

Case Study

# Bead Jewellery Industry in Ghana: Problems and Solutions

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**Abstract:** Bead jewellery is common in all Ghanaian communities. Bead jewellers are well-known for their important bead jewellery production and have advanced to the Master craft level. The industry can be utilized if the industry's difficulties are discovered and remedied. The study area for the research includes Ghana's Eastern, Ashanti, and Greater Accra Regions. The study's population included bead jewellers, bead jewellery firms, bead dealers, bead aficionados, clients, and bead makers. With a sample size of 30, data was gathered mostly through direct observations, interviews, and document reviews. The study went over the procedure for securing land for a bead jewellery workshop. According to a survey conducted by the Ghanaian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCII), Ghanaian bead jewellers should use qualified designers. Cost pooling in legal services, accounting, and consulting is likely to save money.

**Keywords:** Bead, Jewellery, Industry, Master, Craft, Ghana

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## 1. Introduction

Beads have been used in Africa for a long time, so long that they have virtually gone overlooked and forgotten. Beads constructed of natural elements such as shells, stones, and bauxite were unearthed and dated to around 1450 B.C. in Ghana Kumekpor et. al, 1995 [1]. Despite the fact that nations such as Ghana have an ancient tradition of bead jewellery production and a substantial handcraft manufacturing capability, bead jewellery is only exported in small amounts. This potential can be realized if the industry's difficulties are identified and remedied. Bead jewellers are well-known for their significant bead jewellery production and have elevated their work to the master craft level by employing apprentices to assist them in the manufacturing of their works. Bead jewellery is popular in all Ghanaian communities. Bead jewellery frequently expresses something about the wearer's general identity, ethnic identification, or social standing. It also reveals the culture from which they originate. Every conceivable resource and item can be employed in the making of bead jewellery. Artificial or synthetic materials such as plastic, shattered bottles, and so on, or natural materials such as leather, animal bone, seeds, coconut shells, egg shells, metals such as gold, silver, brass, iron, clay, tree backs, and bamboo Anquandah, J. 2013 [2].

## 2. Materials and Methods

The study used a qualitative case study methodology. The geographical location of the study included Ghana's Eastern, Ashanti, and Greater Accra regions. Bead jewellers, bead jewellery firms, and bead producers made up the study's population. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select a sample size of thirty (30). The information was gathered mostly through direct observation, interviews, and document review. In

order to analyze the data, the researcher used thematic analysis. The information gathered during the interview was coded to make analysis easier.

### **3. Results**

The study reveals that there cannot be a manufacturing setup if the manufacturing procedures are not included. Again, a manufacturing process is impossible without tools, machines, labour, equipment, and raw materials. There should also be a location where the production may take place and where part of the equipment can be stored. There are both ancient and new machines in use.

It again reveals that Ghana's technological progress is modest, and as a result, most industries, including bead jewellery, do not produce at a rapid pace. Solutions will be proposed as the issues are identified and debated. During the data collection on the bead jewellers' production procedures, some guidance was given to them.

#### ***3.1. Challenges with Land acquisition and development in Ghana***

The study revealed that when it comes to establishing a bead jewellery factory, land is crucial. Without land, a bead jewellery factory cannot exist. It is also well known that Ghana's land acquisition issues have hampered the country's ability to attract foreign investment. Setting up a factory or workshop, especially for bead jewellery, necessitates a work space, among other things. One of the variables of production is land. A rented, leased, or directly purchased premise or piece of land could be the location. Getting a place, whether it's rented, leased, or purchased, comes with a slew of issues. In an interview with one of the Lands Department's senior land officers in Accra, he stated that there have been numerous land litigation cases sitting in courts around the country since 1994. When asked how the situation could be solved, he indicated that better administration would require a modification of laws and regulations, especially those governing land use, zoning, and value. Although the researcher agreed with him, she emphasized that Chiefs and community elders should educate the people about land sales and resales. Those who wish to purchase land must first do background checks at the Lands Registry in order to avoid having to go to court.

