

## 46. Commercialising Indigenous Pottery Industry to Support Economic Empowerment among Indigenous Akamba Women

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### Abstract

*Commercialising is introducing products or services to the market for profit making. Pottery was an indigenous industry that supported pre-colonial societies' social, cultural, and economic activities. For some reasons, such as colonisation, pottery industries waned in most indigenous societies. The Akamba community, a subset of Bantu communities, practised pottery as one of their economic activities in the pre-colonial period. Today, the community has a significant number of women who engage in unpaid domestic labour and live in abject poverty. The study was conducted to identify the economic potential of the indigenous pottery industry and identify strategies to commercialise the industry and convert it into an economic hub for indigenous Akamba women. The study was a survey that used non-probability sampling techniques to select the sample. Questionnaires were used to gather data that was analysed descriptively with the help of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). A regression analysis was conducted to test the study hypothesis. The findings of the study indicated that the pottery industry has economic potential in Ukambani, and thus, commercialising the industry would lead to the economic empowerment of the indigenous Akamba women. If the findings above are actualised, society will achieve SDG No. 5, which seeks to empower women economically and give them financial independence. This paper contributes to the literature because limited information exists on how to commercialise indigenous industries. The paper is relevant to policymaker's keen on implementing SDGs supporting financial empowerment for indigenous women.*

**Keywords:** *Traditional pottery manufacturing, economic mobility, financial independence, native women*

### 1 Introduction

Commercialisation is releasing new products and services to the market to make a profit. The process involves product production, distribution, and marketing (Mazzarol et al., 2022). Small industries can commercialise their products through value addition and innovation to reach a wider audience. Indigenous pottery is a small industry in Kenya that can be commercialised to empower women economically.

According to Santacreu (2014), pottery manufactures clay products through moulding and hardening by heating. Various indigenous communities practised pottery for social, cultural, and economic purposes. It originated in Egypt around 4000 BC and in China around 3000 BC before spreading to other parts of the world (Smith, 2022).

In some parts of the United States, Native American potters advanced their pottery craft by making it an income-generating activity to support their families. The pottery industry was a small-scale enterprise that expanded in the matriarchal lineage for economic benefit. This

commercial activity gave women financial independence and the ability to control the market without intermediaries. The proceeds from the venture gave women a sense of economic pride and uplifted their status within the community (Vincentelli, 2000).

Craig (2021) in New York conducted a study that shed light on the role of pottery in prehistoric times. The study indicated that pottery was used for functional services such as food preservation to maximise returns from surplus food harvests. At every stage of the pottery-making process, such as clay extraction, fetching water, moulding, decoration, and firing, labour was needed, which created job opportunities for people. Labourers were remunerated for their services, increasing income per capita. This practice can be adopted by a segment of the population, especially those not involved in active employment but looking for alternative sources of income.

According to Maiti (2004), pottery products have a variety of uses in Indian society. Some of these uses include cooking, storing food and water, purifying water, brewing beer, and for decoration purposes. All these functions form an economic pattern in a social setting. Additional economic significance of pottery includes job creation, promotion of trade, and tourism. Pham Hong et al. (2021) similarly established that pottery work supports community-based tourism, enhancing economic sustainability among indigenous communities in Vietnam.

Pottery has an archaeological value that can be utilised for tourism purposes in a country, according to Ibeanu and Okechukwu (2017). These researchers further clarified that the resources needed for pottery in West Africa, which are clay, water, and fuel, are readily available in the local areas. This could mean that if society is willing to commercialise the pottery industry, it may not face the challenges of obtaining raw materials.

According to Wang and Marwick (2020), modern ceramics have replaced the traditional indigenous pottery technology. However, ceramic technology lacks originality or attachment to African cultures, so many indigenous women have yet to embrace it. Lack of appreciation for indigenous pottery has continued to deprive these societies of sources of economic income, leading to increased poverty among indigenous women in Kenya (Wang & Marwick, 2020). Otieno (2022b) also noted that pottery among the *Jonyuol Nyalo* women group in Kisumu County could be revitalised through value addition to the end products to make them economically and financially competitive for women.

The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS, 2020) released a comprehensive 2020 poverty report that indicated that 1/3 of the Kenyan population lives in poverty, with adult villagers earning less than 3252 Kenyan shillings a month. According to Kabeer (2015), poverty is prevalent across different strata of society, but it is more pronounced among rural dwellers and especially women.

Osborne (2015) noted that in the pre-colonial era, the Akamba communities practised hunting, gathering, and pottery as their main economic activities. Today, pottery activities have been abandoned, irrespective of their economic significance. This study sought to find out the economic potential of the indigenous Akamba pottery industry and identify strategies to commercialise it. The findings of this study will contribute to achieving SDG No. 5A, which seeks to empower women economically and give them financial independence.



