

The Economic Impact of Lango Pottery: Sustaining Communities Through Craft

Ocen robert^{1*}, Prof. Jin Weiwei²

College of art and design, Jingdezhen ceramic university, Jiangxi province -China.

*Corresponding Author

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.10100558>

Received: 28 January 2026; Accepted: 02 February 2026; Published: 17 February 2026

ABSTRACT

Lango pottery serves as a vital and dynamic economic engine in modern Northern Ugandan communities, far from being a static artifact of the past. The craft creates sustainable, women-centric livelihoods that strengthen household resilience and promote local economic networks by fusing Indigenous technical knowledge with flexible market strategies. At the same time, the processes of obtaining, making, and using clay in rituals—documented as bearers of cosmological beliefs and clan identity—act as an active, embodied archive. The commodification of cultural heritage in local and tourist markets provides the economic justification for intergenerational knowledge transfer, while the authenticity derived from its deep cultural roots enhances its market.

This paper investigated the strategies put in place by the traditional potters and also identified the marketing principles adopted to guarantee competitiveness and sustainability. The relationships between the potters' age, educational level, years of experience, their perception of and their involvement in pottery business was also determined. Three methods were used that is, pre-tested structured interview schedule, observation, and focus group discussions were implemented to gather data from 50 traditional potters that were randomly selected in two major traditional pottery centers. Descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentages were used to analyze the data. Pearson Correlation analysis was also applied to explain the relationships between the variables tested. The study revealed that traditional pottery is a women-centric in the two centers. Potters implemented marketing concept strategy to gain competitive advantage. Majority of potters showed that foreign substitutes, bad roads, and transportation, to mention a few, were some of the encounters related to their involvement in pottery production. The study concluded that traditional pottery continues to be a major source of employment to rural women hence community sustenance. It also concluded that marketing and its principles, more than any other business functions, is critical to the success of every organization.

Keywords: Lango pottery, economic sustenance, cultural heritage.

INTRODUCTION.

The Lango people inhabit the Lango sub-region of Northern Uganda, an area north of Lake Kyoga. They are a Nilotic-speaking group, part of the larger Luo migration that settled in the region (Tosh, 1978). Historically organized into a decentralized system of chiefdoms, their social structure is based on patrilineal clans (atekere). Traditionally agro-pastoralists, the Lango have a rich material culture encompassing basketry, blacksmithing, and, most notably, a distinctive pottery tradition (Ocitti, 1973).

The rich pottery heritage of the lango.

Lango pottery, primarily produced by women, is a centuries-old craft deeply embedded in the social and ritual life of the people. The process involves coiling and molding local clay (awor), which is then fired in open bonfires. The resulting pots are often burnished with stones or seeds and sometimes decorated with incised geometric patterns, lines, and dots that carry clan-specific or symbolic meanings (Ocitti, 1973).

Lango pottery has a highly symbolic and practical typology. Important types include "the Awor," a big, multipurpose pot for collecting and storing water. "The Agulu" is a pot with a large mouth that is used to cook staple foods like sorghum and millet. "The Abino" is a smaller pot used to brew local beer (kwete) or serve sauces. "Adek" is a small, delicate pot with ritual significance that is frequently used in ceremonies related to ancestral veneration, libations, and traditional healing. This legacy is more than just practical; it is a storehouse of indigenous knowledge, aesthetics, and cosmological beliefs, with decorations and shapes passing down cultural identity through the generations.

Dual role of lango pottery.

a) Social cohesion and cultural preservation:

Lango pottery is an essential tool for maintaining cultural traditions. The craft is "a library of Lango indigenous knowledge," with mothers passing on techniques, symbols, and uses to their daughters orally. Important lifecycle rituals depend on the pots. For instance, specific pots are used during marriage negotiations, childbirth, and funeral rites, anchoring these events in tangible cultural practice. The motifs on the pots are not random; they convey social values, historical narratives, and clan identity, strengthening a sense of community in a world that is modernizing quickly. Anthropologists such as Tosh (1978) and Ocitti (1973) have documented how the pre-colonial Lango political economy and social structure depended heavily on material culture, including pottery, making its preservation an act of protecting intangible heritage.

a) Economic Sustenance and Livelihood:

Beyond its cultural role, pottery has long provided crucial economic sustenance for Lango households, particularly for women. The production and sale of pots at local markets (okwoko) have traditionally been a source of independent income for female potters. In the context of Northern Uganda, a region recovering from decades of conflict and facing economic challenges, this craft has gained renewed importance as a livelihood strategy. Ego (2017), in a study on small-scale industries in the Lango sub-region, identifies pottery as a resilient, low-capital enterprise that contributes to household food security and poverty alleviation. While the advent of metal and plastic containers has challenged the domestic demand for traditional pottery, a parallel market persists for ritual uses, and a growing tourist and cultural heritage market offers new, albeit limited, economic opportunities. Thus, the craft supports both subsistence and the potential for small-scale commercial enterprise.

The lango people's migration from the Nile valley to northern Uganda

The Langi (Langi) migration from the Nile Valley to their current homeland in Northern Uganda is a complex process reconstructed from oral traditions and linguistic evidence.

J. P. Crazzolara in his seminal work "The Lwoo" (1950), argues that the Langi are a product of intermarriage and cultural fusion between Central Sudanic-speaking groups (the indigenous "Madi" group) and migrating Luo-speaking peoples from the Nile Valley (Crazzolara, 1950, pp. 120-125).

Scholars like Crazzolara and later, A. O. Atkinson, trace the origins of the Langi's Luo-speaking ancestors to the Bahr El Ghazal region of present-day South Sudan. These groups were part of the larger Luo diaspora that moved southwards and eastwards over centuries. John Tosh, in his work on the Langi, notes that their traditions "point to an original home in the north, beyond the present limits of Lango settlement" (Tosh, 1978, p. 9). These Luo groups, often referred to in traditions as "Lango" or "Langi", moved into the area north of Lake Kyoga, bringing with them a Luo language and certain political institutions.

Upon reaching the region north of Lake Kyoga, the migrating Luo-speaking groups encountered and gradually intermarried with indigenous Central Sudanic peoples, likely related to the Madi and Okebo. Kenneth Ingham, while summarizing the prevailing view, states: "The Lango are a mixed people whose language is Luo but whose physical characteristics suggest a substantial intermixture with the... Central Sudanic tribes" (Ingham, 1975, p. 47). This fusion was profound. J. B. Webster, in his historical chronology, emphasizes that the Langi identity and culture emerged from this synthesis, where the Luo language dominated but much of the social and cultural fabric was drawn from the indigenous substrate (Webster, 1976, p. 183).

The process was not a single, mass migration but likely a series of clan-based movements and integrations over a long period, culminating in the formation of a distinct Lango society by the 18th or early 19th century. Tosh elaborates that this society was "essentially a new creation, born of the interaction between immigrant and host communities" and that the political structures were a decentralized, clan-based system that differed from the more centralized kingdoms of their Bunyoro neighbours (Tosh, 1978, pp. 10-12).



FIG 1: Map of Uganda showing different regions with their respective clan

While dates are difficult to pinpoint, Webster's chronology places the main period of Luo group infiltration into the area between circa 1550 and 1700 AD (Webster, 1976, p. 183). The triggers for the original migration from the Nile Valley are often linked to the environmental pressures and political disruptions in the Bahr El Ghazal region, common drivers of the larger Luo diaspora.

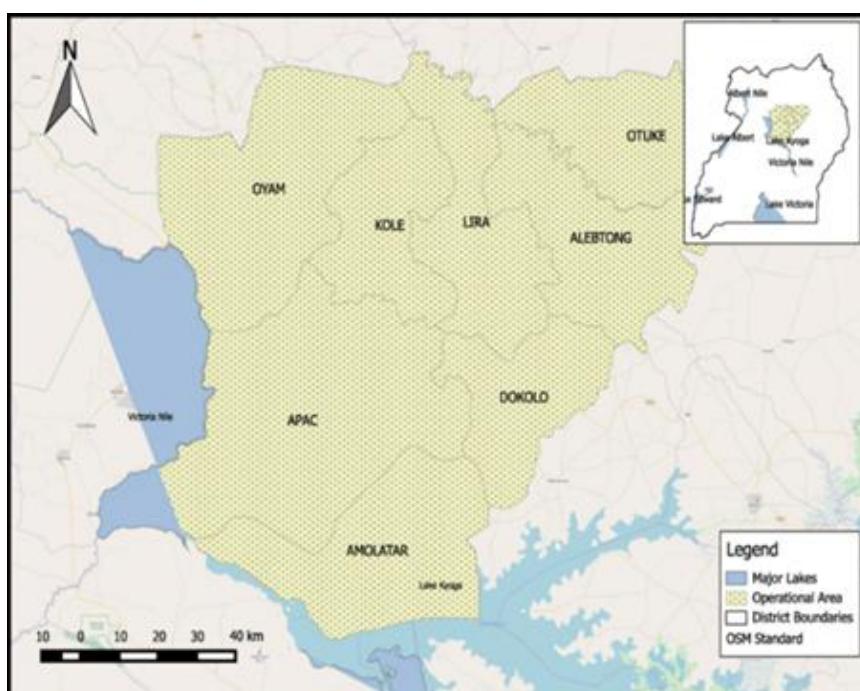


FIG2: Map showing various districts within Lango sub-region

Historical overview of Lango contemporary pottery

Pre-Colonial Art Traditions

In the pre-colonial era, pottery among the Lango people, like many other Nilotc and Luo-speaking groups in northern Uganda, was a highly functional and culturally embedded craft practiced primarily by women.

