile (raw materials) from Yendi and Daboya, supply is still inadequate. This can be attributed to the time needed to weave the textile as against the growing demand for smocks. Inadequate supply of raw materials hinders the general growth of the industry as merchants also find it difficult to meet the growing demand for smock garments.

**Conclusion and Way Forward**

Indigenous industries like the smock are important to development efforts of developing countries. These industries play important roles in providing livelihood opportunities for local people in all areas of
development. In addition indigenous textiles are of much cultural significance. These industries need to be protected as a way of preserving culture as well serves as an avenue for propelling growth. Considering the role of the smock industry, it is important to understand their structures to help in decision making to promote growth. It is also important to incorporate these industries when planning for small scale and informal enterprises.

Indigenous industries like the smock are built along cultural structures. There are strict lines of management along which the smock industry operates. Actors in the industry are more culturally involved than personal interest. Many activities within the industry are culturally driven. However, modernization has called some of the structures to question. In response, the industry has changed in some ways including opening up to all sexes and people from all ethnic group. The operations of the industry are still largely informal though efforts are being made to formalize some aspects over time. It is important to institutions like the Tamale Metropolitan Assembly, NBSSI and relevant NGOs to put in more effort to improve working conditions of actors in the industry so as to make it attractive. Building a Smock market that will provide good working environments for all actors could be an important step towards developing the industry. Sustained efforts are needed from all stakeholders to promote the effectiveness of the industry by harnessing its potential.

References