



GSJ: Volume 8, Issue 11, November 2020, Online: ISSN 2320-9186

www.globalscientificjournal.com

Nigeria's Creative Industry (Nollywood) in the Quest for Economic Diversification and New Sustainable Development

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Abstract

The spate of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria is alarming and this situation has informed serious efforts from all stakeholders from private and public sectors to ensure economic diversification to ensure sustainable development. Nigeria's creative industry (Nollywood) has been attracting attention in a bid to improve the sector's contributions to the national economy of the country. The qualitative approach adopted in the paper reviewed the past studies on the contributions of Nollywood to gross domestic product (GDP) of the country and the gaps that are identified between the policy statement and its execution. Nollywood has been contributing effectively to national economy for sustainable development because the government has not been proactive to harness the potential of this creative industry for national economic recovery and sustainable development. Nollywood's viability for sustainable development should not be compromised by the policy makers.

Keywords: Nigerian films and sustainable development, Nollywood and economic diversification, Nollywood and national economy,

Introduction

The identified gap between policy statement and its implementation in Nigeria is very obvious. The evidence of this situation is seen in the administrative habit of successive governments in the country. These governments have been demonstrating lack of innovation by rehashing the unproductive and unyielding economic policies of their predecessors.

It is disheartening to see successive governments in Nigeria relying solely on oil products as source of foreign exchange and national income. On different occasions, this over-reliance on oil products has dealt serious blow to national economy and the overall standard of living of the populace. This argument is premised on the 2017 reports of the sustainable development goals (SDGs). The reports summarise the challenges faced in the implementation of sustainable development goals into three broad sub-headings to three significant challenges that Nigeria's implementation of sustainable development goals have been confronted with. The challenges are as follow:

- (i) **Over-reliance on the oil and gas sector; dwindling agricultural production and productivity as well as limited value addition in the agricultural sector:**
In order to grow the economy, create jobs, address poverty and ensure food security much more than oil and gas is evidently required. The dwindling agricultural productivity is mainly due to the negative impacts of climate change;

desertification; natural and man-made disasters; unresponsive /land tenure as well as the general low utilization of mechanized farming.

- (ii) **Infrastructural Deficits and Technological gaps:** A major challenge to the SDGs attainment is the infrastructural deficit and technology gaps which hinder service provision and application of science, technology and innovations in many spheres of life.
- (iii) **Economic Recession and Humanitarian crisis:** Economic recession in the country due to fluctuating oil price in the international market and the humanitarian crisis in the North East of the country all present unique challenges that are detrimental to the achievement of the SDGs.

The deduction from the above is that oil sector alone cannot assist Nigeria in the attainment of sustainable development goals. There is a need to look outside of the box to re-invigorate other sectors of the economy such as creative and entertainment industries. We combine these two sub-sectors of the economy because in the course of being creative, the artists/producers also entertain the people as found in Nollywood and music industry.

Nollywood: An Industry Left to its own Fate

Unlike other national films such as Hollywood in America and Bollywood in India, Nigeria (Nollywood) films have been left to its own fate. Like *almajiris* (a popular name for young children who move around to fend for themselves in the Northern Nigeria), Nollywood artists and practitioners have been left to their fate to take care of the production costs from the pre-production stage to the post-production stage. The basic commitment that Nigerian government has shown is in the legislation which is, however, not judiciously executed.

The current fate of Nollywood, perhaps, is traced to its historical antecedents. Theatre historians and film scholars have traced the etymology of Nollywood to rich theatrical traditions in some parts of the country, television culture and Kenneth Nnebue's (a video cassette merchant) experimentation with some of his unsold empty video cassettes ('Diran Ademiju-Bepo, 2008; Barclays Ayakoroma, 2014; Jonathan Haynes, 2016 and Azeez Akinwumi Sesan, 2017) and the country's over reliance on petroleum products. These variables reveal some underlined problems confronting Nollywood in the present

dispensation. The variables reveal further that Nollywood began without proper structure in an informal sector. Thus, “Nollywood, as we know, was created as a popular art in the informal sector (or on its borders) and had as its economic basis the marketing of cassette tapes and then video discs” (Haynes, 2016: p.73).

Theatre historians (for example, ‘Biodun Jeyifo, 1984; Olu Obafemi, 2001 and ‘Dele Layiwola, 2014) have reported that what metamorphosed to the present day Nollywood (especially in the Yoruba sub-sector of the country’s film industry) began with *Alarinjo* theatre tradition of Old Oyo Empire. In his argument, Layiwola avers that:

The precursor of the genre that is generally referred to in the latter part of the 20th century as the home video emerged from the activities of the travelling theatre troupes of the 1940s through the 70s. Most of these troupes were located in the various towns and villages of Western Nigeria.... (217)

Individualism characterised travelling theatre practice to the extent that government had no financial influence on its performance except in some areas of legislation which borders more on the censorship of the content and context of performance. In the light of this argument, reference is made to the censorship that Hubert Ogunde suffered in the hands of colonial government and federal government of Nigeria. At this critical stage in Nigeria’s theatrical experience, the practitioners were given different names such *alajota* (someone who dances for sale), *alagbe* (someone who begs for living) in addition to *alarinjo* (someone who travels with dance). All these names showed that Nigerian people and government had no respect for theatre practitioners. They never thought that theatre can make contributions to national economy as we currently witness with Nollywood. The theatre practitioners of the pre-Nollywood stage combined roles as founders of theatre troupes, artistic and technical directors, producers, theatre managers and above all theatre vendors taking their performances to different locations in the country and beyond the shores of the country. Sadly, overnment did not acknowledge the economic potential of theatre and film even when Nigerian theatre practitioners such as Hubert Ogunde and Duro Ladipo were taking their plays to other parts of Africa, America and Europe. Nigerian government could have utilised the opportunity to promote the country’s cultural diplomacy for sustainable development.