Technique and Form: The dominant technique was coiling, with pots built from rolls of clay, smoothed, and then fired in open bonfires. The forms were largely utilitarian: cooking pots (agulu), water storage pots (ongulu), beer pots for fermentation and serving, and bowls for food.

Decoration was often minimal, consisting of rouletting (using carved wooden roulettes or maize cobs), incised lines, and burnishing. As Margaret Trowell noted in her foundational work on African art, in many Ugandan societies, "the potter is almost always a woman" and her work, while functional, adhered to traditional forms and decorative idioms that carried cultural meaning (Trowell, 1937, p. 45).

Social and Ritual Context: Pottery was not considered "art for art's sake" but a vital domestic technology. Specific pots had roles in social rituals, such as ceremonies related to birth, marriage, and death. The knowledge of clay sources, tempering materials (often crushed old pottery or organic matter), and firing techniques was passed from mother to daughter. J. H. Driberg's early ethnographic work on the Lango describes their material culture in detail, noting the importance of local clay pits and the functional design of vessels suited to their agro-pastoral lifestyle (Driberg, 1923, pp. 78-80).

Colonial Influence and its Impact (Late 19th Century - 1962)

The colonial period introduced forces that disrupted and transformed traditional pottery practices.

Introduction of Alternatives: The importation of cheap, mass-produced enamelware, aluminum, and plastic containers from Europe began to undermine the market for traditional pottery. These alternatives were lighter, less breakable, and often status symbols associated with modernity. John Picton, in his overview of African pottery, observes that colonial economies "led to the decline of many indigenous craft industries" as imported goods replaced local ones (Picton, 1993, p. 470).

Mission and School Workshops: Some missionary and colonial school workshops promoted pottery, but often with a European aesthetic and technical bias (like the use of the kick-wheel) and for a commercial rather than a purely cultural purpose. This created a duality: the traditional domestic production continued, but a new, hybrid form aimed at a new market (colonial officials, tourists, an emerging African elite) began to emerge. Trowell, who taught at Makerere University, documented this shift, where training began to emphasize individual artistry and saleable commodities (Trowell, 1954, p. 12).

Post-Independence Art Movements and Contemporary Developments (1962 - Present)

After Uganda's independence in 1962, pottery, including within Lango, evolved in a complex artistic landscape influenced by formal art education, cultural revivalism, and the tourist market.

Influence of Nabulago and Margaret Trowell: The Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Arts (MTSIFA) at Makerere University, founded in 1939, became a central force. While not Lango-specific, it trained artists from all over Uganda. Under Trowell's philosophy of "conservative modernism," students were encouraged to study traditional forms and techniques but adapt them to contemporary expression. George Kyeyune, in his analysis of Ugandan art, notes that MTSIFA graduates like Francis Nnaggenda (a sculptor who also worked in clay) explored abstract forms inspired by, but not replicating, traditional Ugandan pottery (Kyeyune, 2001, p. 341).

The "Ugandan Pottery" Aesthetic: A distinct contemporary Ugandan pottery style developed, often characterized by elegant, simplified forms, polished surfaces (using stone burnishers), and sgraffito (incised) decoration depicting stylized animals, plants, and geometric patterns. While this style is pan-Ugandan, Lango potters,

especially those with formal training or working through cooperatives, have engaged with it. Sandy Todd's study on contemporary African ceramics includes references to Ugandan potters synthesizing traditional coil-building with modern design for a national and international market (Todd, 1980-1980, 2013, pp. 211-212).

Cultural Revitalization and Challenges: In recent decades, there has been a growing interest in preserving cultural heritage. NGOs and community projects sometimes focus on pottery as a source of women's income and cultural identity. However, contemporary Lango pottery exists on a spectrum: from purely functional vessels made in rural areas using age-old methods, to studio pottery by individual artists experimenting with form and glaze, to souvenir production. The work of Dr. Jessica N. Aguti, a Ugandan scholar, has highlighted the role of women's crafts in Lango livelihood strategies, noting how pottery adapts to changing economic realities (Aguti, 2005, p. 27).

In conclusion, the historical trajectory of Lango contemporary pottery shows a movement from a functional, communally-regulated domestic craft in the pre-colonial era, through a period of disruption and hybridization under colonial influence, to its current status as a diverse practice encompassing traditional survival, cultural commodity, and a medium for individual artistic expression within Uganda's broader art movements. The contemporary scene is defined by this synthesis of inherited form, adapted technique, and modern market demands.

The evolution of Langi pottery traditions

The evolution of pottery traditions is a central subject in archaeology and anthropological theory, understood not as a passive reflection of culture but as an active component in cultural development, social complexity, and technological innovation. The literature demonstrates a shift from descriptive typologies to interpretive frameworks linking pottery to socio-economic processes.

Theoretical Foundations: Pottery as a Proxy for Cultural Process.

Early 20th-century culture-historical archaeology established the fundamental link between pottery styles and cultural groups. V. Gordon Childe framed pottery as a key diagnostic artifact for tracing migrations and cultural interactions, famously using ceramic sequences to define European prehistory (Childe, 1929, pp. v-vi). This established the principle that "pots equal people," though this axiom has since been heavily critiqued for its simplicity.

The processual archaeology of the 1960s-70s re-conceptualized pottery within ecological and adaptive systems. Lewis R. Binford argued that ceramic variation should be explained by its "techno-function" within subsistence strategies, not just style (Binford, 1965, p. 205). In this view, the adoption of pottery, often linked to sedentism and intensive resource processing (like boiling seeds or storing surplus), was a functional response to economic needs.

Social and Symbolic Dimensions: Beyond Function

Post-processual and ceramic ecology approaches have significantly deepened the interpretation. Prudence M. Rice provides a comprehensive model, arguing that pottery evolution is driven by four core factors: technological choices, ecological constraints, social organization, and symbolic communication (Rice, 1987, pp. 441-458). She demonstrates how increasing standardization in paste, form, and decoration can signal the rise of specialized workshops, often correlating with increased social hierarchy and centralized production (Rice, 1981, p. 220). The work of Ian Hodder in ethnoarchaeology challenged purely functionalist views. Studying the Kalabari in Nigeria, he found that decorative motifs on pots were actively used to negotiate social boundaries and ethnic identity, with style functioning as a "form of non-verbal communication" within specific social contexts (Hodder, 1982, p. 189). This showed that ceramic change could be driven by ideological and social strategies, not just economic or environmental pressures.

Case Studies in Cultural Development

The Neolithic Revolution: The invention of pottery is frequently, but not universally, associated with Neolithic

sedentism. In the Ancient Near East, Kathleen Kenyon's work at Jericho showed early pottery (Pre-Pottery Neolithic B) appearing alongside domesticated plants, but not immediately, indicating a complex adoption process linked to new cooking and storage requirements for agrarian life (Kenyon, 1957, p. 92).

State Formation and Specialization: In Mesoamerica, the evolution of pottery is tightly linked to political complexity. George L. Cowgill's analysis of Teotihuacan ceramics shows a dramatic shift from diverse, locally produced wares to highly standardized, state-produced pottery (like Thin Orange ware) distributed across the empire, reflecting "administrative control and economic integration" (Cowgill, 1997, p. 138).

Trade and Interaction: Ceramic styles are prime markers of cultural contact. Colin Renfrew's analysis of Early Bronze Age Aegean pottery (e.g., Cycladic collared jars) used stylistic similarities to map "interaction spheres," showing how trade networks facilitated the spread of not only goods but also technological knowledge and artistic conventions (Renfrew, 1972, pp. 451-454).

4. The Chaine Opératoire Approach: A Holistic View

A dominant contemporary framework is the *chaîne opératoire* (operational sequence), which traces the social choices embedded in every stage of production: clay selection, paste preparation, forming, decorating, firing, and distribution. Olivier Gosselain and Valentine Roux have used this approach to reveal how pottery techniques reflect deep-seated "technological traditions" that are more conservative than decoration, often signaling community identity and learning networks (Gosselain, 2000, p. 189; Roux, 2019, p. 4). Changes in the "chaîne opératoire" thus signal profound social shifts, such as the movement of people (e.g., marriage patterns) or the adoption of new social values.

Pottery roles in daily subsistence, ritual practice, and social identity.

