

# Cultural Flows: The Development and Global Influence of Nigeria's Creative Industries

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Nigeria's cultural and creative industries (CCIs) illustrate the dynamic interplay between cultural production and economic growth. Through Nollywood and Afrobeat, Nigeria has effectively leveraged its creative capital to strengthen its economy and broaden its global cultural influence. These sectors show how local cultural elements can be blended with universal themes, achieving widespread resonance. Beyond their economic contributions, these industries play crucial roles in cultural diplomacy and nation branding, significantly enhancing Nigeria's soft power globally. This paper contextualizes CCIs within their historical and economic frameworks, and addresses key debates in the field, such as the tension between the economic commodification of culture and the pursuit of authenticity. It also challenges the traditional view of 'cultural imperialism', which suggests a one-way flow of culture and aesthetics from the North to the South. The opening sections delve into the origins of Nollywood and the growth of Nigeria's music scene, illustrating how crises can spur a surge of creativity and a do-it-yourself mindset crucial for success in these sectors. The impact of digitalization and networking on content circulation and collaboration is also explored, highlighting how these sectors now generate significant revenue and create jobs, despite facing challenges including copyright issues, funding gaps, and infrastructural deficiencies. The second part of the paper examines how Nigerian cultural exports are perceived and received in other African nations, including the DRC, Tanzania, and Cameroon, through the lens of soft power and cultural diplomacy. It highlights how Africans adapt other African products to their national contexts, and the different combinations that derive from these exchanges. The paper then discusses how Afrobeat has achieved global prominence, turning Nigerian artists into icons of the 'African dream'. This approach breaks away from the cultural imperialism theory, redefining soft power within an African framework.

# **POLICY PAPER**

## **Cultural Flows: The Development and Global Influence of Nigeria's Creative Industries**

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## Introduction: The Creation of Cultural and Creative Industries

The discourse around creative and cultural industries (CCIs) has evolved significantly, underscoring the dynamic interplay between cultural production and economic development. The concept of CCIs emerged in the late twentieth century as a response to evolving economic, technological, and cultural dynamics, particularly in the context of neoliberal policies and the growth of information and communication technologies (ICT). According to Nicolas Garnham (2005), the term gained traction as information society policy developed in the United Kingdom, underpinned by the recognition of innovation, information, and the economic significance of ICT. This was particularly evident in the 1980s and 1990s, a period marked by significant policy shifts that linked the fate of the UK's economy closely to the development of creative industries. This period saw the conceptual transition from 'cultural industries'—a term rooted in critical theory and the critique of commodification of mass culture—to 'creative industries,' emphasizing economic innovation, technology, and the commercial potential of creativity (Moore, 2014).

The United Kingdom's Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) set out a foundational definition for CCIs, describing them as industries *"which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent, and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property"* (DCMS, 1998; Flew, 2002). This characterization frames creativity and intellectual property as core economic assets with intrinsic economic value, setting a precedent for subsequent discussions and analyses in the field. Critiques by scholars including Galloway and Dunlop (2007), and Higgs and Cunningham (2008), however, have highlighted the complexities and ambiguities inherent in defining CCIs, pointing to the varied interpretations and applications of the concept in different contexts (Samuel, 2020). Other scholars including Hesmondhalgh and Pratt (2005), criticized the purely commercial approaches that prioritize profit at the expense of quality and accessibility of culture, defending the need for a balance between the *"commodification of culture"* and *"cultural protectionism"*. They emphasized the importance of not letting economic values overshadow the intrinsic social value of culture.

In this sense, a broader perspective was provided by the UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. The sought to ensure that cultural goods and services are recognized as carriers of identity, values, and meaning, rather than mere commodities. The Convention pushes parties to adopt policies that ensure equal access to cultural expression, supports the creation, production, dissemination, and enjoyment of cultural goods and services, and emphasizes the role of culture in sustainable development. Further definitions from UNCTAD (2008) and UNDP (2010) underscored the complex interplay between economic and cultural dynamics within the CCIs. UNCTAD defined the creative economy as *"the interface between creativity, culture, economics, and technology as expressed in the ability to create and circulate intellectual capital, with the potential to generate income, jobs and export earnings while at the same time promoting social inclusion, cultural diversity and human development"* (UNCTAD, 2008). The UNDP defined cultural industries as *"those industries that combine the creation, production, and commercialization of contents which are intangible and cultural in nature. These contents are typically protected by copyright, and they can take the form of goods or services"* (UNCTAD/ UNDP, 2010).

These definitions emphasize the dual character of cultural products as both economic goods and bearers of cultural value, acknowledging the role of creativity and culture in driving

economic development, while sustaining cultural diversity and expression.

Scholars including Warnier (1999) and Appadurai (2005) raised pressing questions about the preservation and transformation of cultural identities in an era marked by rapid economic globalization and the push towards a “*worldwide cultural uniformity*”. For instance, the concept of “*glocality*,” as developed by Arjun Appadurai, provides a critical framework for understanding the dynamic interplay between global forces and local adaptations. It suggests a nuanced process of cultural exchange, in which local entities absorb, reinterpret, and reconstitute global influences to forge new, authentically grounded expressions that resonate on both local and international stages. Nigeria’s vibrant CCIs exemplify the practical embodiment of “*glocality*” and the pursuit of ‘authenticity’ in a globalized world. Nollywood and the Nigerian music scene have adeptly harnessed global digital platforms to project their uniquely Nigerian narratives, blending universal and local themes to create products that appeal to a broad audience. The pursuit of ‘authenticity’ as an individual endeavor of actors or musicians, in an attempt to create an ‘authentic’ identity in the face of the “*cultural homogenization*” movement of “*modernity*” (Lindholm, 2007), leads to a large number of hybrid combinations and a “*structural polysemy*” within Nollywood narratives. This dynamic is visible in Nollywood star system and the diversity of Nigerian values and images those stars embody and channel (Tsika, 2014).

These definitions and theoretical frameworks help contextualize the concept of CCIs and frame them as tools for economic development linked to the global market, raising several questions related to authenticity and cultural preservation. This paper first focuses on CCIs from an economic perspective, identifying the opportunities and challenges they pose in the Nigerian context, especially for the movie industry and the musical scene. Second, this paper examines the potential of CCIs, specifically these two sectors, in nation branding through cultural diplomacy in the postcolonial state of Nigeria. An examination of these concepts offers insights into the agency of individuals in the intricacies of global power dynamics and cultural public policies, as well as an attempt to approach ‘soft power’ from a Global South perspective. In a holistic and interdisciplinary approach, this paper navigates between four levels—international, continental, national, and individual—and a mix of political, sociological, and economic concepts and theories.

