

THE DEVELOPMENTS OF MACRAMÉ AS A VIABLE ECONOMIC VENTURE IN GHANA

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ABSTRACT

The study of the developments of macramé as a viable economic venture in Ghana, attempts to examine the progressive development of macramé as an art and the available resource material for macramé production. It likewise attempts to expose an inclusive dint macramé have created in Ghana's fashion, at the same time describing meticulously selected fashion accessories that have been made in macramé. The authors expounded that macramé has grown to be accepted as a potential, versatile, fashionable craft capable of complementing other fashionable accessory products for the adoption process in product development, which has a socioeconomic benefits as well as a sustaining culture. Some of the conclusions made are that macramé craft has become an entire facet of our traditional crafts, especially among the youth, and still undergoing progressively notable transformation.

Keywords: Macramé, fashionable craft, developments, viable economic venture.

INTRODUCTION

Macramé as an element of decorative knots permeates virtually in every culture, but may manifest in different directions within these cultures (Jim Gentry, 2002). In Ghana, the meticulously braided cords became the element for forming fish nets, with the aid of a needle-like tool. The practice of knot making is predominantly practiced among youth scouts and cadets, especially in our second cycle institutions as part of their grooming sessions. The art of macramé has become more popular after its official introduction as a subject in the Department of Integrated Rural Art and Industry at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi. Since the turn out of its first graduate in 1978, its use in Ghanaian fashion industry has been phenomenal and dominant among the youth in the making of sandals, bags, jewellery etc.

It is now seen in combination with other materials to fashion all forms of delightful works of art. Owing to its fast growth, strong adaptability and the extensive uses, macramé are closely associated with the fashionable youth. Regarding its use for fashion accessories, macramé exercised in the Near Eastern textiles became an important influences on the termination and development of every decorative garment especially at the fringes of every tent, garment and towel. In this, hanging planter became synonymous with macramé. Macramé, (is an Italian name given in Genoa - its home and birth place) in its traditional forms, became one of the more popular textile techniques. Lending itself to the rich Victorian ornamentation in the latter part of the 19th century (Jim Gentry, 2002). As time passed, knots were used for a variety of utilitarian, mnemonic and superstitious purposes. In Africa, knotting dates back to early Egyptian culture, where knots were used in fishnet and in decorative fringes.

The Incas of Peru used a Quipu, which was constructed of mnemonic knot (basically, overhand knots) to aid them record and convey information. The use of knots, the type of knot, the colour of the cord and knot all helped in conveying complex messages (Jim Gentry,

2002). In classical Greece, knots were used in medicine (as slings for broken bones) and in games (the Gordian knot was one such puzzle). Both the early Egyptians and Greeks used the 'Hercules' knot, (square knot) which had magical or religious connotations on their clothing, jewellery and pottery. Asmah (2005) alleged that the close affiliation between IRAI graduates and macramé has resulted in the discovery of a number of methodologies and integrative technologies, specific in most cases, in the material and the techniques adapted. Asmah (2005) agreed with Jules & Kliot (2005) that these evolved methodologies and integrative technologies represent the achievement and progression of macramé craft in Ghana.

This cultural human achievement has been possible as a result of the creative touch of scholarly artisans to integrate contemporary design involving the use of other materials for fashionable artefacts (Asmah, 2006). Though macramé art has been made and used in most cultures for onward development directed towards achieving both functional and aesthetic appeal, their end products differ from one culture to another. However, by implication, these developments in Ghana according to Effa-Ababio, (2005) are integral parts of cultural development and are the products of progressive achievements of macramé artisans over the years. Using knotting for adornment defines early cultures, and reflected the development of intelligence. It is a craft for all ages and capabilities. Today, macramé is enjoying a twentieth-century Renaissance'. Men as well as women are turning to working with their hands and are creating not only utilitarian but also aesthetic pieces.

This flexibility and versatility, value of macramé notwithstanding, portray macramé as just a type of knotting technique, an off-loom product defined in a non-economic perspective due to its slow nature of production. Macramé as a technique is full of life, adaptable and exploratory that lends its self for processing and handling in many ways in product development and production. Macramé art has been an extremely respected talent throughout the world from earliest times. The journey of macramé production, according to Asmah (2005) travelled through Arabia, in the 13th century, Turkey, Spain during the Moorish conquest, spread to the rest of Europe as early as the 14th century arrived in Italy and France in the early fourteenth and fifteenth century and was later introduced into England in the late 17th century and in the Victorian Era in the mid-to-late 19th century. Sailors and seafaring men, according to history are said to have spread this art form around the world. By the 1920's, macramé in China and America had entered its dormant phase, producing artefacts such as flower hangers, skilfully fashioned bags, as containers for commerce.