#### ***3.2. Challenges with the location of bead jewellery workplaces***

The study has revealed that Ghana has a problem with company locations, particularly for bead jewellery. One obstacle impeding the industry's growth is the fact that some bead jewellery workshops and stores are hidden away in places that are not actually ideal for such companies. It was revealed that the locations for these companies are sometimes passed down from generation to generation in a specific area. Because the shop is located in an area that is not conducive to the bead jewellery business, this may have a negative impact on the industry's promotion. Then, because the cost of production may be extremely high, the things may be prohibitively expensive, putting customers off. The study again revealed that another element that determines the location of jewellery companies, particularly bead jewellery, is traditional practice. Jewellery businesses are also found in the corners of houses where bead jewellers train their children as apprentices. The study revealed that majority of children do not have access to a formal education. Most master bead jewellers have worked under the same roof as their trainee jewellers in the past. The majority of these jewellers are closer to their society's chiefs and elders, and can manufacture traditional bead jewellery for them. As a result, traditional traditions have hampered the jewellery industry's growth and development. There are not much industrial areas in the country for the creation of jewellery, particularly bead jewellery. The study revealed that SSNIT, which runs the College of Jewellery at Weija, near Accra, is the lone attempt to build an industrial estate. Despite this, the diversified character of the industries vying for a place to call home has made it ineffective. The study revealed

that the bead jewellers do not have better work places or shops to work. Those with their own stores, most of which have thatched roofs, are also housed in the family homes.

To find a solution, bead jewellers should band together and form cooperatives and societies which would work under one roof. This implies that, rather than being crammed into a small space, the bead jewellers may hire a large space to use as a workshop and split the rent.

### ***3.3. Challenges with acquiring tools and equipment in bead jewellery***

The research revealed that the procurement of tools and equipment for the creation of bead jewellery comes with a slew of issues. Basic hand tools can be used to make some bead jewellery in Ghana, but this does not rule out the use of more advanced tools or equipment. This is mostly due to the fact that the bead jewellers' production processes in Ghana are primarily handcrafted and labour-intensive, resulting in extremely slow production. Machines used for bead jewellery production in developed countries, on the other hand, are too expensive for most Ghanaian traditional bead jewellers to purchase, despite the fact that they have gotten more compact, complex, and expensive. It was revealed that, it appears only Cedi Beads has the majority of these contemporary instruments and equipment to work more quickly. Modern machinery has sped up and reduced the cost of production. There are current machinery for pounding the glass beads, such as polishing and new pounding machines, as well as polishing machines for polishing the final beads. There are a plethora of sophisticated machines to choose from. From the planning stage through the completion stage, there are also new machines to be used. All of this is to aid in the production of bead jewellery more quickly and at a reduced cost. The majority of bead jewellers appear to be out of touch with current trends. Even if they are aware, purchasing the devices may be feasible.

The research revealed that though basic industry equipment was uncommon a few years ago, there are currently many retailers selling the tools. Due to an increase in the number of trainees in the official training sectors of the trade, an increase in the number of persons dealing in the tool industry may have occurred and become more lucrative. Graduates and diplomates in jewellery making have been trained at the UEW art department, bead jewellery sector, College of Art and Social Sciences, KNUST, and the College of Jewellery, Weija, near Accra. Another possible cause for the rise in the number of dealers in jewellery equipment and accessories is that most bead jewellery trainees are eager to start their own businesses after completing their training. During their training, they spend a lot of money on getting the basic tools. They acquire these instruments because trainees in bead jewellery must purchase their own tools during their training. As a result, they have no choice but to obtain them. The problem with tools sold in Ghana, however, is that because dealers sell them for profit, they import low-cost, substandard instruments for which they can make a lot of money. Students and bead jewellers are obliged to buy and sell substandard tools since they do not have the money to import high-quality, pricey gear. As a result, the beaded jewellery products appear unappealing. Due to this, the researcher urge training institutions to either import these instruments themselves or contact local manufacturers and importers to have them imported on their behalf at a reduced or negotiated price. The institutions will then sell them to the students, which, in the opinion of the researcher will alleviate the problem of purchasing subpar instruments because the training institutions will import the tools based on the school's criteria.

### ***3.4. Challenges in the production processes and their solutions***

It was revealed that material melting is an essential part of bead jewellery, particularly glass bead production. During some of the interviews, it was discovered that Aid to Artisans had promoted four new technologies in Ghanaian bead manufacture at its showroom in the Ghana few years ago. Some of the finest beads made with innovative

technology, such as the new bodom and chevron beads, were on show. Some of the new beads are also made of recycled plastics and many more. It is certainly beneficial to the bead jewellery industry.

The research revealed that a Ghanaian ceramist, is creating a new form of bead by recycling the powder residue from soapstone carvings. His beads come in a variety of shapes, such as bowls, balls, and cubes. Mr. Cedi, a world-class bead designer and businessman whom the researcher interviewed in his Krobo Odumase workshop during my M.Phil research on contemporary trends of the bead jewellery industry in Ghana, has imported new glass bead producing equipment into Ghana. He has spent a significant amount of time and money traveling abroad to learn new techniques for making beads. Even though this technology is expensive, it is very efficient and versatile and can be made to achieve the ultimate in bead making comparable anywhere in the world today.