**Figure 1: The process of pottery making and the local resources required for the process**

**Source:** *Chukwukajustice* (2017). CC-BY-SA-4.0

The following hypothesis guided the study:

$H_0$ : There is no relationship between commercialising the indigenous pottery industry and the economic empowerment of indigenous Akamba women.

## 2 Rationale of the study

In indigenous communities, the pottery industry primarily focuses on meeting society's social and cultural needs. The pottery industry, however, declined with the advent of plastic and aluminium imports, which are ideal substitutes for indigenous pottery products. This has resulted in declining rural industrialisation, employment opportunities, and financial independence among indigenous women. The pottery industry has the potential to generate income for indigenous Kamba women. Several studies have been conducted regarding pottery in indigenous societies. For instance, Otieno (2022a) highlighted the need to modernise pottery production to increase the demand for the end products. Otieno (2021) identified barriers to pottery techniques in rural communities and recommended several solutions that, if implemented, could potentially revive the pottery industry.

Despite numerous studies on the subject, there needs to be more information on how the traditional pottery industry can be commercialised to empower indigenous women financially. Commercialising pottery has the potential to generate profits, which can address poverty cases among indigenous Akamba women. This study seeks to address this gap and provide solutions for Kamba women to achieve financial empowerment. Commercialising the industry can reduce the number of women engaged in unpaid domestic work, thus achieving SDG No. 5 target A, which aims to empower women and give them opportunities to access economic resources and control over financial services. The government can utilise the study findings to design financial models that can support the commercialisation of the pottery industry. As a result, job opportunities will be created to minimise economic gender disparities and promote economic growth in the country.

### 3 Literature review

The study was guided by disruptive innovation theory. The theory was developed by Clayton Christensen in 1990 and posits that smaller companies, usually with fewer resources, can challenge established businesses by entering at the bottom of the market and continually moving up by offering more straightforward, more convenient, and less expensive alternatives to existing products. Pottery, a small industry, has the potential to commercialise and take up the small, ignored market segment that cannot afford machine-cut imports. Gradually, the industry can modify their products to meet the needs of their customers. Eventually, the industry will be able to attract the higher-income segment and gain control over the market.

Vasant (2019) conducted a study that focused on the post-independence traditional pottery-making industry in the rural parts of the Kolhapur District. The researcher noted that, after independence, the pottery industry started to decline because of numerous challenges, among them soil deficiency, less demand, and the decreasing social status of pottery work. The researcher acknowledged that pottery in the 21st century can be commercialised by adopting modern production technology and processing all raw materials. However, a lack of government support, a lack of innovative attitude from the potters, and a lack of cooperation led to a decline in pottery activities in the rural areas of Kolhapur. Industrialisation and globalisation introduced plastic, aluminium, and refrigeration products, which lowered the demand for pottery products. The factors above render the pottery industry irrelevant in the contemporary world. This study could have indicated the population segment affected by the pottery industry's collapse.

Pal (2021) conducted a study to identify the root causes of waning pottery activities in the Bangladesh pottery industry and establish ways of handling the identified problems. The study discovered that pottery was almost facing extinction, with only a few surviving cases of troubled industries. The problems identified included scarcity of product diversification, availability of machine-made plastic products, lack of research for development, lack of finance, lousy weather, and weak marketing of the product. Potters also discouraged newer generations from engaging in pottery, terming it an activity for lower-social status individuals who attract low-profit margins. The researcher recommended developing short- and long-term training programs for pottery production and improved marketing of the pottery industry. Declaring pottery-making villages as tourism sites would help to revive the industry.

Pottery among indigenous communities in Kenya also waned due to colonial influence (Kwanya, 2020; Muga, 2021). The researcher noted that the colonial regime neglected cottage industries in Tharaka-Nithi, irrespective of their potential to alleviate poverty in society. The study, which focused on the performance of the cottage industries in Tharaka-Nithi in 1907–1963, found that several industries, including beer brewing, herbal medicine, and pottery, existed before colonisation. The findings showed that colonialists implemented policies that banned local industries and turned Africans into raw material producers. The whites alienated African lands; thus, potters lacked ideal premises for establishing pottery industries and developing pottery products. The study also discovered that the influx of western-manufactured products overshadowed local pottery production, thus phasing them out of the local markets. The findings concurred with those of Vasant (2019), who stated that pottery waned because of the availability of aesthetically appealing imports that were ideal substitutes for traditional pottery products.

Otieno (2021) conducted a study on an analysis of pottery production for rehabilitating women in Kenyan prisons. The study was guided by several objectives, with one objective focusing on

barriers to pottery production. The findings indicated that the public needed to appreciate the aesthetic value of traditional pottery, which minimised the demand for the products. It was also discovered that pottery could not meet the specifications demanded by users and attracted minimal financial support compared to businesses that switched to a modern mode of production.