Macramé has also proven to be a great natural therapy for those undergoing rehabilitation processes and again helps to strengthen the memory, making it a great activity for everyone. Working with the cords and tying them strengthens the arms and hands, and helps to loosen the joints of the wrist and fingers. It also helps calm the mind and spirit as it requires concentration and the repetitive patterns puts the weaver in a meditative mood. Additionally, it is believed to release stress through the fingers, making macramé knotting a relaxing activity. Macramé has the additional benefit of enjoying the process of self-expression through the creation of the inherent objective hidden within (Jim Gentry, 2002).

The aim of this study is to outline the exploratory value of macramé art in supplementing Ghanaian fashioned culture.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Macramé materials in Ghana

According to Asmah (2005), there are several known macramé materials in Ghana. These are nylon, jute, rayon, shoe sewing threads, raffia threads, shoe lace, cotton threads, fabric strips, leather strips and any other flexible malleable, pliable, strong and hand friendly materials. But the most pleasurable materials to work with are jute, linen, and cotton because they knot well, come in a variety of weights, can be dyed, and are readily available. Some yarns come with a finish on them such as wax, creosote or sizing. In fact, any material that can be purchased in great lengths and is pliable can be used for macramé. Among the above mentioned materials, jute, raffia, cotton and rayon threads are indigenous to Ghana.

Methodology

Preparation of the materials is not elaborate. It starts with product development which is expedient for the design and making process, then through choice and selection of colour and material type based on the product to be made for their compatibility and style. The design processes are very important because the outcome of a complete macramé product basically depends on it. The colour design, purpose and target group for the product is determined at this stage, followed by measurement of cords, according to specification, cutting, mounting of cords, an adaptation of knotting techniques, ornamentation and finishing of products. The Experimental research method is usually employed to assess the suitability of the requisite tools and materials for the making of the macramé product. Critical observation of the materials, tools, equipment and the technique are always paramount in this trade. Additionally, in this study, the exploratory and the descriptive research method was engaged to recount the various activities of macramé culture in Ghana.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This discussion provides the various achievements and results of the macramé development, types of product and techniques prevailing, material suitability for its production and related cultural aspects of macramé art in Ghana. It also positioned the art of macramé as a viable socioeconomic and sustaining venture in Ghana and attempts to examine the progressive development of macramé as an art and the available resource material for macramé production.

The Art of macramé in Ghana

The art of macramé is traditional and usually used for purposes that do not or require much durability. In recent years, macramé has been introduced into woodwork, sculpture and textiles as a decorative art. It is mostly found in homes in the form of upholstery for domestic fabric. Others include plant hangers, shawls, baskets, lace, pillow covers, table decorations, chair covers, lampshades, wall hangings, belts, purses and clothing. Others include fashion accessories as listed in table 1 below.

Table 1: A List of Some Fashion Accessories

Bangles	Toe-rings	Pen-holder	Phone-case
Belts	Chokers	Shin guards	Waistcoat
Buckles	Bracelets	Beads	Key-holder
Shoe-lace	Crowns	Breastplates	Elbow-bands
Singlet	Buttons	Hairnet	Braces
Earrings	Chemise	Masks	Ear-pad
Gloves	Scarves	Slippers	Sandals
Locketts	Finger rings	Bow ties	Purses
Necklaces	Brooches	Spectacle case	Muffler
Pendant	Anklets	Wrist-watch	Tie clips
Shoes	Socks	Stockings	Caps

Apart from fashionable accessories, macramé products has been extended to curtains for room partitioning, as decorative accessories for outdoor or big porch planters, loose nets as onion containers in the kitchen, and bathroom mats used especially in urban dwellings and middle/high-income areas in the cities. An outdoor swing structure, usually knotted with nylon cords is often fixed to the ground, under shady trees to provide relaxation for couples and serve as leisure playing seats for children. Handicrafts such as heat gloves and aprons are made with macramé cotton yarns; lamp stands and lamp shades are made in various yarns for varied purposes, others are integrated with metal frames for the production of chandeliers usually fixed in the living room. With structured metal frame, baby cots, masks and various sculptures are made using macramé cords of several types.