Based on anthropological and historical studies conducted primarily in the mid-20th century, pottery among the Lango people of northern Uganda played a multifaceted and deeply integrated role in daily subsistence, ritual practice, and social identity. The literature emphasizes its functional primacy, with artistic expression being a secondary, though culturally significant, attribute.

Pottery in Daily Life: A Female-Dominated Subsistence Technology:

Pottery was an essential domestic technology, crucial for food preparation, storage, and water carriage. Production was exclusively the domain of women, with skills passed from mother to daughter. John Tosh, in his political history of the Lango, notes that pottery was a "routine domestic craft" and, alongside basket-making, was one of the primary non-agricultural activities for women (Tosh, 1978, p. 18).



FIG 3: a large water pot, for storing water.

Function and Form: The primary vessels were utilitarian. J. H. Driberg, in his early ethnography, describes the main types: atida (a large water pot), agulu (a cooking pot), and abino (a beer pot) (Driberg, 1923, p. 155). These forms were designed for specific functions—the water pot had a narrow neck to prevent spillage, while cooking pots were wide-mouthed.

Production and Economics: Pottery was often produced for household use, but there was also a local exchange system. Margaret Trowell, in her study of African arts, classifies Lango pottery as "domestic ware," typically unglazed and fired in open bonfires, which resulted in the characteristic reddish-brown to black coloration (Trowell, 1960, p. 78). The clay was sourced locally and tempered with crushed sherds or gravel. There was little evidence of full-time specialization; instead, skilled potters might produce surplus for barter with neighbors for grain or other goods.

Pottery in Ritual and Symbolic Contexts:

While daily ware was largely undecorated, pottery gained symbolic significance in specific ritual contexts, particularly those associated with the life cycle and spiritual beliefs.

Burial and Ancestral Rites: Pots served as important grave goods. J. P. Cazzolara notes that personal items, including pots, were placed on graves, "so that the dead might not lack what they needed in the other world" (Cazzolara, 1950, p. 129). This practice linked pottery to beliefs about the afterlife and the continuity of the individual beyond death.

Ritual Vessels for Offerings: Special pots were used for making offerings to ancestors or spirits (jogi). Driberg observes that during ceremonies, beer or food would be placed in a pot and set aside for the spiritual entities, acting as a vessel for communication between the living and the supernatural (Driberg, 1923, p. 209).

Symbolism in Decoration: When decoration appeared, it often held symbolic meaning. The most common decorative technique was rouletting (using a carved wooden roulette to create impressed patterns) and incised lines. Trowell suggests that simple geometric patterns, like zigzags or bands, may have carried protective or auspicious meanings, though she cautions that such interpretations were often not explicitly articulated by the potters themselves (Trowell, 1960, p. 79).

Pottery as Artistic and Social Expression

Artistic expression in Lango pottery was constrained by its utilitarian nature but was evident in form, finish, and limited decoration. Its primary artistic role was as a marker of social identity and skill.

Aesthetic of Function: The beauty of a pot was judged by its symmetry, the fineness of its finish, and its functional efficiency. A well-made, thin-walled pot that cooked evenly and was pleasant to handle was considered aesthetically superior. Tosh implies that a woman's skill in pottery, like her skill in cultivation, contributed to her status and reputation for competence (Tosh, 1978, p. 18).

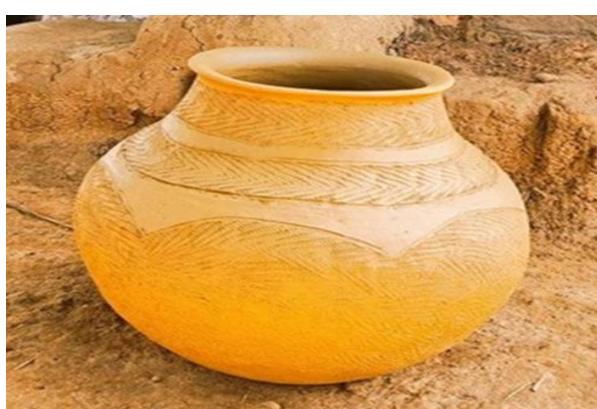


FIG 4: a well finished pots with surface decorations



FIG 5: a well decorated large water pot.

Ethnic Identifier: The forms and decorative techniques themselves were markers of Lango identity, distinct from the pottery of neighboring Acholi, Iteso, or Bunyoro peoples. The collective, decentralized production style—with no royal workshops or highly ornate courtly ware—reflected the acephalous, clan-based social structure of pre-colonial Lango society. As Tosh argues, material culture like pottery was part of the "new creation" of Lango identity from its mixed origins, representing a pragmatic, adaptive craft tradition (Tosh, 1978, p. 12).

Limitations on "Art for Art's Sake": There is little evidence in the literature for purely ceremonial or non-utilitarian sculptural pottery in traditional Lango society. Artistic expression was channeled more prominently into other media, such as body scarification (kwalo), ironwork (spears and bracelets), and later, beadwork.

Research Problem.

The Lango region in northern Uganda was recognized for its diverse traditional practices prior to Uganda's independence in 1962. These inclinations encompass agriculture, conventional bead crafting, basket weaving, among others. Many of these tendencies have vanished or are operating at their minimum capacity due to contemporary production methods or foreign substitutes. Nonetheless, traditional pottery making has endured and stayed authentic despite the modern advancements in production techniques and the spread of alternatives like porcelain, plastic, and metal items. Potters encounter a variety of challenges, including insufficient funds to satisfy the increasing demands of their customers. Additionally, they face issues like water scarcity, poor road conditions, and transportation, among others.

The research noted that pottery production was rising instead of falling despite the previously mentioned difficulties and international competition. As a result, the subsequent questions emerged regarding this tendency: what strategies are the potters using to guard against competition? What marketing principles were being applied, whether deliberately or unintentionally? Which pricing strategies were they utilizing and what opportunities are they exploiting? For what duration can they maintain these strategies? These and various inquiries prompted this research, which required nine (7) months of exploration from June 2025 through January 2026

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.

The study was intentionally conducted in two traditional pottery communities, specifically the Oloo and Amac pottery communities located in Alebtong and Lira district, respectively. The two locations were among the biggest traditional pottery hubs in the Lango sub-region of northern Uganda. The study was conducted from June 2025 to January 2026, encompassing Uganda's lango sub-region during both the rainy and dry seasons. The rainy season plays a significant role in traditional pottery production. Finding clay is simpler in this season since the clay pits are softer and more accessible to extract. In contrast, the firing of the wares poses more challenges in this season due to the traditional use of open firing and the unpredictable rains occurring during this time.

The study was conducted in three stages according to Goulding's (2007) approach. The initial stage involved a collection of fifteen (15) recorded, pre-tested structured in-depth interviews with fifty (50) traditional potters randomly selected from the two pottery centers. Tapes and informants were utilized since most potters were

illiterate and unable to communicate in English. The interviewed women were aged between 20 and 70 years, with an average age of 45 years. Surveys focused on the techniques employed by the potters, obstacles faced, and marketing strategies utilized to achieve an advantage over contemporary ceramics.

The second phase involved observing the production of pottery at the pottery centers. Grove and Fiske (1992) state that observational methods involve data collection approaches that emphasize experience by delivering genuine impressions in real-world settings. Adler and Adler (1994) propose that the defining characteristic of observation is its non-intrusive quality, which reduces any disruption in the behavior of those being observed, whether through manipulation or stimulation.

The concluding stage of the study included several focus group discussions with a diverse range of potters regarding their social class and educational backgrounds. In these discussions, 50 individuals from the two pottery centers took part, despite 70 individuals being contacted. Descriptive statistics, including frequency distribution and percentages, were employed to examine the collected data.

The analysis of the correlation coefficient was employed to assess the connections between potters' participation and their socioeconomic traits. The various marketing strategies and principles employed by the potters were evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Undecided (3), Disagree (2), to Strongly Disagree (1).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS.

Table 1 indicated that most (60%) of the surveyed potters were older than 60 years, 25% fell within the age range of 35 to 54 years, and merely 18% were aged between 15 and 34 years. This is not surprising, as field observations and focus group discussions indicated a higher presence of older women compared to younger ones. The practice of pottery also benefits women beyond their childbearing years, as only post-menopausal women can partake in the observance of rituals and taboos. Culturally speaking, traditions prevent younger women in their prime from managing certain ceremonial potteries, like sacred and ritual vases. Moreover, the government's policy of free education in primary and secondary schools penalizes parents who prevent their school-age children from attending school.