### ***3.5. The bead making process***

The research revealed that three main types of beads are made in Krobo-Odumase. These are transparent, translucent, and opaque beads. The procedures for making the beads are similar, with a few differences. The raw materials for making the beads is glass. Sometimes this is purchased, but more often, old bottles and louvers are used. Colouring dyes are used, and the interaction of the glass with the dyes is a prime consideration. The bottles are then washed and crushed into a fine powder. A metal mortar and pestle are used. The powdered glass is then sifted using a wire mesh, and a ceramic dye is added to it and stirred well. Clay moulds are prepared, and the insides of the clay moulds are coated with kaolin. The kaolin is to harden the beads and extend their lifespan. Moulds of various shapes are made and used.

A cassava stalk is then inserted in the middle of the mould, and the glass powder is poured very carefully into the mould using a funnel made from a can. After the glass powder inside the mould is fired, the cassava stalk will burn and leave a hole in the molten glass, which comes out as the bead. During the "design" phase, which requires great skill and experience, the different powdered colours are skilfully used to make the patterns on the beads. This is what is termed the "design." A large quantity of beads could have designs running through the whole bead and not just along the surface. Other beads are made by a similar method. But the glass does not need to be pounded into a powder. Small particles of glass are inserted directly into the moulds. It is then fired, just as in the case of the opaque beads. Recycling older beads that are chipped makes some of the most expensive beads. This is because they are assumed to be the "original" antique beads. In fact, after recycling, it is very difficult for even an experienced bead dealer or collector to differentiate between beads from the trade and antique beads. After 'designing', that is, arranging the various colours in a skilful manner, the moulds are fired in a mud kiln. The powdered beads are then fired for 20 to 45 minutes at 600 to 850 °C.

The translucent beads are fired at 800-1000 °C for 40 to 60 minutes. Because of this very high temperature, translucent beads cannot use a stalk, so the hole must be punched by hand. As soon as the beads are removed from the fire, they are shaped with the use of two large long pins. The final step is to let the beads cool for about an hour and then polish them on a stone or with the polishing machine. The beads are then strung on a strand and are ready for the market.

## **4. Discussion**

### ***4.1. Marketing and sales of bead jewellery in Ghana***

#### **4.1.1. Infrastructural problems affecting the sales of bead jewellery: their solutions**

If a business wants to grow and be more competitive, there will be a need to develop some factors and other basic infrastructure. It is the responsibility of the government,

individuals, and corporate bodies. It is necessary for the government to play a leading role because when it creates the enabling environment for businesses, including bead jewellery, they will expand by way of an increase in production and sales. This will also enable businesses to pay their taxes and levies, which will be used to develop infrastructure such as roads, communication facilities, and hospitals.

#### **4.1.2. Unappealing designs and poor product finishing**

Among the problems confronting the industry are the unappealing designs that inhibit large sales. The bead jewellery product designs that are unappealing include: chains, earrings, bangles, rings, bags and many other items. In addition, the designs are limited to a few motifs. The majority of bead jewellers keep repeating designs from the past rather than innovating or creating new designs. The participants who were interviewed as to whether they were influenced by the designs of the products before they bought them responded "yes", with just a few of them responding "no." The bead jewellers keep producing them using the same symbols and patterns over the years. An experienced dealer can easily see a bead product and know that it is from a Krobo or Asante design since they have not changed over time. Other materials like glass, clay, and sand are also used for making beads, but the same designs have been repeated over the years. Though it is not wrong to use the same old motif, the researcher suggests that the motif should be recreated in so many ways. Copying of designs by other bead jewellers is also very rampant in the industry. This is because most bead jewellers are not ready to be creative to come up with different designs of their own. Since it takes a lot of time to come up with a new design and the fact that they think other people may copy their designs if they come up with a new one, once the market likes it, almost every bead jeweller tends to copy or reproduce it and sell it. Ghana has a copyright law that protects the works of artists, but most designers and artists, including bead jewellers, hardly register their new designs with the Registrar General's Department as specified under the law. In Koforidua, most of the bead jewellers complained about the copying of their designs, resulting in the fact that the same designs are found in the various bead jewellery shops. A customer buying beaded jewellery does not really have enough varieties to choose from. It is therefore enough to visit one or two shops to make a purchase, where one will see all the range of designs and varieties. The researcher therefore suggests that, as it is done in developed countries, there is a need to train and employ more bead jewellery designers. Even though schools and colleges run courses in design, the course contents are not broad enough to transform the design needs of the bead jewellery industry. Bead jewellers are required to learn from what happens in other countries. For instance, At the Gemmological Institute of America (GIA) in the USA, they run a detailed certificate course in jewellery design, including the principles of good jewellery design. They develop the skills needed to create and illustrate designs for a variety of jewellery in full colour, actual size, and with full detail. The students are taught to design for beauty, but also for problem-free manufacturing, long wear, and comfort. At the GIA, they practise drawing techniques that help to convert ideas into sketches and, later, into finished jewellery renderings, sometimes using watercolour paints. Finally, at the GIA, students also learn how to customize jewellery to reflect the customer's individuality. The topics go by the following:

1. How to illustrate rings and other jewellery
2. How to design men's and women's jewellery
3. How to incorporate a customer's personality and needs into a design
4. Presentation of final designs like a professional
5. How to create detailed views and layouts for the jewellery manufacturing

The students are taken through step-by-step processes of sketching and illustrating jewellery through extensive practice and expert coaching from instructors. At the end of the class, students are required to display completed and framed projects before invited guests. Something of this can be done seriously in Ghana to help our bead jewellery students especially with the short courses so that they will be more productive and creative. One cannot isolate design from quality finish and craftsmanship. Ghanaian jewellers have to make a name for themselves in terms of reputation and quality. The quality of materials and workmanship must be highly competitive Kotoku, W 2008 [3].

#### **4.1.3. Problems and solutions to poor display and packaging of bead jewellery in Ghana**

Expensive jewellery like beads, are mostly displayed on a display pad in a glass showcase, or in a packaging box in a showcase in a showroom in Ghana. They are mostly displayed on tabletops in the open, especially in the markets or mostly where it is sold. These producers must act as both production jewellers and sellers as well. They sometimes think that they are cutting down cost by not employing a salesperson. This has the advantage of the bead jeweller himself having direct contact with the customer. This practice however, may obstruct production since one may have to get up from his production room to attend to customers. Bead jewellers are heaped in the open with no sense of special arrangement. To make bead jewellery appealing, there is the need to use the right approach to display them.

It is also important to provide one or two chairs or stools for customers so as to make them comfortable in bead jewellery shops. It is preferable to use the bar-type seat since younger customers will prefer to 'perch', rather than sit in more formal chairs. Ghanaian bead jewellery showrooms are not set up as mentioned, even though a few have provided chairs for customers. On the items displayed, it can be overwhelming to try to look at everything in a full display case. This means that not too much should be displayed at a time. This has to be done because when too many are displayed, it becomes difficult for the customer to view the items properly. It is also good to display the bead jewellery several inches from the floor and the display cabinet.

The packaging of bead jewellery products to customers is as important as the bead jewellery itself. But unfortunately, bead jewellers do not give the packing of Bead jewellery the necessary attention it deserves. Mostly, it is treated as secondary. The reason why bead jewellers do not give the packaging the necessary attention it deserves is that the packaging boxes or materials cost money and instead of factoring it as part of the production cost, it is assumed by the bead jewellers as if it is a waste of money. Just a few have however tried to package their products to customers as a way of increasing sales.

Ghanaian bead jewellers should try and liaise with other African counterparts to also try to develop local packing boxes at cheaper costs.

#### **4.1.4. Problems of pricing in bead jewellery industry: Their solutions**

In fact, there is not much clear-cut policy on the pricing of bead jewellery in Ghana. There are so many approaches to the sale of bead jewellery.

There is the cost-based pricing which is determined by costing the actual factors of production incurred in producing the item, and then adding a profit to it.

When there is a higher demand for a particular bead design, even though the cost of producing the item could be used as a basis for pricing, it is usually overpriced because it has a high demand advantage. In certain cases, a trader lowers the price of his items so as to sell more than his competitors. Based on that, he will sell at the same price or a little lower, so as to win more customers. This mostly happens when there is a competition on the market.

In the case of market-based pricing or value satisfaction, the firm's goodwill and its products and services influence the price at which the bead jewellery is priced. Sometimes

the name of the beads also determines the price, so far as the customer hears that it is made of crystals or a particular bead the price doesn't matter. Ghanaian bead jewellers and other craftsmen have an advantage in the pricing of their works, since most of the products are handcrafted, and no two items are identically the same, though the type of designs in one shop may be the same as that of another shop, there is no basis for calculating the price. The products including bead jewellery are priced anyhow and they therefore tend to sell most often at high prices. Most customers are aware of this and so they most a times bargain seriously before buying. The location of the shop also determines the price. The prices could therefore be exorbitant or not. The seller can even sell at a loss depending on how dire he is in need of money at a particular time. Bead Jewellery shops that are located in prime areas price their works more expensive than those which are not in well commercial areas.