In the domestic front, arm rest, leg rest and laundry baskets are made to support or integrated with either cane, wood or fabrics. Macramé jute strands are used to weave a bottomless basket locally known as '*Poponma*' for the storage of onions that comes from the northern part of the country. Fishermen in Ghana who cultivate fishes in man-made fish ponds also use a similar tub-like macramé net to harvest fish. In other instances, trap-nets used to bait fishes are woven with macramé nylon cords. In another method, open ended fish nets are suspended under the water attached with solar lights to draw fish's to the light and provide false shelter for the fishes. The fishes swim into the nets, but are unable to swim backwards out of them. Maracas made from calabashes and gourds of about 60 mm diameter, well known in Ghanaian music are covered with a net of nylon macramé cords, integrated with natural seed-beads that aids produce a variety of musical sounds when it is played.

Macramé art, a thriving culture in Ghana

Culture in a broader term is defined as the beliefs, value systems, norms, mores, myths, symbols, language, behaviour and structural elements of a given group or society (Hugo, 2002; Parsons, 1999). Culture is not a timeless and motionless body of value systems that remains unaltered by social change: rather it is dialectic and incorporates new forms and meanings while changing or reshaping traditional ones (Parsons, 1999). The concepts of culture and human creativity complement each other to the extent that one is inconceivable without the other. Human creativity does not take place in isolation but is embedded in the user's culture. The use of macramé art in the cultural context of the Ghanaian is more than an embellishment. It is a visual achievement of history, imaginative feedback and socioeconomic thoughts of a person. Macramé art is the effect of the ingenuity and creativity

of a people to resolve issues of life, a meaningful approach to life for onward development (Zec, 2002).

Though it forms a tiny fraction of the development of a person, yet it is a very important cultural ingredient. According to Effa-Ababio, (2005), macramé art evolved inside the enclosed effort of culture through human achievements. In effect, culture generates diversity and it is naturally revealed in all human actions, including the various macramé products that artisans produce. Moreover, it is argued that human products shapes the culture and lifestyle of modern society (Zec, 2002). Observing the macramé artefacts produced and patronised in a society often reveals the cultural situation and the people's life, education, desires and demands. If this is so, then the diverse products fashioned in macramé in different parts of the world constitute the sum total of the achievements of artisans, and this is what Effa-Ababio, (2005) calls its culture.

Macramé, a dynamic and adaptable art form

Currently, macramé art is ascertained to be one of the acceptable production forms for the fabrication of macramé products. Asmah, (2005) indicate that macramé art in Ghana has now been adopted as one of the most important manufacturing methods for fashion accessories. This art form now provides an alternative method, especially for bag and shoe production in the fashion industry. By its adaptability, several products have evolved which are complementary or accessories for artistic fashionable products.

Beyond aesthetics and product variations, macramé combines artistic talent and skilled labour with flexible fibre materials and complimentary materials to produce the artefacts in figure 1 and 2. In much the same way, the artistry, workmanship, and materials that make up a piece of macramé product determine both its quality and its cost. Macramé is an art form that evolved with the human desire to create beauty and command nature closely together in a symmetrical pattern. Bold geometric shapes, sleek lines, and dynamic curves are the visual hallmarks of today's technological culture mirrored in macramé designs. Dozens of specialized knotting techniques are used today, but the more involved ones are the eight basic methods – square knotting, Mounting Knotting, half knotting Josephine Knotting, Half-hitch Knotting, Wrap Knotting, Overhand knotting and taunting. Materials often used in Macramé are cotton and nylon cords. The products below confirms the dynamic and adoptable experiences of macramé art in Ghana.

Macramé bag and Buckled Belt

For the making of the picnic bag (Fig 1D), the following knots were used: - Lark's head knots, Square knots, Left diagonal double half hitches, Right diagonal double half hitches and Josephine knots.