Most (65%) of the participants at the two ceramic studios identified as Christians. 20% identified as Muslims, whereas 15% were traditionalists who honored one traditional deity or another. The majority Christians in the focus group discussions transitioned from traditional beliefs to Christianity. Many of them continue to follow traditional beliefs alongside their Christian faith and frequently express, "culture does not conflict with religion." Most were also wed to husbands who had multiple wives. The Christian religion permits its followers to marry multiple partners because there is no strict regulation against having numerous wives.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to their socioeconomic characteristics Frequency Percentage (%)

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Women age:		
15 – 34	5	15
35 – 54	15	25
Above 60	30	60
Religion:		
Christianity	15	65
Islam	65	20
Others	20	15
Marital status:		
Single	5	10
Married	30	60
Widow	15	30

Level of education:			
Nursery school	33	66	
Primary school	15	30	
Secondary school	2	4	
Level of children's involvement:			
None			
1 – 3	25	50	
4 – 6	20	40	
	5	10	
Years of experience:			
5 – 20	13	26	
25 – 36	32	64	
Above 40	5	10	

Source: Field survey, 2025

The research revealed that a different majority (60%) were married, 30% were widows, and 10% were unmarried women. This appears to align with the previous discussion regarding the taboos that prevent younger women from participating in pottery making and the government's mandatory schooling policy, resulting in a limited number of single women. Conversely, the 30% of widows identified through observational methods and focus group discussions are of older age, with most around 65 years old, having either lost their partners recently or many years ago. The 60% majority who were married were noted to be relatively old and have between 3 to 6 adult children.

The research also showed that most (66%) of the participants lacked formal western education, 30% were capable of attending primary schools, and merely 4% had secondary school education. The older potters disclosed (through focus group discussion) that their parents and partners were not supportive of western education. Instead, they were urged to be deeply rooted in informal Christianity.

The policy of free education negatively affected the number of children engaging in or helping their parents. The skills passed from mother to child in traditional pottery appear to be at risk. Consequently, concerning the aforementioned, the largest portion (50%) of the surveyed potters did not have children to whom they were passing down skills, 40% had 1 to 3 of their children participating in skill transfer, specifically engaging in pottery creation, while just 10% had 4 to 6 of their children entirely engaged in pottery-making activities. During the observation period and focus group discussion, the women expressed sorrow over their children's disinterest resulting from their exposure to Western education. The kids participating in focus group discussions hoped their parents would permit the modernization of the process by accepting the throwing wheel method, but it was in vain. The parent potters were concerned about the future of the craft due to the pressures of imposed Western schooling.

Table I additionally showed that most participants (64%) possessed 25 to 36 years of experience in traditional pottery. 25% had 5 to 20 years of experience in making, whereas 10% possessed 40 years of pottery-making expertise. Observation and focus group discussions indicated that the 10% of women potters with 40 years of experience were quite elderly, and their skill was evident in their craftsmanship and exquisite finishing of pottery items. It was additionally noted that the other group of women with 25–36 years of experience similarly demonstrated speed and skill in finalizing their pot making. Nonetheless, women with 5-20 years of experience were observed to be younger, more inventive, and more imaginative. They design innovative ceramics to fulfill the growing demands of their city dwellers.

Traditional Potters' Perception of Marketing Concept (Segmentation, Targeting and Positioning)

Table II presents twelve (12) perceptual statements regarding marketing concepts that were tested, validated, and presented to the respondent potters to gather their feedback. The assertions were formulated using a 5-point Likert scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Most respondents (60%) strongly agreed, and (24%)

agreed that the pottery they made satisfied the needs and desires of their clients, 4% were uncertain, and 8% disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed.

This was noted from the various forms and dimensions and their corresponding purposes. The majority of potters at that time

Table 2: Distribution of women potters according to perception of their involvement in traditional pot making

S/N	Perception statement on marketing concept	Strongly Agreed	Agreed	Undecided	Disagreed	Strongly Disagreed
1	Your products (wares) satisfy the needs and wants of rural dwellers	30 (60)	12 (24)	2(4)	4(8)	2(4)
2	Rural dwellers buy your pots because of religion and ritual rites.	20(40)	15 (30)	6(12)	9(18)	0(0)
3	Urban dwellers also support your pots.	15(30)	7(14)	4(8)	22(44)	2(4)
4	More of your customers are designed with features for rural dwellers.	32(64)	6 (12)	2(4)	8(16)	2(4)
5	The rural dwellers could afford your wares because it is affordable and accessible.	30 (60)	5 (10)	3(6)	9(18)	3(6)
6	Your pottery designs are dictated by the needs and wants of your customers.	36(72)	6(12)	0(0)	8(16)	0(0)
7	Your pots have specialized functions that is easily recognizable by your buyers.	37(74)	7(14)	5(10)	1(2)	0(0)
8	Religious pots are conveying special messages to your customers.	41(82)	4(8)	1(2)	4(8)	0(0)
9	Traditionalists are involved in the design of ritual pots.	37(74)	0(0)	6(12)	7(14)	0(0)

10	You earn enough from pottery sale to train your children in school.	6(12)	37(74)	2(4)	4(8)	1(2)
11	Years of experience count in the production of pottery.	24(48)	20(40)	0(0)	5(9)	1(2)
12	Your children have interest in the vocation.	14(28)	3(6)	0(0)	33(66)	0(0)

Source; field survey 2025.

Observation and focus group discussions confirmed that the shapes and sizes influence pottery usage and thus, 'customize' their production to satisfy the needs and desires of their consumers.

In direct relation to the previous point, most respondents (40%) strongly agreed and (30%) agreed that the potteries they created sought to differentiate the market between rural versus urban populations and between traditional and contemporary ceramic pottery. Minority respondents (18%) disagreed on this perspective, whereas (12%) were unsure. Most respondents were noted to have clients in rural regions who utilize their various products for cooking, storage, and creating concoctions, infusions, and decoctions to treat illnesses. The majority of herbalists were limited to the countryside in Uganda, especially in the Lango subregion. This aligns with the results of Areo (2014), which indicated that traditional medicine practices were based in rural areas. It additionally confirmed that conventional earthen pots were the suitable medium for preparing traditional medicine. This was additionally supported by Areo and Areo (2011) in their book called Hand-built Pottery.

Table II indicates that 30% of participants strongly agreed and 14% agreed that urban residents also support their potteries, and (8%) were uncertain, whereas a majority of 44% disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed that urban residents provide them support. This indicates that traditional potteries were more specialized for those living in rural areas compared to those in urban settings. It additionally indicates that conventional religion and ceremonial practices were more established in rural areas, consequently fostering the manufacture and commerce of traditional pottery. Throughout the focus group discussions and observations, the potters noted that while some city residents back them, they frequently utilize their products solely as planters and candle holders, whereas the ceremonial pots are mainly employed for home decor. They designated the misuse of their ritual pots for this aim.

The research also indicates that most (64%) of participants strongly concurred that they aimed at rural clients by creating pots that were easily recognizable to them; 12% agreed too, while 16% disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed whereas 2% were undecided. Field observation revealed that the religion and ritual rite pots possess unique characteristics or designs that are unusual to local deities. This aimed to reach the rural inhabitants in their villages, where traditional beliefs are still prevalent. An additional 60% of respondents (potters) strongly concurred that their pots were aimed at low-income individuals in society, predominantly situated in rural areas, 10% agreed too; 6% were unsure while 18% and 6% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively this view.

Various traditional religious groups are recognized for utilizing distinct symbols and motifs in their religious practices. Thus, most (72%) of potters strongly confirmed that their designs and patterns were typically determined by their clients, 12% as well agreed to the same view. Merely 16% of those surveyed expressed disagreement. Likewise, 74%, which constitutes a majority, strongly concurred that their potteries were aimed at specific purposes and events, 14% agreed too, while 2% disagreed and 10% were unsure. This is demonstrated in the practical application of specific pottery items utilized during various festivals and at particular period of the year.

To promote their products, traditional potters were seen to label and suggest their pots, which can only be understood by their customers. This is why most respondents (82%) strongly believed that their pots communicate unique messages to their customers, 8% also agreed to this. Afterward, most participants (74%) concurred that the making of ritual pottery involved ritual priests and occasionally priestesses, who no longer

have children, whereas 14% disagreed and 12% were undecided. The entire concept was to establish the specialized pots in the perceptions of their customers. Positioning is recognized for fostering consumer loyalty.

Regarding the income from pottery production and sales, most respondents (74%) once more concurred that their earnings were sufficient to educate their children, while 12% strongly agree to this. An additional majority (88%) both agreed and strongly agreed that experience over the years is important in crafting traditional pottery. The longer they engage in pottery making, the more energetic and beautiful pottery they create.

Similarly, the majority (66%) disagreed that their children displayed interest in their mother's skill acquisition career; a minority (34%) agreed and strongly agreed that their children showed interest in pottery. These align with the observation noted while potters created pottery, as there were few young girls assisting or learning skills. The few individuals who assisted their parents did so after coming home from school and, in many instances, on weekends. These were moments of free time that these children could utilize to help their parents. These young girls displayed a general indifference to pottery making, likely due to their exposure to Western education.