Kariuki (2022) wrote a book chapter that focused on harnessing traditional knowledge holders' institutions to realise SGDs in Kenya. The study focused on the Mbeere community and considered pottery to be indigenous knowledge. The researcher thought that indigenous pottery could be revitalised to achieve SDG number 16, which calls for reducing illicit financial flows and recovering stolen assets. According to the study, Mbeere women hawk final pottery products within the village or sell the rest at Ishara market. However, the greatest challenge is that traditional knowledge and innovation fail to meet the necessary intellectual property (IP) protection criteria. IP protection is a source of income for the creators and innovators of a product. Lack of IP protection discourages people from continually developing and innovating products to meet the market's changing demands. The author indicated that if pottery is subjected to IP protection, more people would innovate, develop magnificent commercial products, and get financial rewards through patents.

The existing literature examines why indigenous pottery waned and several ways of revitalising the industry. It has, however, insufficiently examined how traditional pottery can be commercialised and exploited to empower indigenous women economically. This study seeks to address the abovementioned gap by developing informed strategies for commercialising the indigenous pottery industry to empower women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



**Figure 2: Finished pottery products**

*Source: (Fuseini, 2023). CC-BY-SA-4.0*

## 4 Methodology

The study aimed to identify the potential of the indigenous Akamba pottery industry as a source of income for women and identify strategies to commercialise Akamba indigenous pottery. The study was a survey that was conducted in Machakos County. The county was selected because the characteristics of the population qualified for study. The study population consisted of women who were members of registered community-based organisations (CBOs). The researcher could not ascertain the exact population size, so a nonprobability sampling technique was used. Levy

and Lemeshow (2013) advise that researchers should use the nonprobability sampling technique if the population size is unknown. The researcher, therefore, used snowballing techniques to select the study sample. A sample size of 30 CBOs was selected, and one respondent who knew the research questions was purposely picked in each CBO to answer the study questions. A total of 30 respondents were therefore picked. Questionnaires were used to collect data because they effectively analyse qualitative data (Lavrakas, 2008).

The researcher administered research questions in cases where respondents could not complete the questionnaire independently. Respondents were informed that the data collected was for academic purposes only and that there were no financial rewards for participating in the study. The collected data was analysed with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were estimated for all quantitative variables and presented in tables. Inferential analysis was done using regression analysis, and R2 was used to establish the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Regression was preferred because of its ability to predict two or more independent variables (Oso & Onen, 2009).

## 5 Data Analysis and Discussion

Data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, and findings were presented using tables. The discussion section interprets the findings of the study objectives.

### 5.1 Descriptive analysis of the economic potential of the indigenous pottery industry

The respondents were asked to rate economic potential on a Likert scale of 1-5, where one represents strongly agree and five strongly disagree. Table 5.1 below shows the computed means and standard deviations for the items measuring the economic potential of indigenous pottery industries in Ukambani

Table 5.1: Analysis of the Economic Potentials of the Pottery Industry.

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Voluminous pottery product production	30	1	5	2.27	1.112
Availability of raw materials for pottery products	30	1	5	1.93	1.230
Probability of a high employee count	30	1	4	2.47	.776
High profit margins for pottery products	30	1	3	2.03	.718
High demand and sales for pottery products	30	1	4	1.53	.819
There is a significant market share for pottery products.	30	1	4	2.10	.845
Valid N (listwise)	30				

*Source: (Survey Data, 2023)*

Results in Table 5.1 above indicate that most respondents agreed that the pottery industry in Ukamabani has economic viability. Based on the mean values of the tested products, respondents agreed that product production, employee count, demand, and profit margins for pottery products are high. Respondents agreed to the availability of raw materials and significant market share for the pottery products.

These findings indicate that investment in the pottery industry in Ukambani can be a viable venture with the probability of making profits. The availability of raw materials and a market share can make the venture successful. This will, after that, create job opportunities

for women in the area. Based on disruptive innovation theory, the availability of principle requirements for economic investment makes it possible to commercialise this industry and empower women financially.

## 5.2 Descriptive analysis of strategies for commercialising the pottery industry

Table 5.2 below shows the computed means and standard deviations for the items measuring strategies for commercialising indigenous pottery industries in Ukambani. Responses were rated on a Likert scale of 1-5, where one represents strongly agree and five strongly disagree.