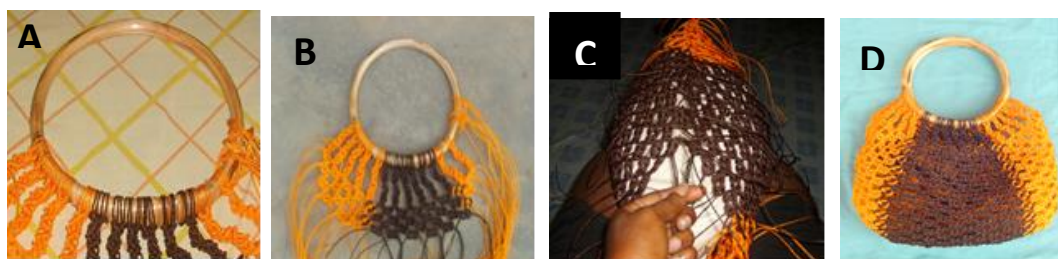


Fig. 1A, B, C & D: Mounting, Knotting and Making of the Picnic Bag

Additional materials are a pair of round cane handle, Nylon cords (brown and orange), Silk cloth (brown) and Metal buckle. The finished length of the project is about 40.8cm x 43.2cm with a warp strand length 57.6cm of 190.5cm double. Individual strands were mounted on the cane handle (Fig 1A) using the Lark's head knot and a Sinnet method adapted using the square knot on the left and the diagonal double hitches on the right. The process continued with Josephine knots and alternated them until the required length was obtained (Fig 1C). The process continued with the other half and later joined by the sides. Before closing the base, wadding material was stuffed in the bag and secure with Josephine and square knots. Excess cords were trimmed off and satin bias stitched at the border to prevent fraying. The inner lining was then sewn and attach to the bag by sewing with the thread and needle. The execution of the belt (Fig 2B) took 6 strands of warp of double length 558.8cm and follow the same process above using the buckled belt hook to mount the cords.

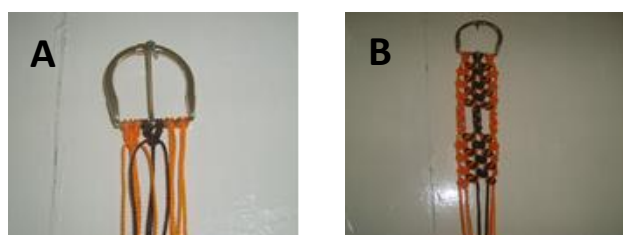


Fig. 2 A & B: Mounting, Knotting and Making of the buckled belt

Macramé pair of slippers and a pair of Sandals

In the making of the Macramé slippers, the following knots were used: - Lark's heads knot and alternating square knots Sinnet. The additional materials, waxed cotton cords, painted wooden Beads, an already made sole, bona and glue. Figure 3, and 4 a pair of slippers and a pair of Sandals produced in macramé. These were made to show the divers' ways the art of macramé can be fashioned into various accessories. A length of 76.2cm double of 4 warp strands were used. Another piece of about 20.32cm were then cut and mounted on one of the working cords (the fourth cord) using Lark's head knot. Then continued with alternating square knots Sinnet which are crossed over to the required length. The same was applied to the other pair of slippers.



Fig. 3A, B, C, D & E: Making the top, the sole and the pair of the slippers

The inner sole was cut according to the size of the outer sole. The size was then stamped and fixed on the inner soles with the help of 'last' and glue. The Fig.3E went through the same process as before but used, six warp strands of length 76.2cm double. Another piece of about 8" were mounted on one of the working cords (the fourth cord) using Lark's head knot. Then continued with alternating square knots. The beads were inserted and worked on till the

required length. In this different macramé tops were designed and given an alternate look to bring them to the expected end.

Several intentions and philosophies formed the bases upon which most of these accessories were designed and made. The choice and use of colour and material is relevant to bring the users relate to life, and with God. The complementary materials employed in the design and production of macramé are all directed towards interpreting the cultural philosophies of life. The second macramé top is a composition of wooden bead, nylon cords and leather sole were arranged symbolically to represent the cycle of life that is at birth, in marriage and in death. The green yarn used to represent birth, the ringlike wooden bead represents marriage and the black leather sole represent death. Philosophically every human born of a woman has a beginning and an end and nothing last forever, no matter how strong, youthful, successful one is. Every human is believed to come from God and will forever return back to God. With such an understanding one is expected to live a life of humility.