Relationship between the potters' involvement in pottery making and some Selected socioeconomic characteristics

Table 3 demonstrated a positive and significant correlation among age, marketing concepts perception level, and potters' years of experience, with values of $r = 0.122^*$, $r = 0.253^*$, and $r = 0.388^*$, respectively. This indicated that the skill in pottery production, the speed of producing pottery, and the extent of engagement in crafting pottery are influenced by their experience, age, and viewpoint, suggesting that as women age, it becomes simpler for them to create beautiful and creative pottery. However, a significant negative correlation of -0.385^* was noted between education and the extent of children's participation in pottery production. Education adversely affected the perception and creation of traditional pottery crafts.

The more rural people are exposed, the less favorably they regard traditional practices like farming, weaving, and local fishing. It can be further stated that in conventional pottery making, education may, for an extended period, lack a considerable impact on the production technique due to the customs and taboos associated with it. If allowed, education would probably seek to eliminate this vital traditional element of pottery culture in Lango, which explains the opposition of traditional potters to modernization and education/enlightenment.

Table 3: Relationship between the Potters' involvement in pottery making and some selected socioeconomic characteristics

S/N	Characteristics	Coefficient of correlation(r)	Coefficient of determination (r2)
1	Age	0.122*	0.0148
2	Educational level	-0.385*	0.1482
3	Level of perception	0.253*	0.0640
4	Level of children's participation	-0.231*	0.0533
5	Years of experience	0.388*	0.1505

Source: field survey 2025.

Occupational Hazards Related to Traditional Pottery in Lango sub region.

Table 4 outlines the occupational risks reported by potters during traditional pottery production, which involve rain, poor road conditions, insufficient fuel for firing pots in the rainy season, back and neck discomfort, exposure to hazards like scorpion and snake bites, inhaling carbon monoxide from the smoke during firing, dust, and damage to wares due to bad roads and accidents. The delicacy of the items makes them susceptible to damage during firing and when being transported to their vendors. Many conventional potteries are typically fired outdoors; consequently, rain poses a significant obstacle in the creation of pottery items. Additional pots are created in the dry season, whereas rain decreases the ability to produce and fire them.

Table 4: Problem matrix related to pottery making according to the women potters

S/N	Challenge	Clay mining	Pottery transportation	Pottery firing	Pottery marketing
1	Rainy season and other weather condition	47(47)	37(37)	45(45)	22(22)
2	Bad roads	46(46)	42(42)	29(29)	18(18)
3	Foreign competition	45(45)	35(35)	14(14)	30(30)
4	Back pain	48(48)	46(46)	65(65)	17(17)
5	Smoke inhalation (carbon monoxide)	00(00)	00(00)	94(94)	0(0)
6	Exposure to snake bite and other danger	30(30)	37(37)	45(45)	8(8)
7	Breakage of pottery	0(0)	49(49)	49(49)	15(15)
8	Collapse of mining pit	48(48)	0(0)	0(0)	30(30)
9	Fuel shortage	0(0)	0(0)	48(48)	5(5)
10	Water supply	42(42)	20(20)	7(7)	7(7)

Source: Field survey, 2025.

Note: Multiple respondents recorded. Data presented as number (per cent).

Economic Impact Of Lango Pottery

Drawing from existing ethnographic and historical studies on pre-colonial and early colonial Lango society, the economic influence of pottery was considerable yet confined, functioning within a subsistence and household economy instead of a large-scale commercial framework. Its effects are most clearly seen through the lens of labor division, community exchange networks, and their role in enhancing household resilience.

A Household-Centered Subsistence Activity:

The primary economic impact of Lango pottery was its direct contribution to household subsistence and efficiency. As a "routine domestic craft" (Tosh, 1978, p. 18), its production enabled essential food-processing tasks. J. H. Driberg explicitly lists pottery as one of the key domestic activities, crucial for the storage of water and grain, the cooking of food, and the brewing of beer (Driberg, 1923, p. 155). The economic value was intrinsic; a household with a skilled potter (or access to one through kinship) avoided the need to procure these vital tools through exchange, thereby increasing its self-sufficiency.

Division of Labor and Gender Economics:

Pottery production was a strictly gendered economic activity, falling under the domain of women's work. This created a distinct gender-based sphere of production and exchange. John Tosh notes that alongside cultivation, pottery and basket-making formed a major part of women's economic contributions (Tosh, 1978, p. 18). A woman's skill as a potter added to her economic value within the household and could enhance her social standing. The knowledge and resources (clay sources, temper) were controlled by women, creating a parallel economic circuit to the male-dominated spheres of livestock herding, hunting, and iron-working.

Localized Barter and Non-Market Exchange:

While primarily for domestic use, pottery did enter the local economy through barter. Skilled potters who produced a surplus created a localized "cottage industry" impact. The literature suggests this exchange was informal and direct.

Medium of Exchange: Pots were traded for other subsistence goods. Margaret Trowell classifies such pottery as "domestic ware" made by village specialists who might exchange wares "for a small fee in kind" (Trowell, 1960, p. 78). This "fee" would typically be agricultural produce, such as grain, or perhaps other crafted goods like baskets.

Scale and Scope: There is no evidence in the key sources (Driberg, Tosh, Cazzolara) of long-distance trade networks specifically for Lango pottery or of specialist potting villages as found in some other African societies. The economic impact was hyper-local, likely within a neighborhood or clan area. J. P. Cazzolara, while detailing migrations and social structure, does not mention pottery as a trade commodity, underscoring its primarily local, non-commercialized role (Cazzolara, 1950).

Repair and Value: The economics of pottery also involved repair. Driberg notes the practice of drilling holes on either side of a crack and stitching the pot together with wire or fibre, indicating that vessels were valuable enough to warrant repair rather than immediate replacement (Driberg, 1923, p. 156). This extended the useful life of the product, a key economic consideration in a subsistence system.

Limitations on Wider Economic Impact:

The economic impact of Lango pottery was constrained by several structural factors:

Lack of Specialization: The decentralized, household-based production model limited surplus output and standardization, preventing economies of scale.

Acephalous Political Structure: Unlike in kingdom societies like Buganda, there was no royal court to act as a patron, consuming luxury pottery or stimulating specialized production for an elite market (Tosh, 1978, p. 12).

Perishable Value: Pots were low-value, heavy, and brittle, making them unsuitable as commodities for long-distance trade compared to lighter, higher-value goods like iron tools, beads, or livestock.

Colonial Period and Modern Shifts:

The economic role of traditional pottery declined during the colonial era. The introduction of cheap, durable metal (aluminum, enamelware) and plastic containers from global markets provided substitutes for many of pottery's functions. Tosh's work, which focuses on the colonial interface, implies that while pottery-making continued, its economic centrality waned as the cash economy and imported goods penetrated Lango society (Tosh, 1978).

Women's Role And Empowerment In Lango Pottery

Women's Traditional Role in Pottery Production

Among the Lango people, pottery is a craft associated with gender, traditionally and mainly being the

responsibility of women. This position is not just a job but a fundamental cultural establishment that shapes social identity, systems of knowledge, and economic involvement.

Guardians of Indigenous Technical Knowledge (ITK): Women serve as the main carriers and conveyors of the complete chaîne opératoire of pottery. From locating sacred clay sources (kongo awor) to perfecting the coiling method (gweno), burnishing (pwonyo), and the ceremonial firing (tumo), this wisdom is transmitted matrilineally from mothers to daughters and granddaughters. This positions women as the living "libraries" of Lango cultural heritage, with their knowledge representing generations of ecological and aesthetic insight.

Ritual Experts: The creation of pottery, particularly for ceremonial purposes, is regulated by customs and rites managed by women. Experienced master potters frequently conduct libations at clay sources and adhere to strict customs (e.g., isolation during menstruation) to guarantee ritual cleanliness and the successful firing process. The making of the sacred adek (libation pot) is a serious duty given to experienced older women, connecting their work directly to the community's spiritual health.

Social Organization of Labor: Production was traditionally organized at the household or extended family level. Women would often work communally, sharing tasks like clay preparation or firing, which also served as important spaces for social bonding and the informal transmission of cultural values and oral history (Ocitti, 1973).

2. How Pottery Provides Economic Independence for Women

In a typically male-dominated and agro-pastoral society, pottery provides women a valuable and unique means of earning and managing their own income, promoting substantial independence.

Authority over Production and Earnings: In contrast to agricultural goods, frequently regarded as household or male-dominated possessions, pottery is acknowledged as a craft of women. The pots she creates and sells produce monetary income that she usually handles on her own. As noted by Ego (2017), this income is often allocated to children's education, healthcare, household nutrition, and minor investments, which directly improve family welfare and provide women with real decision-making authority.

Financial Resilience: Pottery offers an income source that is not reliant on rain-dependent agriculture and is available throughout the year. This financial cushion is essential in drought periods or bad harvests, positioning women as vital support for household economic stability. This economic position enhances their standing in the household and the community.