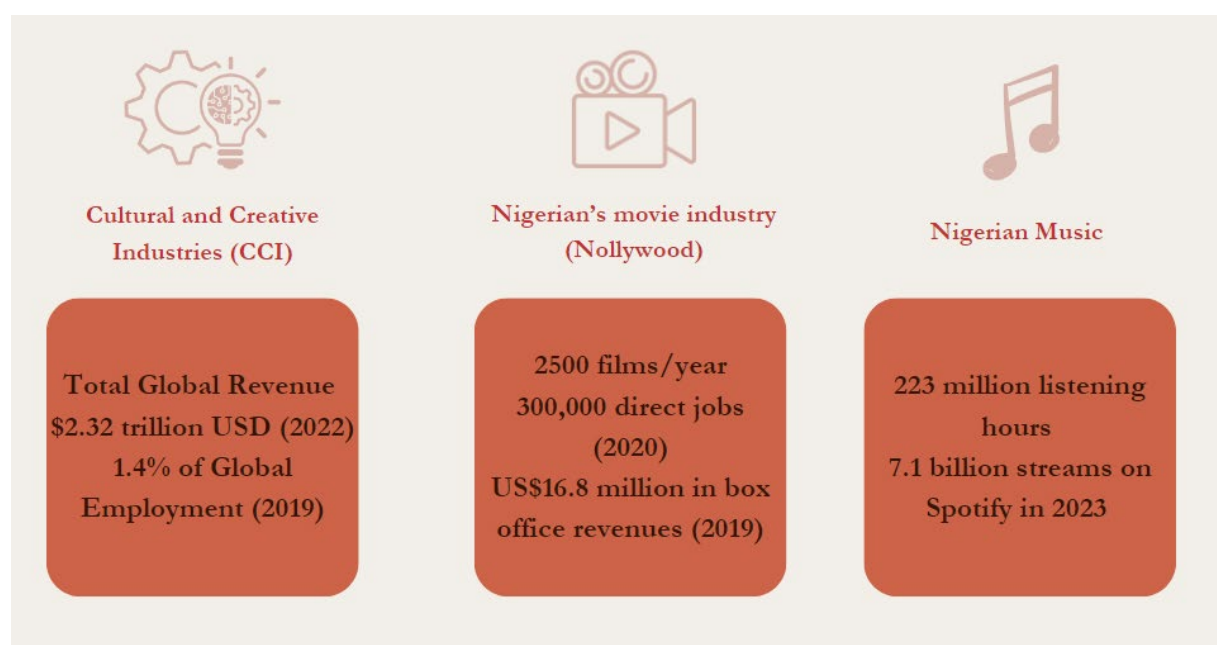
## 1. Nollywood and Afrobeat: An Exceptional Performance

According to Moore (2014), the evolving discourse around CCI reflects a broader shift from industrial to post-industrial society, emphasizing the role of creativity, technology, and innovation in economic development. Creative industries are understood not merely as sectors within the economy, but as a dynamic ecosystem that encompasses various forms of production, distribution, and consumption of cultural and creative goods and services. This perspective underscores the transformative impact of digitalization on cultural production, and the strategic importance of creative industries in fostering economic growth, cultural diversity, and innovation in the twenty-first century.

From a solely economic perspective, globally, the CCIs have exhibited remarkable growth. According to a PwC report, « Perspectives from the Global Entertainment & Media Outlook 2023–2027 » (2018), total global entertainment and media (E&M) revenue rose by 5.4% in 2022, to \$2.32 trillion, signaling the significant impact of the industry on the global economy. This burgeoning sector not only contributes to GDP but also fosters employment. Estimates from the ILO show that the sector of ‘global media and culture’ accounted for 1.4% of global employment or 46.2 million jobs in 2019 (ILO, 2023).

Nigeria is recognized as a leading force both economically and militarily in Africa, with the highest GDP on the continent as of 2022 (IMF, 2022). As part of economic-diversification efforts, Nigeria is focusing on CCIs to reduce its traditional dependence on oil. These sectors, especially the vibrant Nollywood film industry and the influential Nigerian music scene, are central to harnessing cultural production for economic gain.

Nollywood represents this economic potential. It is the second-largest employer in Nigeria, trailing only the agricultural sector, with 300,000 employees (WB, 2020), showcasing the tangible benefits of culturally rooted industries. Producing over 2,500 films annually, Nollywood ranks as the world's second-largest film producer, following Bollywood (OIT, 2022). These numbers explain Nigeria's extensive cultural reach and appeal (Afolabi et al, 2022). In 2023, the sectors encompassing motion pictures, sound recording, and music production, which prominently include Nollywood, contributed approximately \$1.73 billion to Nigeria's GDP (IMF, 2023). Additionally, in 2019, the export of cultural goods from Nigeria was valued at approximately \$1.49 billion (International trade in cultural goods, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2024)<sup>1</sup>.



Nollywood films are distributed globally by platforms such as iROKOTv, reaching an audience of six million across 178 countries (WIPO, 2017). This vast production capacity represents an economic success and also promotes Nigerian culture and traditions globally via the internet, fostering greater cross-cultural interactions and understanding (Offiah, 2017).

These figures underscore Nollywood's significant contribution to job creation and economic expansion and emphasize Nigeria's global cultural influence. This not only strengthens the national economy but also solidifies Nigeria's status as a leading cultural force worldwide.

On the other hand, Nigeria's music revenue grew from \$26 million in 2014 to \$34 million in 2018 and was projected to reach \$44 million in 2023 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). The Nigerian music industry has witnessed remarkable growth and international collaborations over the years. This growth is largely attributed to an increase in musical consumption, fueled by digital innovations

1. See graphs in the annex for a comparison with Bollywood and Hollywood.

that have revolutionized how music is accessed, distributed, and monetized. Since 2013, digital platforms have overtaken traditional revenue streams, shifting from physical sales and analogue broadcasts to digital downloads, streaming, and digital radio. This transition has expanded the market, and has also democratized the industry, reducing the dominance of record labels over artists.

In Nigeria, major labels such as Mavin Records and Chocolate City have seen their influence wane as artists including Wizkid, Davido, and Tiwa Savage have gained direct control over their music and earnings, benefiting from live performances, endorsements, and digital sales across platforms such as Spotify and iTunes. Furthermore, partnerships with mobile networks including MTN and Globacom have introduced platforms such as Music Plus, enabling artists to sell their content directly to subscribers. Despite the success and global presence of Nigerian music, debates continue about the existence of an industry that truly serves the multitude of local talents and the economy at large. However, the shift towards digital has opened new opportunities for artists, suggesting significant economic potential and the possibility for job creation and greater artist autonomy in the digital age. This evolving landscape invites further research into the impacts of digital innovation on the Nigerian music industry, and its contribution to economic development (Adedeji, 2016; Adedeji, 2023; Ofochebe, 2020).

## 1.1. Behind the Scenes: The rise of Nollywood and Afrobeat

The evolution of the Nigerian film industry reflects a response to colonial legacies and the challenges of post-independence economic and cultural policymaking. The Indigenization Decree of 1977 was a pivotal moment aimed at correcting neo-colonial tendencies within Nigerian filmmaking and distribution. Despite the decree, challenges persisted, with many film exhibition centers remaining under the control of foreign interests.

Nollywood's emergence is also directly linked to the economic downturn that gripped Nigeria from the mid-1980s. This period saw the collapse of traditional cinema and film production, largely because of a severe recession that lasted for over a decade. The closure of cinemas, cessation of celluloid film production, and the decline of the recording industry marked a significant shift in the Nigerian entertainment landscape. In this context Nollywood was born, rooted in the cassette culture that emerged as a response to these challenges.

Krings and Simmert (2020) detailed how former television employees, theater enthusiasts, and electronics merchants pioneered Nollywood's early production and distribution models, leveraging VHS technology. This approach made film production more accessible and economically viable, despite modest production values and rampant piracy issues. Early Nollywood films often tackled themes resonant with societal change in Nigeria, including moral transgressions and their repercussions, mirroring the complexities of transitioning under military rule, and the influences of evangelical Christianity and political corruption.