The materials used for the making of sandals have been as follows; already sown leather strips, Bona, Inner sole, 'Wet' and Glue. The type of knot used was the Josephine knot. Two coloured leather strip warp of length 76.2cm was used to make a long Josephine knot Sinnet. Additional. 4 long pieces of leather cords were cut and used as strings for tying the legs to compliment the sandals. Using size 39 'last', the inner sole was measured, cut and glued on the surface and pasted onto the leather. Leaving about half an inch for folding, the inn sloe was then cut, glued on the surface of the 'Bona' and placed on the folded 'wet' inn sole. The heel was also measured, cut and pasted onto the 'Bona' after sanding the heel portion. The pieces were fixed to the inner soles with the help of 'last' and glue, and the glued areas hammered to adhere well.



Fig. 4A, B, C & D: Forming the sole, measuring, fixing the top and the completed sandals

Macramé ear ring and Necklace

The pair of earrings commenced with 6 warp cords of 76.2cm long. They were passed through the hole of the earring hook at the centre of the cords were located. Three overhand knots were tied and threaded through the wooden cream bead and continued with another three overhand knots.



Fig. 5A, B, C, & D: Making the overhand knots and the Chinese crown knot and overhand knot

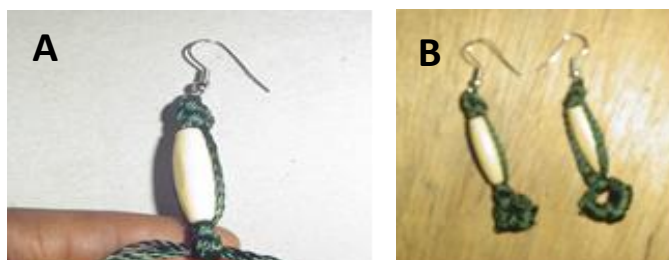


Fig. 6A & B: Completing the Ear Ring

The working cords were then separated into twos, to get 6 cords for each half and then a Chinese crown knot Sinnet (5 Chinese crown knots). The two Sinnets were closed with two overhand knots bundle and the unused hanging cords cut off.

The necklace (Fig 7A) was made with 6 warp cords of 152.4cm long. To start with, an overhand knot was made at one end and continued with Chinese crown knots Sinnet. An overhand knot was then created and continued with square knot Sinnet and ended with another overhand knot, before the long wooden bead is threaded through. Make two square knots Sinnets are made in between overhand knots and the other set of beads are threaded to get to the centre. The pendant is added and the process reversed in the end.



Fig.: 7A the finished Necklace

The social extent of macramé art

Macramé art production is becoming a social heritage as most producers irrespective of their origin embrace designs that seems universal as well as traditional. The number of younger users of macramé products has increased over the past few years. The youth of today is trendy and putting a great emphasis on new creative designs. In many cases, they are influenced by the comprehensive trends in clothing fashion, mainly through magazines, cinemas and internet. In terms of product trends, macramé products have been increasingly influenced by universal clothing fashion as well as traditional needs. Patrons, especially women, are opting for more accessories like macramé accessories to express their sense of style. More women are now adding such accessories to complement their dressing.

The demand for macramé accessories is on a rise, for both male and female who are more fashion-conscious. The realisation by all, acknowledge that macramé accessories are essential to a complete look, and has therefore become an integral part of their dressing. They may buy bracelets and necklaces' macramé products to complement their looks. Though, articles about men's macramé accessory products are still quite limited. Attitudes required for its continuity are being rooted and manifested through the proliferation of art colleges, vocational and

university institutions that encourage the use of macramé art as a creative element for fashionable products. Such attitude is turning the macramé art into an operational, cultural character that uncovers the social scope of macramé art production in Ghana. Now macramé art is not only an occupation for the youth (Fig. 8), but an acknowledgement of the creative development of the ingenuity of Ghanaian youth.

Cultural insinuations of macramé products

In Ghanaian indigenous culture, the beauty of colour insinuates visual qualities and attracts social interpretations. For instance the silver colour is associated with second in position and used for the royal regalia of sub-chiefs, Queen's ornament and female royalty. Green means newness fertility, growth, vitality and it is used for outdooring and child naming ceremonies, puberty, at funerals to keep the mouth of cynics shut, etc. and therefore used in a macramé product brings to the user a philosophical insight into cultural mannerisms, custom and traditions, giving meaning to the actions of people. Shapes and forms used to produce fashion accessories is believed to invoke the spiritual assistance that influence their psychic performances. The most noticeable systems of philosophies that tend to affect the human conduct of its citizenry through its material culture is an important vibrant component of its people. Material culture like beads and cotton cords a valuable material component for the indigenes referred to as *toma* used as a wrist band to protect newborn babies and a waist band for couples, especially the *Krobos* in the eastern region of Ghana for erotic reasons, play significant roles in their sexual life (Avotri, 2009).