Asset Development: The expertise of a proficient potter is an invaluable, non-transferable resource. Her capacity to earn money through her talent offers a type of social safety and decreases financial reliance on male family members, which can be especially vital for widows or single mothers.

3. Training Initiatives and Competency Enhancement

Although traditional family-based apprenticeship is still the primary training approach, structured programs have arisen to improve skills and incorporate business knowledge.

Traditional Apprenticeship: From an early age, girls start by watching and helping their mothers or grandmothers, gradually advancing from basic activities like kneading clay to eventually mastering intricate designs over several years. This approach guarantees the accuracy of cultural transmission, although it may be gradual and unstructured.

Programs Led by NGOs and Governments: Entities such as UCOBAC (Uganda Community Based Association for Child Welfare), SNV Netherlands Development Organization, and Uganda's Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development have carried out initiatives in the Lango sub-region. These initiatives, as referenced in development reports, commonly emphasize:

Technical Improvement: Implementing superior tools, straightforward kiln methods for increased output and uniformity, along with quality assurance practices.

Business Skills Training: Instructing on fundamental bookkeeping, expense assessment, marketing techniques, and collective negotiations. This connects traditional craftsmanship with sustainable business.

Design Innovation: Fostering the creation of novel products (e.g., ornamental pieces, ceramic accessories) for specialized markets while maintaining traditional core offerings.

The cooperative assembly of potters has transformed into a strong platform for female leadership and community engagement.

Cooperative Governance: Women's pottery cooperatives choose their own chairs, treasurers, and secretaries. These leadership positions offer essential experience in management, finance, and public speaking. Ego (2017) highlights that women leading these cooperatives frequently emerge as esteemed advocates and liaisons for NGOs, government bodies, and buyers, transforming conventional community leadership roles.

Entrepreneurship: Accomplished master potters develop into micro-entrepreneurs. They oversee production timelines, supply chains for clay and fuel, and distribution networks. Individuals such as Margaret Ateng from Lira (highlighted in multiple NGO case studies) have taken on roles as trainers and brand ambassadors for Lango pottery, attending exhibitions and trade fairs to market their artistry.

Advocacy and Voice: Collectives provide women with a more powerful, collective voice to push for improved market access, equitable pricing, and support services. This united effort contests conventional gender roles and establishes women as vital participants in community economic advancement.

4. Accomplishments of Women Artisans

Though academic writings frequently conceal subjects' identities, reports on development and journalism emphasize personal journeys.

The Tale of a "Master Potter" Who Became a Trainer: A frequent success story features a senior, esteemed potter (often called Ajua awor or "mother of clay") who, following attendance at a skill-enhancement program, evolves into a chief trainer. She instructs younger women in both conventional methods and contemporary business strategies, promoting intergenerational continuity and enhancing the group's economic sustainability. Her knowledge generates both financial gain and significant social status.

The Cooperative Chairperson: Accounts from the Lango sub-region highlight instances where the chosen leader of a pottery cooperative has utilized the group's achievements to obtain microloans, acquire communal land for a workshop, or arrange agreements with hotels and cultural centers in Kampala for supplying ornamental pottery. This shifts her position from craftsman to acknowledged business leader.

Youth Participation: A notable achievement is the slow turnaround of the craft's viewed deterioration among the youth. With pottery gaining economic viability, accounts arise of educated young women intentionally opting to learn the craft from their elders, merging contemporary design aesthetics with age-old techniques to produce items for today's market. This secures the craft's future and repositions it as a symbol of pride and contemporary opportunity.

Community Development and Social Cohesion

A. Social Impact

Preservation of Cultural Heritage and Identity.

Lango pottery functions as a primary, tangible vessel for preserving intangible cultural heritage, anchoring community identity in a rapidly changing world.

Material Manifestation of Worldview: The forms, functions, and decorations of Lango pots encode the community's cosmology, social structure, and history. The adek (libation pot) is not merely a container; it is a

physical interface with the ancestors (Tipu), embodying spiritual beliefs. The clan-specific motifs incised on pots serve as a visual language of belonging. pottery is a "technological style" that actively expresses and reinforces Lango identity, distinguishing it from neighboring ethnic groups.

Resistance to Cultural Erosion: In the face of globalization and the displacement caused by past conflicts in Northern Uganda, the sustained practice of pottery acts as an act of cultural resilience. The continued demand for ritual pottery for marriages, births, and funerals ensures that core aspects of Lango traditional life remain active and relevant, rather than fading into memory.

A Living, Evolving Archive: Unlike static museum pieces, Lango pottery is a living tradition. Its preservation is dynamic, allowing for adaptation (e.g., new decorative items for tourists) while maintaining the sacred core of the craft. This ensures cultural heritage remains a functional part of contemporary life, not a relic of the past.

Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer.

The production of pottery is the most robust mechanism for the intergenerational transmission of Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), operating through a structured, albeit informal, apprenticeship model.

Matrilineal Apprenticeship: The primary channel of knowledge transfer is from grandmothers and mothers to daughters and granddaughters. This occurs through observation, guided practice, and oral instruction within the domestic sphere. Ocitti (1973), in his study of Indigenous education, highlights such practical, situated learning as the bedrock of cultural continuity. Young girls learn not just the technique of coiling, but also the ecological knowledge of clay sources, the seasonal timing for collection, and the rituals that accompany each stage.

Transmission of Holistic Knowledge: The transfer goes beyond craft skills. It includes:

1. **Aesthetic Principles:** What constitutes beauty, balance, and proper form.
2. **Social Norms and Values:** The discipline of work, the respect for ritual taboos, and the cooperative spirit of communal firing.
3. **Historical Narratives:** Stories and proverbs shared during work sessions that embed family and clan history.
4. **Revitalization through Economic Incentive:** The emerging economic viability of pottery, as documented by Ego (2017), has revitalized this transfer. When young women see the craft as a source of income and status, they are more motivated to learn from their elders, reversing the trend of youth disinterest and preventing a critical knowledge gap.

Community Pride and Cultural Tourism.

The recognition of Lango pottery, both nationally and internationally, has become a significant source of collective pride and is catalyzing the development of cultural tourism.

Source of Collective Esteem: When Lango pottery is exhibited in the Uganda Museum, featured in scholarly works, or purchased by international visitors, it validates the community's cultural production. This external recognition fosters internal pride, positioning potters not just as artisans but as cultural ambassadors. This pride reinforces the community's commitment to preserving the craft.

Catalyst for Cultural Tourism: Pottery has become a centerpiece for cultural tourism initiatives in the Lango sub-region. The Lango Cultural Centre and other sites now often include live pottery demonstrations as a key attraction. This creates a virtuous cycle: ① Tourism generates direct income for demonstrating potters. ② It creates a market for souvenir pottery. ③ It incentivizes the community to safeguard and showcase other aspects of its heritage (dance, music, oral history) to create a holistic tourist experience.

Reclaiming Narrative: After decades of being portrayed primarily through the lens of conflict and poverty, cultural tourism centered on pottery allows the Lango people to redefine their narrative for outsiders, emphasizing creativity, resilience, and rich cultural heritage.

B. Infrastructure Development

Establishment of Pottery Centers and Workshops.

A key infrastructural development has been the move from dispersed, individual household production to centralized, shared facilities, often driven by cooperative formation and NGO support.

Function of Centers: These centers, such as those supported by UCOBAC or the Uganda Women's Effort to Save Orphans (UWESO), provide dedicated workspace sheltered from the elements, secure storage for materials and finished goods, and designated areas for drying and firing.

Impact on Production: Centralization leads to significant improvements:

Quality Control: Consistent working conditions and shared best practices improve the quality and uniformity of output.

Scale and Efficiency: Potters can work concurrently and share tools, kilns, and bulk materials, increasing collective productivity.

Training Hub: Centers become focal points for formalized training programs in both advanced techniques and business skills (Ego, 2017).

Access to Markets and Resources.

Infrastructure development critically involves improving linkages between producers and consumers, and securing reliable input supply chains.

Market Access: Cooperatives and NGOs facilitate direct access to higher-value markets that are inaccessible to individual potters. This includes:

Contracting with Hotels and Retailers: Supplying boutique hotels in Kampala or craft shops with curated collections.

Participation in Trade Fairs: Showcasing products at national events like the Uganda International Trade Fair or cultural expositions.

Digital Platforms: Exploring online sales through social media and websites managed by supporting organizations.

Resource Access: Collectivization improves access to key resources:

Clay and Fuel: Cooperatives can negotiate for or collectively purchase rights to high-quality clay pits and sustainable sources of firing fuel.

Financial Capital: As a registered entity, a cooperative can more easily access microloans or grants from government programs (e.g., the Youth Livelihood Programme or Women Entrepreneurship Programme) or NGOs for purchasing equipment like kilns or vehicles for transport.

3. Improved Living Standards.

The cumulative effect of the social and infrastructural developments is a measurable improvement in the living standards of pottery households and their communities.