In parallel, the Nigerian music scene has also been through significant transformations, driven by the economic crisis, shifts in cultural policies, and digitalization. In the past, Nigeria boasted a robust music industry, supported by major international labels, alongside local investors such as Tabansi Records. However, by the late 1980s and early 1990s, economic challenges led to the exit of these major labels, leaving a void in the industry (Adedeji, 2016). However, the advent of digital audio technology towards the end of the decade, and the influence of hip-hop<sup>2</sup>, played significant roles

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2. On the influence of American hip hop and ties with African American communities in Nigeria, see, among others, Olusegun-Joseph (2014); Shonekan (2013).

in regenerating the musical scene. The promise was that anyone could become a star, reducing the need for formal music education. Serres's idea of the "*aesthetic of entrepreneurship*" (Serres, 2022) reflects this era's shift towards self-made success, emphasizing how personal computers and digital audio software reduced the costs and time needed for recording and editing music, enabling individuals to produce complete songs with minimal equipment. This "*democratization of music production*" aligns with Serres's discussion on the "*pursuit of emancipation*", with the emergence of independent music scenes, led by labels like Kennis Music and Dove Records, introducing a mix of international and local genres, and providing a platform for artists to address social and political issues. This shift not only illustrated the 'hustling' ethos prevalent in Lagos, but also signified a broader paradigm shift towards entrepreneurial self-assertion in global cultural economies (Serres, 2022).

By the end of the 2000s, a notable shift had occurred with the emergence of Afrobeat, a genre that combined local musical elements with up-tempo dance music. This genre benefited from improved access to quality recording technology, enabling previously unattainable production standards. Afrobeat showcased a unique blend of rhythms and vocal techniques, and also became a canvas for incorporating and celebrating influences from across Africa and the Caribbean. Despite regional rivalries, this cross-pollination of musical ideas was crucial for the development of a 'pan-African pop culture'. Afrobeat artists such as Wizkid, Burna Boy, and Davido, began to gain international recognition through collaborations between Nigerian artists and American rappers including Akon, Kanye West, and Snoop Dogg<sup>3</sup>. Today, the role of social media in this evolution cannot be overstated. Platforms including Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have enabled Nigerian artists to reach global audiences notably through "*dance challenges going viral*" (Adedeji, 2023).

Nevertheless, at the counterpoint of these success stories, most artists in Lagos today operate independently, performing roles from production to promotion single-handedly. The current structure forces artists to navigate a precarious landscape, in which success is as much about networking as it is about musical talent (Adedeji, 2016). The digital divide also prevents many artists from emerging globally.

## 1.2. The Evolution Toward 'New Nollywood'

The entry of international media corporations, attracted by the untapped market of potential subscribers, signifies a new era in Nollywood's evolution. The interest in Nigeria of giants such as Netflix and Prime Video reflects the global recognition of Nollywood's potential. This period, often referred to as New Nollywood, is characterized by a shift towards high-quality film production, aimed at international and domestic cinema screens, driven by technological advancements and increased investment.

However, this transformation has led, according to some authors, to a shift towards professionalism, or "*gentrification*" (Ezepue, 2020). The 'old' Nollywood is known for its direct-to-video productions, and the 'new' Nollywood targets cinema releases and international film festivals. This change is driven by an influx of trained filmmakers who have sought further education in film academies worldwide, bringing back knowledge and expertise to elevate the industry's standards. The industry has seen a deliberate move from its initial informal setup, dominated by amateurs and enthusiasts, towards a more formal and structured approach that encourages and attracts professionals. This evolution is spurred by global exposure, interaction with corporate entities, and the availability of funding, which have collectively enhanced the production values, narrative content, and distribution methods of

3. The influence and interaction between Afro-American culture and Nigerian/African culture is more structural than just international collaborations. See, among others, Shonekan (2011; 2013).

Nollywood films. Ezepue (2020) used the term “*gentrification*” metaphorically to describe this ongoing transformation within Nollywood. This shift has not only changed the aesthetic and quality of Nollywood films but also their audience, with newer productions appealing more to the middle and upper classes, both within Nigeria and internationally. Ezepue (2020) raises concerns about potential class displacement, as the original mass audience of Nollywood might find themselves marginalized by the industry’s new direction.

Other criticisms of the New Nollywood point to a growing disconnect between filmmakers, who are now often educated abroad and steeped in global filmmaking standards, and the authentic, everyday experiences of ordinary Nigerians. This gap is not just about the thematic focus or stylistic choices of these films, but also about who gets to tell Nigerian stories, and whose stories are deemed worthy of telling. There is a concern that, as Nollywood seeks global validation, it may inadvertently prioritize narratives and aesthetics that resonate with international audiences and film juries, over those that speak directly to the Nigerian experience. This process could sideline grassroots storytellers and marginalize the very audiences that Nollywood originally sought to represent, thus reinforcing the socioeconomic divides within Nigeria. These debates reflect underlying “*postcolonial anxieties*” that refer to the identity tensions between “*embracing modernity*” and “*preserving traditional values*”, and the myriad of possibilities in between, in a globalized but unequal world (Afolabi et al, 2022).

### 1.3. Mapping Institutional Frameworks and Cultural Policies

In 1979, the Nigerian Film Corporation was created under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture, and the Nigeria Film Institute was established. In 1988, the cultural Policy for Nigeria stood as an important framework, aiming to harness cultural diversity for national development by promoting traditional Nigerian cultures. Afolabi (2022) highlighted the policy’s emphasis on promoting creativity, national pride, and a moral societal fabric, alongside the efficient management of cultural resources. Notably, the policy underscored the importance of preserving and promoting Nigerian culture through various mediums, but it did not explicitly prioritize cinema. However, the establishment of the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) in 1993 marked a significant step toward recognizing and regulating the film industry, tasked with classifying films and managing film and video outlets. Subsequently, the 1999 constitution identified the legal and institutional frameworks guiding cultural policy (Afolabi et al 2022). The Nigerian Broadcasting Code also aims at regulating the broadcasting industry in Nigeria, ensuring that broadcast content adheres to national values and standards. It aims to promote fair competition, protect consumer rights, and support the growth of local content in the broadcasting sector.

According to Ezepue (2020), the Nigerian government's involvement in Nollywood has fostered professionalization. Corporate sponsorship, though initially minimal because of Nollywood's informal economic status, has increased, particularly from local corporations, while international sponsorships remain limited because of perceptions that the industry is disorganized. In 2013, under the Goodluck Jonathan administration, Project Act was introduced, providing significant government funding to Nollywood. This initiative aimed to build capacity through partnerships with local training institutions and the provision of equipment (Kelechi Samuel, 2020).

Another initiative is the MOPICON (Motion Picture Practitioners Council of Nigeria) bill, a legislative effort to regulate the Nigerian film industry, which has been an issue of dispute. MOPICON has been controversial since the review committee was selected to revisit the document drafted in the early 2000s. The initiative was proposed by Prof. Hyginus Ekwuazi, then-Director General of the Nigerian Film Corporation, to align the motion picture industry with the larger industrial subsector of the national economy, and to professionalize filmmaking, making it bankable.



In 2016, an African Movie Academy Awards jury member suggested that the industry no longer needed MOPICON, but rather an endowment fund, highlighting that funding and infrastructure are the industry's greatest needs. Opponents argue that MOPICON is necessary to formalize the industry and ensure all practitioners are licensed.