Pricing has also become so competitive that with information on the internet, one can check the actual prices before selling, with the advantage of using the mobile phone, one can abreast with the latest prices and can therefore sell at a higher or lower prices depending on market demand. With a strong association, bead jewellers can also take advantage of the mobile phone technology to communicate prices with members so as to get good bargains on the market. Though the above can be a good way of getting good or high price for bead jewellery, there is the general scarcity of information on market prices.

#### **4.1.5. Selling of bead jewellery: Problems and solutions**

For bead jewellery trade in Ghana, the selling mostly takes two forms: wholesaling and retailing. Most of the bead jewellery is retailed or sold direct to the consumer. The study revealed that, those who manufacture the bead jewellery especially the Krobo glass bead are sold in bulk to retailers who also sell to their consumers whom they say are mainly tourists. The bead jewellery is normally displayed on tables or in showcases in the markets and sold to customers by mostly the wives or children of the producers. Kotoku *et. al*, 2001 [4].

Prices are not fixed and the prices quoted depend on the type of customer. They normally in most cases sell to foreigners at higher prices. Another strategy used by bead jewellery producers to increase sales is by hawking of the Bead jewellery. Hawking may be in the form of selling from house to house, market to market or from town to town. Mostly in Krobo, which is well known for their bead jewellery production, the men are the main producers of the beads. They work from Monday to Friday. The women string the beads and take them to the markets for sale. Since each village has its own market day, the women trade on a different market each day. Koforidua and Agormenya in the Eastern Region for example, have their market days on Thursdays and Saturdays respectively. On Mondays, which are the market days for beads in Kumasi, all sorts of beads are displayed for sale at both wholesale and retail prices. Most foreigners come all the way to buy large quantities to their countries.

A problem observed in this international trade in large quantities to the traders is that the Ghanaian traders are ignorant of the fact that they are exporting the beads to the neighbouring countries. They therefore do not fill the necessary export declaration forms for the traders, so that they can be shown at the exit border points of the country so that the correct export data can be captured with the Ghana Export Promotion Authority for planning purposes since as said earlier, information and data on the industry is scarce. It is therefore assumed that beads are not exported, whiles it is not so. Again, the sale of bead jewellery is sometimes boring according to personal observations and it is therefore suggested that those employed to sell bead jewellery in bead jewellery shops, ought to be scholars who have studied apart from bead jewellery, marketing, customer relations and care. Agyei *et. al*, 2023 [5].

## 5. Conclusions

This section is not mandatory but can be added to the manuscript if the discussion is unusually long or complex. The study has mentioned numerous challenges that are hindering the development of the bead jewellery industry in Ghana. Many suggestions for tackling the numerous challenges have been offered by the researcher. The research has shown beyond all reasonable doubt that with commitment and sacrifice from stakeholders, the challenges identified as militating against the development of the bead jewellery industry in Ghana can be solved. When the problems are solved, it will lead to job creation, an increase in foreign exchange earnings for the country, and a boost in tourism, which will, in the end, increase revenue for the country.

The study has said that to make Ghanaian bead jewellery marketable and internationally acceptable, it is therefore necessary to engage the services of qualified designers of international repute, so as to improve upon the design of the bead jewellery. This will, in the end, widen the range of designs produced by the bead jewellers in the industry.

Also, the study has offered various suggestions and recommendations for the improvement of advertising by bead jewellery companies in the country. The researcher hopes that the suggestions and recommendations will be considered by traditional bead jewellers, researchers, and the government of Ghana.

Above all, the thesis has identified that when bead jewellers form co-operatives, there will be cost sharing and thus this will reduce their operation costs. Cost sharing in legal services, accountancy, and consultancy are likely areas where the bead jewellers can co-operate and have economies of scale. Again, when the jewellery businesses operate their outfits well by following sound management practices, the bead jewellery industry will flourish. In light of the above mention was made of good record keeping and professional pricing of bead jewellery products. With commitment, therefore, the problems facing the industry can be solved.

It is the expectation of the researcher that the Federation of Ghanaian Jewellers will also play its desired role by way of an aggressive membership drive so that, in unity, the problems facing the bead jewellery industry can be solved.

Based on the numerous litigations outlined in the research, it is recommended that bead jewellers conduct thorough investigations before making any payments on land acquired. The investigation into whether the land has already been allocated can be done at any regional office of the Lands Commission.

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