Direct Income Increase: The combination of higher productivity, better quality, and access to premium markets leads to greater and more stable household income, as tracked in poverty-alleviation studies (Ego, 2017).

Investment in Human Capital: This increased income is consistently invested in children's education (school fees, uniforms), better nutrition, and improved healthcare, breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty.

Improved Working Conditions and Safety: Moving firing from open, hazardous bonfires in homesteads to controlled kilns in dedicated centers reduces the risk of burns and property fires. Sheltered workshops protect potters from the elements and reduce health issues related to dust and posture.

Community-Wide Multiplier Effect: The pottery economy generates demand for other local services (transport, raw materials, food vendors at markets), creating a positive economic multiplier effect that benefits non-potting households as well.

Market Challenges for Lango Pottery Makers In Uganda

Market Competition and Economic Viability

1. Competition from mass-produced goods: Lango pottery faces intense competition from cheap, mass-produced imported alternatives (primarily plastic and metal containers) and lower-cost pottery from other regions. This has drastically reduced the everyday domestic demand for traditional pots, which were once essential household items for cooking, storage, and brewing (Ayikoru, 2015). As Asiimwe (2019, p. 87) notes, "the influx of cheap alternatives... has relegated much traditional pottery to ceremonial or decorative use only, shrinking its market base."
2. Limited access to international markets: Artisans primarily operate through local, informal markets and face significant barriers in reaching regional or international buyers. Challenges include lack of market information, inadequate packaging for safe long-distance transport, and difficulties in meeting the scale and consistency requirements of export markets (Nakintu, 2020).
3. Pricing pressures and production costs: The labor-intensive, time-consuming nature of traditional coiling and firing methods makes it difficult to price pots competitively against factory goods. Simultaneously, rising costs of inputs like clay (due to land access issues) and firewood squeeze profit margins (Barongo, 2017).

Sustainability Concerns

1. Environmental impact of traditional practices: The primary environmental concern is deforestation and air pollution from wood-fired open bonfire kilns. As documented in a study on Ugandan pottery, "traditional firing methods are highly inefficient and contribute to local forest depletion, creating a tension between cultural practice and environmental sustainability" (Tumwine & Barløse, 2018, p. 204).
2. Need for modern equipment and technology: There is a recognized need for more efficient technologies, such as improved kilns (e.g., Lorena or biogas kilns) that reduce fuel consumption and pollution. However, adoption is hindered by high upfront costs, lack of technical training, and sometimes resistance from potters accustomed to traditional methods.
3. Balancing tradition with innovation: This is a core challenge. While innovation in design, glazes, and firing is necessary to meet modern aesthetic and functional demands, there is a risk of diluting the unique cultural identity of Lango pottery. Scholars like Katumba (2016) argue that the "authenticity" valued by cultural tourists depends on maintaining traditional elements, creating a delicate balance for artisans navigating market change.

C. Opportunities for Growth

1. Cultural tourism and experiential workshops: This is a significant opportunity. Integrating pottery demonstrations and hands-on workshops into cultural tourism packages offers a new revenue stream. As noted

by the Uganda Tourism Board (2022), "craft villages and experiential tours... add value to the tourist experience and provide direct income to artisans." This also fosters cultural preservation.

2. Digital marketing and e-commerce platforms: social media (Facebook, Instagram) and digital platforms offer a low-cost way to reach global audiences. Initiatives like the "Northern Ugandan Pottery Collective" Facebook page showcase and sell wares online. E-commerce platforms, including those specializing in African crafts, can bypass traditional market access barriers (Nabukenya, 2023).

3. Collaborations with designers and international brands: Strategic partnerships can enhance value. Ugandan designers like José Hendo (who incorporates traditional motifs into contemporary fashion) have shown how collaboration can reposition crafts. International "artisan-to-market" brands, such as Africa Collect Textiles or those featured on platforms like 1.54 Africa, provide models for linking Lango potters to high-value design-conscious markets, often emphasizing ethical production and storytelling (Kwagala, 2021).

The Lango Cultural Foundation (LCF):

Initiatives, Impact, and Lessons Learned The Lango Cultural Foundation (LCF) is the official, non-profit institution mandated to preserve, protect, and promote the cultural heritage of the Lango people in Northern Uganda. Established under the Lango Cultural Leadership Ordinance of 2017, it operates under the guidance of the Won Nyaci (Paramount Chief). Its initiatives are multifaceted, aiming to address cultural erosion, promote socio-economic development, and foster unity. While its work spans language, music, leadership, and craft, its initiatives relevant to community development and artisans can be analyzed as follows.

Local Programs and Their Impact

Cultural Education and Documentation Programs:

Initiative: The LCF runs programs to document oral histories, proverbs, traditional knowledge, and craft techniques, including pottery. This often involves working with elders and master artisans. They also promote the teaching of Léblango (the Lango language) in schools and community workshops (LCF, 2019).

Impact: These efforts are a direct countermeasure against cultural erosion. Documenting pottery techniques, for instance, creates a reference archive that can be used to train younger generations, ensuring that indigenous knowledge is not lost. As noted by Ocitti (2020, p. 112), "the LCF's documentation projects have provided an invaluable repository for intangible cultural heritage, which forms the basis for all contemporary cultural promotion and education."

Promotion of Indigenous Crafts and Livelihoods:

Initiative: The Foundation actively promotes Lango crafts, notably pottery and basket weaving, as both cultural symbols and economic assets. This includes organizing and sponsoring cultural exhibitions and fairs, such as those during the annual Lango Cultural Festival. They facilitate market linkages by bringing buyers and tourists to interact directly with artisan groups (Atoo, 2021).

Impact: These platforms significantly increase the visibility and market access for local potters. By framing crafts within a cultural festival, they add value through storytelling, which can command higher prices. A study on the festival's economic impact found that "artisan participants reported a 50-200% increase in seasonal income from festival sales compared to local market averages" (Komakech & Akullu, 2022, p. 34).

3. Conflict Resolution and Social Cohesion Initiatives:

Initiative: Leveraging traditional justice systems and community dialogues, the LCF plays a crucial role in mediating local disputes (often over land or resources) and promoting reconciliation in a post-conflict region (after the Lord's Resistance Army insurgency).

Impact: This work creates a more stable and peaceful environment necessary for economic activities like pottery to thrive. Stable communities allow for safer collection of clay, consistent production, and the holding of markets.

As argued by Ogora (2018), "the LCF's role in restoring social trust has been a foundational, though often overlooked, prerequisite for sustainable community-based enterprises in Lango."

4. Advocacy for Land and Resource Rights:

Initiative: The Foundation advocates for communal rights to ancestral lands and natural resources, including clay pits and forests used for firing pottery. They engage with local government to protect these resources from unregulated exploitation or land grabs (Adongo, 2023).

Impact: Securing access to raw materials is critical for the survival of traditional pottery. This advocacy helps ensure that potters, especially women who are the primary producers, can continue to access clay and fuel without prohibitive costs or legal challenges.

Lessons Learned and Best Practices

1. The Centrality of Collaborative Governance:

Lesson: Top-down cultural edicts are less effective than collaborative approaches. The LCF has learned that integrating the knowledge of master potters and elders with the administrative skills of younger, educated community members yields the best results (LCF, 2021, Strategic Review).

Best Practice: Establishing technical committees for specific domains (e.g., a "Cultural Crafts Committee") that include artisans, LCF officials, and NGO partners. This ensures initiatives are grounded in practical reality and have broad ownership.

2. Economic Incentives are Crucial for Cultural Preservation:

Lesson: Purely preservationist appeals can fail to engage the youth. The LCF found that programs are most sustainable when they demonstrate clear economic benefit—showing that culture can be a livelihood (Atoo, 2021).

Best Practice: Coupling cultural training (e.g., pottery techniques) with business skills development (e.g., pricing, marketing). The most successful programs, such as those supported by Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda (CCFU), link artisans to markets through festivals and digital platforms, making cultural practice financially viable.

3. Balancing Authenticity with Market Adaptation:

Lesson: There is a tension between preserving "pure" traditional forms and adapting products to modern market tastes. The LCF has observed that rigid adherence to tradition can limit market reach, while excessive commercialization risks eroding cultural significance (Komakech & Akullu, 2022).

Best Practice: Encouraging innovation within a cultural framework. This means supporting artisans to develop new product lines (e.g., smaller, decorative items for urban buyers) while maintaining traditional motifs, stories, and core techniques for ceremonial pieces. This "hybrid" approach satisfies both cultural and commercial objectives.

4. The Importance of Strategic Partnerships:

Lesson: The LCF cannot operate effectively in isolation. Its most impactful initiatives are done in partnership with NGOs, government agencies, and academic institutions.

Best Practice: Partnering with organizations like CCFU and Bureau for Uganda Tourism Association for capacity building and market access, and with universities like Gulu University for research and documentation. These partnerships bring in external expertise, funding, and networks that amplify the LCF's reach and effectiveness (Adongo, 2023).