MOPICON aims to function as a professional body like the Nigerian Medical Association and the Nigerian Bar Association, regulating and standardizing the industry. However, some argue that existing bodies like the Nigerian Film and Video Censorship Board are sufficient, and further regulation may stifle creativity.

Despite noble intentions, such as addressing structural deficiencies and tackling piracy, there is skepticism about the government's ability to implement these plans effectively. Previous initiatives, like the Strategic Action Against Piracy and Project-ACT Nollywood, faced challenges such as fund mismanagement and lack of transparency.

The Nigerian film industry comprises numerous guilds, often duplicated and conflict-ridden, with little incentive for membership. MOPICON is seen by some as a potential regulatory body to oversee these guilds and the industry, ensuring standards and resolving disputes.

Though the concept of MOPICON dates to the early 1990s, it only materialized in 2015, reflecting ongoing efforts to professionalize and regulate the Nigerian film industry (Ezepue 2017).

Other initiatives include the Nollyfund of the Bank of Industry launched in 2015. The Nollyfund is designed to make funding accessible to producers of commercially viable film projects. Loan approvals are based on the commercial potential of the script and the revenue it could generate. This approach aims to encourage high-quality, market-driven content creation, allowing filmmakers to focus on innovation and creativity.

Moreover, the Central Bank of Nigeria's Creative Industry Financing Initiative (CIFI) established in 2018 marks a significant step towards institutional support for Nollywood. Announced as a commitment to invest in the industry, CIFI underscores the recognition of filmmaking as a critical component of Nigeria's creative economy that merits substantial financial backing. While specific details of CBN's investment plans were not detailed in the initial announcement, the initiative signals a broader trend of recognizing the creative sector's potential for economic development and cultural export. Other initiatives supporting the sector include the Special Entertainment Fund and the GEMS Entertainment Initiative, but authors such as Nwankwo (2018) underline the need for consistent policy implementation and support, especially for copyright protection and investment in infrastructure (Nwankwo, 2018).

Since its beginnings in the 1980s, the Nigerian film industry has grown independently based on a purely commercial model, with productions often being self-funded by filmmakers themselves. However, in the past ten years, Nigerian filmmakers and entrepreneurs have been given access to various funding sources, including those sponsored by government (Nollyfund, Creative Industry Finance Initiative etc.), international organizations (World Cinema Fund, African Culture Fund), and private investors (Canal+, Africa Capital Alliance, Keystone Bank)<sup>4</sup>.

The growth of the Nigerian music scene has been significantly driven by the creation of key institutions such as the Copyright Society of Nigeria (COSON), the Coalition of Nigerian Music Industry—which encompasses five associations—and partnerships with global music icons and

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4. For an exhaustive list of institutions and funding mechanisms, see UNESCO report, 2021, "The African Film Industry: Trends, Challenges and Opportunities for Growth".

labels (Adedeji, 2016). Despite these advances, Serres (2022) noted that COSON has halted royalty payments because of a long-running governmental dispute, pushing artists to increasingly turn to international markets. In November 2023, COSON resumed distribution of royalty payments.

The music industry in Nigeria has evolved from a product-centric to a service-oriented approach, in which music is not just sold but is part of a larger service offering. This service-oriented model includes brand endorsements, caller ring-back tunes (RBT), music shows, private gigs, and advertising revenues from large online followings. Such a model capitalizes on the commodification of artists' brands. That is how the revenue generated from endorsement deals, live performances, and digital sales has provided substantial income for artists and has also boosted the national economy. After many years of a do-it-yourself mindset, artists are now keen to build a sustainable, revenue-generating system within the country, as they navigate the surge of corporate interest.

This support recognized the cultural and socio-economic potential of Nollywood and represented a formal acknowledgment of its importance to Nigeria's cultural landscape. A thorough evaluation of these initiatives, their achievements and their limits could improve cultural policymaking and better address financial and regulatory challenges in an inclusive manner.

It is important to link the evolution of the institutions and initiatives to the history of African cinema and music, and also to international frameworks and agendas, such as the UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, and Sustainable Development Goal 11.4<sup>5</sup>.

## 1.4. Challenges and recommendations

Despite these various initiatives aimed at supporting Nigeria's creative industries, numerous challenges persist. A paramount challenge across these sectors is the protection of intellectual property, with piracy being a critical concern. According to OIT (2023), the global movie industry loses from \$40.0 billion to \$97.1 billion in revenue to digital piracy per year. The World Bank also notes that about 90% of Nollywood films sold are pirated, starkly underscoring the rampant intellectual property rights violations that severely limit the industry's earnings potential. Interestingly, while piracy has paradoxically contributed to Nollywood's global fame, it remains a contentious issue that deprives creators of rightful earnings and undermines the sector's growth.

Moreover, the creative industries in Nigeria suffer from a lack of comprehensive mapping making it difficult to assess accurately their economic value and develop targeted policy responses. The semi-formal nature of these sectors, characterized by a mix of formalized production and informal distribution channels, presents another layer of complexity, reflecting broader themes of informality within the Nigerian economy (Nwankwo, 2018). According to Adedeji (2016), the absence of a coherent strategy to protect artists' intellectual rights, coupled with the lack of a formal distribution network, exacerbates the issue, allowing piracy to flourish.

Several recommendations have been formulated in the literature to address these main challenges. Authors suggest a comprehensive strategy encompassing financial, educational, and infrastructural reforms.

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5. SDG 11 aims to make cities and human settlements "*inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable*". It focuses on improving urban planning and management to create cities that offer opportunities for all, with access to basic services, energy, housing, transportation etc. SDG 11.4 aims to strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage. This target recognizes the importance of preserving cultural sites, monuments, and natural landscapes as essential components of sustainable urban development. SDG 11.4 and the cultural and creative industries are intrinsically linked through their shared goal of preserving and promoting cultural heritage.

The fragmented nature of financing, as highlighted by Offiah (2017), underlines the need for a cohesive funding mechanism that can galvanize the entire value chain of these creative industries. Drawing inspiration from the golden era of Nigerian music, the aim should be to attract both private sector and institutional investors through structured, appealing opportunities. This approach necessitates the establishment of formal financial frameworks capable of assessing and investing in the creative sectors, thus breaking the vicious cycle of informal and inadequate funding that currently stifles innovation and quality production<sup>6</sup>.

Parallel to financial reform, policy formulation and rigorous enforcement of copyright laws are priorities. The rampant piracy that has plagued the industry, halving annual revenue according to estimates, is rooted in both the historical context of informal distribution networks and the advent of digital technologies that have exacerbated intellectual property infringements. The Nigerian Copyright Commission's efforts require bolstering through updated legislation, specialized judicial processes, and an intensified commitment to enforcement, ensuring that artists and creators are protected in both the physical and digital realms.

On the educational front, there is a pressing need for specialized training programs and curricula that focus on the business aspects of music production, rights management, and digital distribution, to equip artists and industry professionals with the necessary skills to thrive in a global market. These capacity-building programs could include partnerships between educational institutions and industry stakeholders, to ensure that training is relevant and up to date.

Additionally, infrastructural improvements are essential. Investment in recording studios, performance venues, and digital distribution networks can help local artists produce high-quality work that competes internationally. Such infrastructure should be strategically developed in key cultural hubs across the country to foster regional growth and artistic collaboration.