Table 5.2: Analysis of Strategies for Commercialising the Pottery Industry

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Fixed capital formation increases sales of pottery products.	30	1	3	1.60	.770
Training in pottery skills increases production output.	30	1	3	1.90	.712
Product diversification and customisation increase market share.	30	1	3	2.07	.583
Professional marketing strategies increase sales of pottery products.	30	1	5	1.80	.847
Pricing pottery products affects demand and sales.	30	1	4	2.30	.794
Valid N (listwise)	30				

*Source: (Survey Data, 2023)*

From the table above, respondents strongly agreed that developing fixed capital, such as warehouses, godowns, and supply chain centres, could increase sales in the pottery industry. The majority of respondents strongly agreed that the use of professional strategies for marketing and training women on pottery skills will go a long way in supporting the commercialisation of the pottery industry. Respondents also agreed that if products were reasonably priced, they would increase pottery product sales. Diversification and customisation would increase the market share for pottery products. Commercialising products involves production, distribution, and marketing (Mazzarol et al., 2022). To commercialise pottery products, society needs to work on establishing fixed capital, vigorous marketing strategies, and continuous training for it to be in a position to increase market share, make a profit, and empower women financially.

## 5.3 Test of hypothesis

The study used regression analysis to establish the relationship between independent and dependent variables. The study hypothesis was that there is no relationship between the commercialisation of the pottery industry and the economic empowerment of indigenous Akamba women. The following results were obtained:

Table 5.3 Regression Analysis Model Summary on Commercialising Strategies

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.396a	.157	.127	.56268	.157	5.222	1	28	.030

a. Predictors: (Constant), commercialisation strategies

The findings revealed that the R<sup>2</sup> value was 0.157, meaning that the independent variables (commercialisation strategies) contribute to 15% of the variation of the dependent variable. The remaining 75% shows that economic empowerment in the pottery industry can be explained by factors other than commercialisation strategies.

Table 5.4: ANOVA Test Table

ANOVAa						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.653	1	1.653	5.222	.030b
	Residual	8.865	28	.317		
	Total	10.519	29			

a. Dependent Variable: Economic potential

b. Predictors: (Constant), commercialisation strategies

The analysis of variance shows that the significance value was 0.03, which is below the 0.05 threshold, and therefore, the overall model was significant. The results hold that commercialising the indigenous pottery industry will positively impact economic empowerment. As such, the null hypothesis was rejected, concluding that commercialising the indigenous pottery industry would lead to economic empowerment among indigenous Akamba women.

The study aimed to establish ways of commercialising the indigenous pottery industry to support the economic mobility of indigenous Akamba women. The findings revealed a statistically significant contribution of commercialisation strategies towards the economic growth of the pottery industry. These findings align with previous research by (Kariuki, 2022; Pal, 2021; Vasant, 2019), who indicated a potential for commercialising the indigenous pottery industry by adopting modern technology and improving the industry's marketing. However, the findings on commercialisation strategy for customising pottery products differed from the findings by Otieno (2021), who noted that local consumers do not appreciate indigenous pottery products.

It is important to note that the study was conducted within a specific region. Consequently, generalising and applying the findings to communities without a history of pottery-making in pre-colonial times might not yield the anticipated outcomes. Despite the limitation, the study contributed to the growing body of evidence supporting the revival of indigenous industries for economic mobility among indigenous women.

## 6 Conclusion

The study sought to identify commercialisation strategies for the indigenous pottery industry and its significance in supporting the economic empowerment of indigenous Akamba women. The study also assessed the economic potential of the indigenous pottery industry to empower Akamba women. Based on the findings, the indigenous pottery industry has economic potential that, if well invested, can create job opportunities and financial empowerment for indigenous women. With economic viability, the researcher identified that the commercialisation of the pottery industry could create an economic hub that would act as a source of income for indigenous Akamba women. However, based on the inferential analysis report, commercialisation strategies contribute approximately 15% towards economic empowerment. Thus, other studies can be carried out to ascertain other contributors that can strengthen the economic potential of the indigenous pottery industry. Therefore, the

government, non-governmental organisations, and other financiers can use the findings to empower women economically and achieve SDG No. 5, which seeks to empower women financially and reduce cases of unpaid domestic labour.

## 7 Recommendation

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

- Implementing a policy for promoting the commercialisation of indigenous pottery. Policymakers may consider allocating financial resources to support the integration of cottage industries into economic growth models in the country. This will make it easy for indigenous women to access funds that allow them to venture into the pottery industry.
- Training programmes and resources may be developed to raise awareness of indigenous pottery's potential for fostering economic empowerment among women.
- The study contributes valuable insight into the disruptive innovation theory by identifying other mechanisms, such as the adoption of modern technology by small-scale industries, which gives them a better platform to integrate with the modern population and expand their market share.
- A similar study can be carried out by expanding the scope to include other areas of Ukambani to ascertain that the findings hold the truth. Further study should be conducted to establish whether women in urban slums who face similar financial challenges can benefit from the pottery industry.

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