5. Sustainability Requires Addressing Environmental Concerns:

Lesson: Traditional practices, like wood-fired pottery, can be environmentally unsustainable and face future regulatory or resource constraints.

Best Practice: Piloting and promoting improved technologies is now seen as essential. The LCF, in partnership with environmental NGOs, has begun exploring the introduction of more fuel-efficient kilns, framing it not as a break with tradition but as a necessary innovation for the craft's long-term survival (LCF, 2021).

Government Support For Lango Pottery Makers

A. Government Support

1. Policy Frameworks for Craft Preservation:

The Ugandan government recognizes the cultural and economic value of crafts through national policies, but implementation at the local level for specific groups like Lango potters is often inconsistent. The overarching framework is the National Culture Policy (2006, revised 2019), which mandates the preservation and promotion of indigenous knowledge and skills. This is operationalized by the Uganda National Cultural Centre (UNCC) and the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD). Furthermore, the Presidential Initiative on Skilling the Girl Child has, in some districts, included traditional crafts as a viable trade for vocational training (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2020). However, scholars note that while policies exist, "a dedicated, well-resourced, and enforceable legal framework specifically for the protection and promotion of traditional craft industries remains lacking" (Namubiru, 2022, p. 15).

2. Funding Opportunities and Subsidies:

Direct funding and subsidies for potters are extremely limited. The primary government financial mechanism is the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme (UWEP) and the Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP), which provide revolving, low-interest group loans. Some Lango pottery cooperatives have accessed these funds for purchasing bulk raw materials or simple tools. However, these programmes are highly competitive, not specific to crafts, and fraught with challenges like politicization and high default rates. There are no direct production subsidies. As Barongo (2019) observes, "Artisans remain at the periphery of formal financial and subsidy schemes, which are overwhelmingly designed for agriculture and light manufacturing."

3. Infrastructure Development:

Government infrastructure support is indirect and general. The development of rural electrification can enable the use of modern equipment (like electric wheels or kilns), though affordability remains a barrier. Improved road networks under programmes like the Development Response to Displacement Impacts Project (DRDIP) in Northern Uganda facilitate better market access for transporting fragile pottery (World Bank, 2018). The most relevant infrastructure initiative is the establishment of craft villages or hubs, often led by local governments in partnership with cultural institutions. For example, the Lira District Local Government's plans for a Lango Cultural Village aim to provide a centralized workspace, showroom, and tourist destination for potters and other artisans (Lira District Development Plan, 2020-2025).

B. Private Sector Engagement

1. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Initiatives:

Engagement is nascent but growing. Local banks (e.g., Centenary Bank, Stanbic Bank Uganda) and telecom companies (e.g., MTN Uganda, Airtel) have, through their CSR arms, sponsored cultural festivals like the Lango Cultural Festival, providing prizes and visibility for artisans. Bidco Uganda has supported tree-planting initiatives that, while not craft-specific, address the environmental sustainability of wood-fired pottery (Atoo, 2021). These engagements are often short-term and event-based rather than sustained partnerships for capacity building.

2. Market Linkages and Fair-Trade Practices:

This is the most significant form of private sector engagement. Ugandan social enterprises and fair-trade exporters act as crucial intermediaries. Companies like Mirembe Crafts and Uganda Crafts provide consistent market access by sourcing products for their domestic and export networks, often offering design input and fair-trade principles that ensure better prices than local markets (Nabukenya, 2023). International retailers like Ten

Thousand Villages and online platforms like Novica have, through local partners, connected Lango pottery to global consumers, though at a relatively small scale.

3. Investment in Training and Capacity Building:

Private sector-led training is typically provided by NGOs and social enterprises, not traditional for-profit corporations. The Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda (CCFU), a non-profit, has been instrumental in training Lango potters in product finishing, quality control, and business management (CCFU, 2022). The African Craft Trust has facilitated workshops on digital storytelling and marketing. True private investment in upskilling for purely commercial return is rare, as the craft sector is not yet seen as a high-growth investment frontier.

C. Future Vision

1. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Alignment:

The future of Lango pottery is intrinsically linked to the SDGs. Its promotion directly advances:

SDG 5 (Gender Equality): Empowering female artisans.

SDG 8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth): Creating green, culturally-rooted jobs.

SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption & Production): Promoting sustainable craft practices and cultural tourism.

SDG 13 (Climate Action): Through the adoption of energy-efficient kilns.

Framing pottery initiatives within the SDG framework is a powerful strategy for attracting development partner funding and aligning with national development plans (UNDP Uganda, 2021).

2. Digital Transformation Opportunities:

The future hinges on leveraging digital tools beyond basic social media marketing. Opportunities include:

E-commerce Integration: Developing dedicated online storefronts on platforms like Etsy or a coordinated "Lango Pottery" website.

Digital Storytelling: Using augmented reality (AR) codes on products that link to videos of the artisan and the making process, enhancing value.

Mobile Money & Digital Finance: Enabling seamless payments from customers and access to digital microloans for equipment.

Virtual Workshops: Offering paid online pottery-making experiences for the global diaspora and cultural enthusiasts (Kwagala, 2023).

3. Global Market Expansion Strategies:

To move beyond niche fair-trade, a multi-pronged strategy is needed:

Niche Luxury Positioning: Collaborating with high-end international interior designers and boutique hotels to supply authentic, statement pieces.

Diaspora Engagement: Targeted marketing to the global Lango and Ugandan diaspora seeking cultural connection.

Cultural-Intellectual Property (CIP) Protection: Working with bodies like the African Regional Intellectual Property Organization (ARIPO) to legally protect Lango pottery designs from mass replication, ensuring origin and benefit sharing (Nakintu, 2022).

Participation in Global Craft Fairs: Leveraging government trade and cultural attachés to secure spaces at major international craft and gift fairs, such as those in Frankfurt or New York.

In Conclusion, The Lango people of Northern Uganda possess a rich pottery heritage that is both an art form and a socio-technical system. As evidenced by ethnographic and cultural studies (Ocitti, 1973; Tosh, 1978), this tradition performs the dual role of preserving cultural identity—encoding history, belief, and social structure—and providing economic sustenance, especially for women, thereby linking cultural resilience with community livelihood. The preservation of this heritage is therefore critical not only for cultural reasons but also for supporting sustainable local development.

The academic consensus, as built upon by these key authors, is that the Langi people originated not from a direct, unbroken migration of a single group, but from the intermingling and cultural synthesis of Luo-speaking

migrants from the Nile Valley region (Bahr El Ghazal) with pre-existing Central Sudanic peoples in what is now Northern Uganda. Their Luo language testifies to the migrant influence, while their social organization and aspects of culture reflect the indigenous substratum.

The evolution of pottery is therefore understood as a multifaceted process. It is not a simple, linear progression but a dynamic dialogue between: Practical constraints (raw materials, climate, function), Socio-economic structures (division of labor, trade, political economy), and Ideological systems (identity, symbolism, ritual). As summarized by Rice, pottery is a "social artifact" whose evolution provides critical insights into "the development of technology, the organization of production, the structure of social identities, and the expression of cultural values" (Rice, 2015, p. 23). Its study remains fundamental to tracing the intertwined paths of technological innovation and cultural development.

For the Lango, pottery was first and foremost a functional, female-managed craft vital to daily subsistence. Its role in ritual was an extension of this daily function, with ordinary pots taking on sacred meaning in contexts of burial and offering. Artistic expression was present but subordinate to utility, manifesting in the elegance of form, the quality of the finish, and simple geometric decorations that potentially carried social or symbolic meaning. The pottery tradition thus reflected core Lango social values: pragmatism, household self-sufficiency, and the important economic role of women, within a societal structure that lacked centralized artistic patronage.

The economic impact of Lango pottery was fundamental at the micro-level of the household and local community but marginal at a broader regional level. It was a critical subsistence technology that: Enhanced household self-sufficiency, defined a specific sector of women's economic production and facilitated a small-scale, non-monetary barter economy within local networks. Its impact was not transformative in a macro-economic sense but was integrative and stabilizing, supporting the day-to-day functioning and resilience of the domestic unit within the stateless, agrarian society of the Lango. As characterized by the sources, it was a "domestic craft" first and an "industry" a distant second.

Lango pottery is a profound vehicle for women's empowerment. It transforms their traditional cultural role as knowledge bearers into a foundation for economic independence, leadership development, and social influence. The craft provides a unique space whereby, preserving heritage and forging progressive gender equality are mutually reinforcing goals. The hands that shape the clay are also shaping the economic and social future of their communities.

The impact of Lango pottery extends far beyond the economic. It is a cornerstone for cultural preservation, a dynamic school for intergenerational learning, and a source of profound community pride. The parallel development of physical and market infrastructure—centers, cooperatives, and market linkages—translates this cultural and social capital into tangible improvements in health, education, and overall quality of life, demonstrating how safeguarding intangible heritage can be a powerful engine for sustainable community development.

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