Collaboration among stakeholders, including government bodies, private investors, trade unions, and the creative community, is crucial for implementing these strategies effectively. By fostering stakeholder collaboration, the industry can unify against piracy, develop supportive infrastructure, and advocate for the collective interests of creators. Moreover, industry branding efforts, supported by government initiatives such as local and international festivals, can amplify Nigeria's cultural footprint and economic impact on the global stage.

While these recommendations<sup>7</sup> set out a broad framework for the revitalization of Nigeria's music and cinema sectors, it is crucial to temper them with inputs from the artists themselves, mindful of the risks of exclusion and the limitations inherent in such top-down strategies. Artists, as the core stakeholders and primary beneficiaries of these reforms, possess unique insights into the nuances of creative expression and the practical challenges of their crafts. Their involvement ensures that policies and initiatives not only reflect their needs, but are also conducive to fostering an inclusive and diverse creative ecosystem. There is a potential risk of exclusion, particularly for grassroots and emerging talents, who may not have access to the formal structures or platforms proposed. Moreover, a one-size-fits-all approach to policy and infrastructure development could inadvertently sideline minority genres or experimental art forms that do not conform to mainstream or commercial expectations, set by global aesthetic standards. Therefore, any strategy must be flexible and adaptable, with mechanisms for continuous feedback and dialogue with artists across the spectrum.

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6. On the contrary, Lobato (2010) argued that the role of informal markets is what makes it a sustainable industry, though the implications of its informality (lack of copyright and media piracy) can constitute challenges.

7. Find more recommendations in the annex.

## 2. Nigerian Soft Power Through Cultural Diplomacy

As presented above, this article aims to show that Nollywood and Afrobeat, among other cultural sectors, not only hold an important economic potential but also constitute a powerful tool for cultural diplomacy and nation-branding strategies, enhancing Nigeria's soft power in Africa and beyond.

The term 'soft power' was coined by Joseph Nye (1990) to describe the ability of a country to persuade others to do what it wants without force or coercion. The sources of soft power include a country's culture, political values, and foreign policies, particularly when these aspects of a nation are admired and deemed legitimate or morally authoritative by other nations. Soft power operates by shaping the preferences of others through appeal and attraction. Cultural diplomacy and nation branding are key instruments through which soft power can be exerted, as they involve spreading a country's cultural, social, and political values to enhance its international image and influence (Kang, 2013).

Cultural diplomacy is the practice of using cultural exchanges as a means to promote mutual understanding and cooperation between nations. Cultural diplomacy operates under the premise that cultural understanding and cooperation contribute significantly to resolving conflicts and fostering global peace. Governments, through their cultural, educational, and diplomatic institutions, deploy cultural diplomacy strategically to advance national interests, shape foreign perceptions, and enhance soft power.

Nation branding is partly dependent on, and fostered through, the exertion of soft power and the process of cultural diplomacy. It is a strategic effort to enhance a nation's reputation by highlighting its culture, values, and contributions to the world. Nation branding seeks to make a country more appealing to the international community, thereby supporting its political, social, and economic objectives on the global stage.

These three concepts<sup>8</sup> are interlinked and play significant roles in the dynamics of international relations and global politics. Soft power lays the foundation of attraction and persuasion, cultural diplomacy acts as the method through which soft power is operationalized through cultural exchanges and initiatives, and nation branding is the strategic outcome, aimed at shaping international perceptions and improving a country's standing and influence in the world.

Nigeria has significant soft-power potential through cultural exports and foreign policy. The global reach and appeal of Nollywood, the Nigerian music scene, fashion, literature, cuisine, and other cultural products exemplify the country's capacity to influence international audiences. Nigeria's role in international peacekeeping and mediation further bolsters its soft power, showcasing the country's commitment to global peace and security. The Technical Aid Corps Scheme (TACS), and Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy, emphasize a dedication to humanitarian aid and regional cooperation, reinforcing Nigeria's image as a leading force in Africa (Tella, 2014).

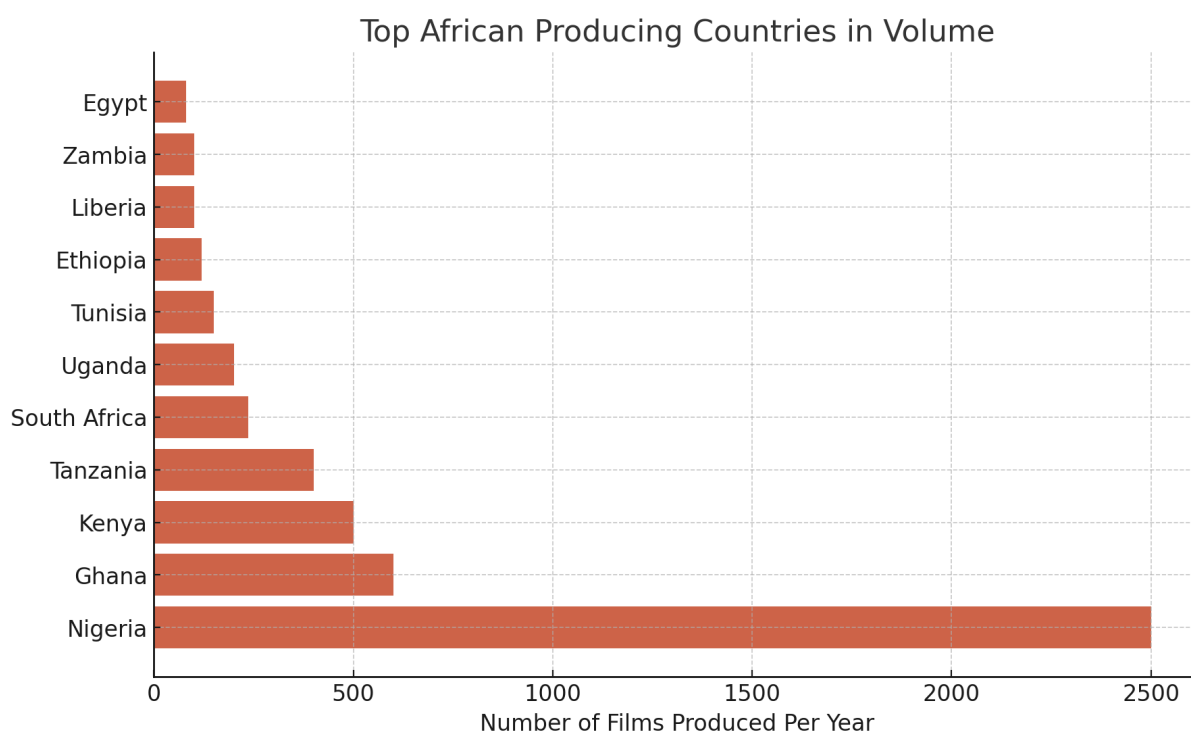
Nollywood, in particular, has transcended geographical boundaries, bringing Nigerian stories and cultures to the world stage. Cinema plays a significant role in the strategies of soft power, utilizing cultural diplomacy to influence global perceptions and international relations. According to Endong (2018), Hollywood has been instrumental in spreading American cultural values and norms globally, though this has also led to accusations of cultural imperialism. On the other hand, Bollywood's narratives reshape global perceptions of India, elevating its cultural diversity beyond stereotypes.