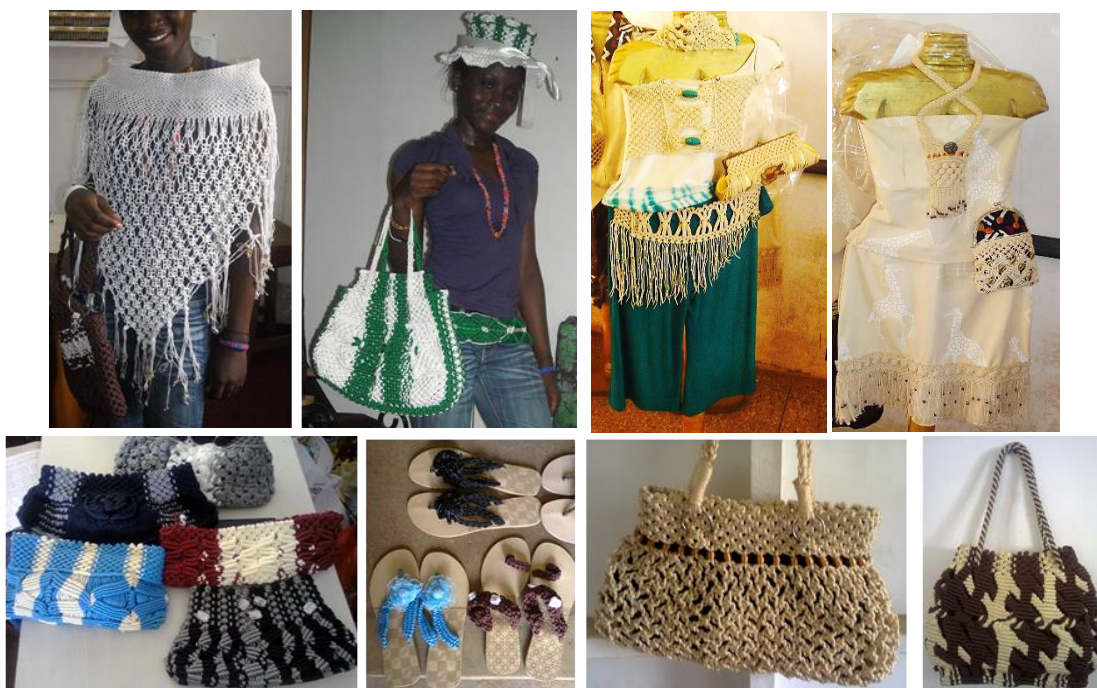


Fig. 8: Catalogue of Students macramé Fashion accessory products

The catalogue of macramé fashion accessory products in Fig. 8, attest to the implications that commands prestige, style, affluence, modernity and current.

CONCLUSION

By virtue of macramé art being used to produce fashionable products, this creative art has become an integral part of international, tradition and culture. The fundamental principle of

this study was to examine the progressive development of macramé as an art and a viable economic venture in Ghana. For the study so far, the rationale for macramé art is widespread for the majority of world cultures and forms a tie linking citizens of diverse cultural backgrounds. It must be acknowledged that it has undergone vast changes and growth through creativity and commercialization across cultures. Nevertheless, the trend of macramé designed products has been observed to be influenced by the comprehensive trends in clothing fashion, mainly through magazines, cinemas and internet. The result has been credibly exhibiting the tradition and culture of the Ghanaian people, which explains the Ghanaian cultural policy that provides a distinct identity to its citizenry (Anquandah, 2006). Though culture is dynamic the realities and possibilities of inclusive influence and hybrid cultures cannot be ruled out. However, the macramé art, can be seen as a promising exportable potential to be developed further to create employment and to enhance its contribution to the Gross Domestic Product of Ghana. An effort in this direction will go a long way to help revitalize the Ghana's economy and culture.

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