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8. Note that these concepts have been criticized for having large and sometimes incoherent or abstract definitions, making it difficult to measure their impacts. This leads to creating biases based on the "global appeal" of cultures, and having to oversimplify them to fit such standards (Ogunnubi and Isike, 2018).

Similarly, Nollywood's ascent onto the global stage showcases Nigeria's diverse cultural narratives, despite controversies.

The following chart shows that Nigeria is leading in the production of movies in Africa. Focusing on Nollywood and Afrobeat, the following pages examine their contribution to Nigerian soft power within and outside the continent. We then touch on the challenges faced in building a positive image amidst internal security, economic, and social crises.



## 2.1. Nollywood's Influence on African Audiences

Nollywood movies in other African countries are at the center of complex dynamics of influence, appropriation, adaptation, and cultural exchange. Other local film industries have found themselves both challenged and inspired by the Nollywood phenomenon (Krings and Simmert, 2020). This phenomenon underscores Nollywood's role as a pivotal force in shaping contemporary African pop culture and sets the frame for a south-south soft-power perspective. Through examples from Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, and Cameroon<sup>9</sup>, this part will explore how Nigerian movies are circulated and perceived on the continent.

Katrien Pype (2014) examined the circulation and reception of Nollywood films in Kinshasa, revealing intricate interactions between migration, Pentecostalism, and local-media dynamics. First, the circulation of these films is significantly facilitated by the circular migration of Kinshasa residents to Nigeria, often for economic and religious reasons. These migrants, when returning to Kinshasa, brought back Nigerian films, which found a ready audience. This movement coincided with a period of political liberalization in the mid-1990s when then-DRC President Mobutu's weakening power led to a more tolerant policy towards broadcasting technologies. The declaration

9. Other authors have also studied similar dynamics in countries including Ghana, Kenya, and Uganda.

of press freedom in 1996 allowed private media management to flourish, with many entrepreneurs, including Pentecostal pastors, launching local TV channels that would later become instrumental in distributing Nollywood content.

Furthermore, Pype (2014) discussed how Pentecostalism influenced the popular culture in Kinshasa, particularly in shaping the reception and interpretation of Nollywood films. The pastors, utilizing their newly established TV channels, not only broadcast these films but also integrate their themes into sermons, thereby weaving them into the spiritual life of the community. This integration was connected to the emergence of a new social and moral imagination in Kinshasa, which in turn, influenced local aesthetic conventions. Nollywood films frequently explore themes of good versus evil, redemption, and divine intervention, which align closely with Pentecostal beliefs. These films portray intense spiritual battles, in which characters often face moral dilemmas and supernatural challenges, reflecting the Pentecostal worldview that emphasizes spiritual warfare and the power of conversion and salvation.

Moreover, to Kinshasa's Pentecostal Christians, Nigeria is the epicenter of profound spiritual activity and the home of powerful religious leaders who are believed to wield an extraordinary level of divine power and authority. This fascination is further fueled by the stories of miracles and supernatural occurrences frequently featured in Nollywood films.

This is how Pentecostalism played a role in shaping the circulation and reception of Nollywood films, facilitated by the mobility of pastors and congregants between Kinshasa and Nigeria. These films, imbued with Christian themes and narratives, are then disseminated through local media, deeply influencing both the spiritual life and the cinematic tastes of the Kinshasa residents.

Similarly, Tanzanians perceive Nigeria as a place of fascination and repulsion, especially when it comes to themes related to witchcraft and sorcery. Tanzanian horror movies are inspired by and constructed with the influence of Nollywood movies. Böhme (2022) argued however that there is a specific Tanzanian style that is the 'bricolage' between Tanzanian stories and myths, Nollywood aesthetics, Hollywood standards, and Bollywood techniques. Bohme investigated the Tanzanian video industry's adaptation of Nigerian Nollywood aesthetics, arguing that Tanzanian horror films, though influenced by Nollywood, are not mere imitations but rather a complex mix of local myths and Nigerian standards.

Tanzanian filmmakers initially drew inspiration from Nollywood's horror genre, known for its dramatic portrayals of witchcraft and spiritual conflict. However, the perception among Tanzanian audiences and critics of these films as mere copies has shifted over time. Filmmakers such as Haji Dilunga actively resist this view by creating films that, while influenced by Nollywood, strive for a distinct Tanzanian identity. This is achieved by integrating local narratives and settings, which resonate more deeply with Tanzanian viewers. Bohme's study revealed a complex interplay between Tanzanian and Nigerian cinematic traditions, with Tanzanian filmmakers not only borrowing from, but also critically engaging with, Nollywood's aesthetics, to create films that are uniquely Tanzanian, reflecting both global influences and local realities.

Similarities to this dynamic of consumption, adaptation, and appropriation of Nollywood movies are also observed in Cameroon, even though Nigeria is there more perceived as an "*imperialist country*" (Endong, 2018). The widespread consumption of Nollywood in Cameroon is facilitated by both local and international broadcasters that feature Nollywood films prominently in their programming. For example, Spectrum TV, a Cameroonian television station, dedicates a significant portion of its schedule to Nollywood productions. Despite this, there is still notable competition from other international film industries, particularly Latin American and Asian cinema, which also hold substantial appeal for Cameroonian audiences.

The influence of Nollywood in Cameroon extends beyond mere viewership to a significant impact on the local film industry, colloquially referred to as Collywood, especially in the Anglophone regions termed 'AngloCam cinema'. This influence manifests in various ways, from the adoption of Nollywood's cinematic styles and themes to technical collaborations between Nigerian and Cameroonian filmmakers. Many Cameroonian filmmakers and actors look to Nollywood as a source of inspiration and a model for success in the industry. This has led to a phenomenon described as the "*Nigerianisation*" of Anglophone Cameroonian cinema, with local films increasingly imitating Nollywood's paradigms and themes which resonate well with local audiences (Endong, 2018b). While Nollywood's dominance is viewed by some as a cultural insurgency challenging the growth of independent cinema in Cameroon, it also presents opportunities for technical improvement and for Cameroonian films to reach bigger audiences. The dynamic between Nollywood and Collywood reflects a broader debate about the balance between cultural influence and authenticity within the scope of African cinema.

## 2.2. 'The African Dream': Afrobeat on the Global Stage

As mentioned above, Afrobeat is a hybrid musical genre that has achieved remarkable international success, with artists such as Ckay, Wizkid, and Burna Boy topping charts in different countries. This section explores how Afrobeat went global and how artists and local entrepreneurs in the sector navigate the global dynamics and their own aspirations. It also shows how these "*cosmopolitan individuals*" act as brand ambassadors for Nigerian culture and identity (Serres, 2022).

The development of Afrobeat is also a tale of survival and adaptation. Following economic downturns and structural adjustments in Nigeria, a new generation of artists and entrepreneurs emerged, driven by the desire to forge a distinct identity and to capitalize on global music trends. This success has been propelled by major companies including Amazon, Google, and Spotify, which integrate Afrobeat into their marketing strategies and feature Nigerian artists prominently. American and European artists have incorporated Afrobeat into their music, with figures such as Beyoncé drawing heavily on its sounds and aesthetics. Moreover, Afrobeat artists have become adept at using digital media to connect with fans worldwide, utilizing platforms for online 'fame building'. This direct engagement has fostered a global community of listeners who are not just passive consumers but active participants in the spread of Afrobeat.

Serres (2022) showed how the industry's growth is fueled by a combination of privatization and a proactive approach to global marketing. Young Nigerian artists and entrepreneurs, understanding the genre's international appeal, use Afrobeat not only as a cultural export but also as a means of socio-economic emancipation, aiming to transform global success into local industry development. Nigerian music entrepreneurs today are keen to leverage Afrobeat's global appeal to generate sustainable local profits.

By studying the local label Aristokrat Records and the French-owned Universal Music contracts and interactions in the industry, Serres (2022) showed how Nigerian music entrepreneurs are engaging strategically with international corporations to challenge and redefine the hegemonic structures of global cultural exchange. This engagement is not merely a pursuit of international success, but also a nationalist endeavor aimed at establishing a sustainable and autonomous local music industry in Nigeria. Nigerian music professionals want to break away from traditional "*flows of capital, images, and symbolic meaning*" that often place African artists at a disadvantage. The economic benefits derived from these partnerships are significant but are intertwined with the "*individual subjectivities of post-colonial African*" entrepreneurs (Serres 2022).

Under the slogan of "*bringing Africa to the world*", these artists promote a brand of "*New Afrika*".

defined as a “*geo-aesthetic category*”. This highlights the shift towards viewing the continent as a dynamic and creative hub, rather than a static, exoticized ‘other’. New Afrika is about embracing this multipolarity, showing the world a multifaceted Africa that is a critical player in global cultural, economic, and political spheres. It reflects a culture that is inherently hybrid, incorporating diverse influences, and evolving in response to global trends while maintaining its authenticity. This approach challenges the frameworks of cultural imperialism. More than attempting to forge a decentralized view of the world, the players in the music industry have switched the focus towards a “*south-south transnationalization*” (Serres, 2022). They have developed personal networks, making Dubai a hub for their live shows and extensive media activities. Structural challenges have led to new ways of living, reflected in the evolution of Nigerian music. This marks a shift from traditional forms to what is called “the rise of the street” or “popular music.” These socio-economic transformations and how they forge a youth identity help in understanding how Dubai, the center of consumerism and ostentatious display of wealth, has become the symbol of success for Nigerian stars and their fans.

Dubai's emergence as a hub for Nigerian artists can be traced back to its unique position as a cosmopolitan, technologically advanced, and relatively accessible city (compared to European or American cities). For many Nigerian artists, Dubai represents the first tangible experience of a ‘global postmodernity’—a place where the future seems real and within reach. The city's infrastructure, economic opportunities, and open attitude towards international visitors make it an ideal platform for showcasing talent and conducting business.

In conclusion, the success of Nigerian artists on the international stage is intrinsically linked to national pride and the global perception of Nigeria. As these artists gain acclaim abroad, they not only elevate their personal careers but also enhance Nigeria's brand as a vibrant, culturally rich, and innovative nation. This dual success story—personal and national—highlights a dynamic in which individual achievements in the music industry contribute significantly to national development and image-building.

### 2.3. Challenges to Building a Positive Image

The global success of Nigerian artists becomes a powerful tool for national branding and international diplomacy, promoting Nigeria as a key player in the global cultural economy. However, challenges remain in building a positive image, in the context of internal economic, social, and security crises.

There is a debate among scholars on the inevitable failure of foreign policy without internal reform. Endong (2018) argued the “*Nigerian image crisis*” has deep roots in the country's history of military dictatorships and undemocratic practices, which have contributed to a persistent negative international perception. Over the years, various Nigerian governments have initiated nation (re)branding campaigns to improve this image, especially during times of positive international engagement, such as when Nigeria has led peacekeeping missions. However, despite these efforts, the portrayal of Nigeria has often swung back to negativity because of ongoing issues including corruption, insecurity, and political instability. Endong (2018) also highlighted other factors behind the Nigerian image crisis, such as western media reproducing negative stereotypes and reporting bad news. Moreover, the author criticized the lack of a national strategy for branding that is more than logos and slogans.

In this sense, many argue that instead of sidestepping these issues and promoting a positive image, Nollywood showcases these challenges and contributes to the spread of negative image of Nigeria. While shedding light on social, political, and economic struggles, by depicting corruption and criminality, filmmakers contribute to the stigmatization.



Proponents argue that Nollywood mirrors the realities of Nigerian society and plays a critical role in highlighting issues that need attention. Filmmakers often defend their work by stating that they are telling authentic stories that resonate with the experiences and challenges of everyday Nigerians.

On the other hand, some argue that Nollywood also contributes to rebranding Nigeria by balancing stories of hardship with those of success and resilience. While Nollywood reflects the society from which it springs, it also holds the key to reshaping that society's image by choosing how to tell the stories. The industry's influence can help pivot the world's view of Nigeria from one focused on challenges to one that also includes the country's potential and opportunities (Endong, 2018).

## Conclusion

Nigeria's cultural and creative industries, particularly Nollywood and Afrobeat, embody the dynamic interplay between cultural production and economic growth. These sectors illustrate how local cultural elements can be blended seamlessly with universal themes, achieving widespread resonance, and significantly contributing to the national economy and global cultural influence.

The evolution of Nigeria's film and music industries underscores a broader narrative of resilience and innovation in the face of structural challenges. Nollywood and Afrobeat, as symbols of cultural dynamism, illustrate how creative sectors can thrive independently and adapt to changing economic landscapes. This resilience is mirrored in the music industry, where digital innovations and entrepreneurial spirit have propelled Afrobeat to global prominence, redefining global cultural dynamics from a South-South perspective.

A significant lesson from this analysis is the critical importance of establishing robust institutional frameworks that can support and sustain creative industries. While grassroots efforts and individual ingenuity have propelled these sectors forward, their long-term success hinges on addressing systemic issues including intellectual property rights, funding accessibility, and infrastructural deficits. This requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including artists, government bodies, private investors, and international organizations.

Nollywood and Afrobeat have become powerful tools for shaping global perceptions of Nigeria. However, to fully leverage this soft power, it is crucial to address internal challenges such as economic instability, social inequality, and political insecurity. These internal issues threaten to overshadow the positive image projected by Nigeria's cultural exports, potentially undermining the country's efforts to build an attractive national brand.

This paper delved into Nigeria's CCIs, focusing primarily on Nollywood and the Afrobeat music scene as tools for development and nation-branding. However, the analysis omitted several relevant aspects that warrant further investigation. Notably, the paper did not cover other important sectors such as fashion, literature (Nwankwo, 2018), and entertainment/showbusiness (Idowu and Ogunnubi, 2023; Apollos Maton, 2018), which are vital components of the cultural landscape. Additionally, it overlooked the political engagement of artists. Other layers of these dynamics include debates on intangible heritage and orality, gender dynamics and representation, the influence of festivals and forums, the role of the diaspora (Tsika, 2014; Dekie *et al*, 2015), the themes of the movies, the constraints of censorship, the linguistic diversity, ethnic divisions and how they affect cultural production and consumption (Alabi, 2013). The discussion also overlooked the role of other sectors in the Nigerian soft-power strategy, such as sports considering African Cup of Nations (Afcon)'s success story, which has significantly boosted Nigeria's international image.

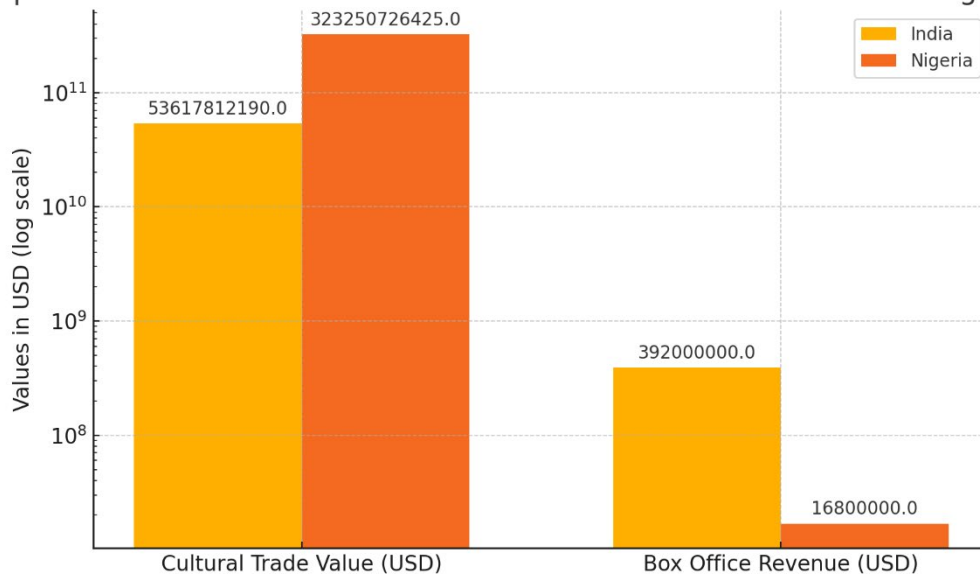
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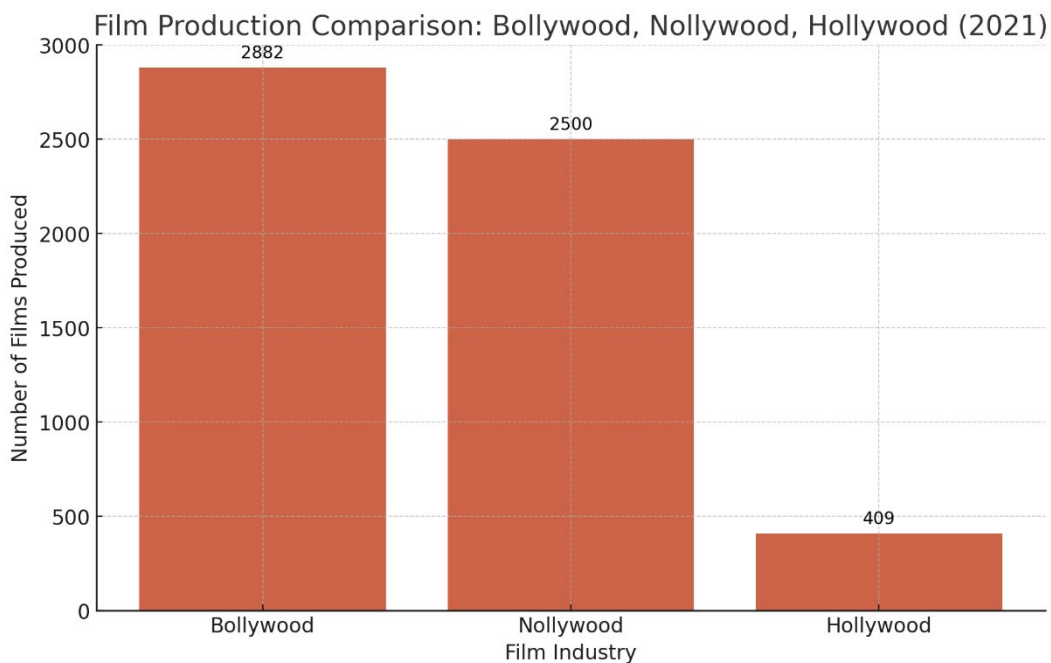
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## Annex:

Comparison of Cultural Trade Value and Box Office Revenue: India vs Nigeria (2019)



Source: UNESCO UIS



Sources: Film Federation of India, National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria, and the Motion Picture Association (MPA).

### The Nollywood Model\* according to the UNESCO report (2021):

Characteristics	Description	Recommendations
Low-Cost, rapid production	Films are completed for as little as US\$15,000 within a few weeks.	Remove administrative and tax barriers. Simplify the process for registering a production company or applying for a film license. Facilitate equipment purchases and access to filming location to allow private initiatives to thrive.
Privately funded productions	Similar to China, India, and the United States, production budgets are privately funded. Larger productions may benefit from brand sponsorships and product placement.	Encourage content sponsorship: Offer tax rebates to encourage local investors to sponsor content.
High volume to combat piracy	Volume is crucial to maximizing profits quickly due to rampant piracy.	Implement local content quotas: Enforce broadcast quotas for local content to support domestic productions.
Effective distribution	Initially, films were sold on DVDs and VCDs through extensive street vendor networks. Now, films are widely distributed online and on television across Nigeria, Africa, and the diaspora.	Invest in Internet infrastructure: Focus on developing internet infrastructure with the content industry in mind, ensuring countrywide internet access at affordable rates.
Unique storytelling style	Developed a home-grown style that resonates deeply with Nigerian and African audiences. Ignored Western cinematic expectations, proving an alternative path is possible.	Collaborate with strategic partners: Work with global social media companies (YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok), mobile operators, and independent local platforms to create monetization opportunities for content producers.
Favorable context for large markets	Best suited for countries with large local markets, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, or Tanzania. Smaller markets, like Rwanda, can adopt this approach by tapping into larger diaspora communities and aligning production budgets with revenue potential.	Support promotional events: Governments should support award ceremonies, festivals, and film premieres to enhance the visibility of local talent. Engage local talent: Involve popular local actors and actresses in promotional events and as ambassadors for social initiatives to boost their profiles and drive sales.

\*The Nollywood Model is one of the four strategic development and growth models of the movie industry in Africa. Other models identified by the UNESCO report are the author model, the festival model, and the service model.



# *About Policy Center for the New South*

The Policy Center for the New South (PCNS) is a Moroccan think tank aiming to contribute to the improvement of economic and social public policies that challenge Morocco and the rest of Africa as integral parts of the global South.

The PCNS pleads for an open, accountable and enterprising "new South" that defines its own narratives and mental maps around the Mediterranean and South Atlantic basins, as part of a forward-looking relationship with the rest of the world. Through its analytical endeavours, the think tank aims to support the development of public policies in Africa and to give the floor to experts from the South. This stance is focused on dialogue and partnership, and aims to cultivate African expertise and excellence needed for the accurate analysis of African and global challenges and the suggestion of appropriate solutions.

As such, the PCNS brings together researchers, publishes their work and capitalizes on a network of renowned partners, representative of different regions of the world. The PCNS hosts a series of gatherings of different formats and scales throughout the year, the most important being the annual international conferences "The Atlantic Dialogues" and "African Peace and Security Annual Conference" (APSACO).

Finally, the think tank is developing a community of young leaders through the Atlantic Dialogues Emerging Leaders program(ADEL) a space for cooperation and networking between a new generation of decision-makers from the government, business and civil society sectors. Through this initiative, which already counts more than 300 members, the Policy Center for the New South contributes to intergenerational dialogue and the emergence of tomorrow's leaders.

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