The place of television drama in the development of the contemporary Nigerian film industry is another phenomenon that needs to be examined (Barclays Ayakoroma, 2014: p. 39). In 1959, there was the establishment of Western Nigeria Television (WNTV) which is presently

known as Nigeria Television Authority (NTA). This television station made it possible for some theatre practitioners such as Duro Ladipo, Jimoh Aliu, Oyin Adejobi and Wole Soyinka) to migrate from stage to television screen. The successes of WNTV in the promotion of theatre and the perennial politicking in the country made other regional and state governments to establish their own television stations. The establishment of these television stations promoted theatre practices but with little or no financial commitment from the government. In terms of artistry and delivery, there was no much difference from the plays of live theatre and tele-drama. Gbemisola Adeoti (2014: pp. 20-21) reviews the series of tele-dramas on Nigeria's television stations as follows:

... in the 1970s and 1980s, there were regular television drama series featuring some of the troupes on Western Nigeria Television (WNTV), later Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), Ibadan. These include: *Bode Wasinmi* (Duro Ladipo), *Awada* (Moses Olaiya Adejumo), *Awada Kerikeri* (Ojo Ladipo), *Kootu Asipa* (Oyin Adejobi). On Ogun State Television, Abeokuta, (OGTV), there were *Ere Abalaye*, featuring Omilani Theatre, and *Ogun Adubi* with Akin Ogungbe. In 1986, Jimoh Aliu's *Arelu* enjoyed wide viewership on Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State (BCOS), Ibadan, while the drama series lasted. The Tele-drama series did not lack the fundamentals that appealed to their audience in live theatre. Indeed, the audio-visual medium enlarged their capacity to represent situations where characters could commute swiftly between the physical and the supernatural realm.

Adeoti's review reveals that tele-drama is neglected in the hands of management of these television stations. The consequence of this was that the artists were left at the mercy of the management for their economic survival and massive patronage. The attention of the government was on the oil boom since they could import film reversals for some productions.

Nigeria's petroleum-based economy continued till 1980s when the country began to witness dwindling revenue. In a Revised Technical Proposal on Structural Adjustment Programme, National Centre for Economic Management and Administration writes that:

To reverse the worsening economic fortunes in terms of declining growth, increasing unemployment, galloping inflation, high incidence of poverty, worsening balance of payment conditions, debilitating debt burden and increasing unsustainable fiscal deficits, among others, government embarked on austerity measures in 1982. Arising from the minimal impacts of these measures, an extensive structural adjustment programme was put in place in 1986 with emphasis on expenditure reducing and

expenditure switching policies as well as using the private sector as the engine of growth of the economy via commercialisation and privatisation of government-owned enterprises.

Sadly, Nigerian government has not lived up to the expectations of diversifying the economy as contained in the objectives of structural adjustment programme. This is because the country's economic planning still relies on the proceeds from petroleum products up till the contemporary time. Nollywood, which in operational principles and practices belong to the private sector of the economy, has not attracted committed attention of the government. Structural adjustment programme, however, had and still has positive and negative effects on Nollywood.

The positive effect of structural adjustment programme on Nollywood is that it promoted creativity and innovation among the theatre practitioners and others in the allied professions. As it was no more economically viable to acquire reversals for the processing of film negatives, theatre practitioners from the Igbo and Yoruba axis of the industry embraced video film medium. Whatever the argument of film critics is (such as Sanya Osha, 1998; O. Alamu, 2010; Philips Adedotun Ogundeji, 2014; Azeez Akinwumi Sesan, 2017) about the originator (s) of video film format in Nigeria's film history, what is certain is that the attempt at making video film format was consequent upon economic challenges of the period. With this development, more practitioners opted for video film format to get more money and to reach out to more audience. The video film format has improved the presence of Nigeria in the global film industry is ranked third after Hollywood in America and Bollywood in India. Despite this global ranking and unfortunately, the government does not see any economic fortune in Nollywood.

The negative impact of structural adjustment programme on Nollywood is that it further sustains government's neglect of the industry. Different entrants, with little or no professionalism in theatre and film making, take up responsibilities in the industry. The filmmaking industry (Nollywood), therefore, becomes open for 'all-comers'. The industry, thus, becomes unorganised and uncompetitive. The economic implications of this situation for the attainment of sustainable development are discussed in due course.

Nollywood's problems are also associated with the government's inability to properly manage the oil and post-oil boom in Nigeria. With the discovery of petroleum at Oloibiri, all the economic plans and developmental projects of the country have been on the proceeds from the oil. This situation has stunted the economic growth and development of the country.

This is because all other sectors of the economy such as mining, agriculture and creative industry are neglected. As a sub-sector in creative industry, Nollywood has not enjoyed positive patronage of the government in terms of finance and budgetary allocation. The only attention that Nollywood artists and practitioners get is during general elections when they serve as campaign coordinator and 'brand ambassadors' to political parties. This phenomenon, in relation to its economic implication, is discussed in the later part of this paper. It is, therefore, averred that oil has been a barrier to the attainment of Nollywood's full potential in Nigeria's economic advancement. This argument is consistent with Barisua Nwinne's (2017: p.7) 'resource curse theory' that:

Economics (sic.) with an excessive exposure to a commodity, such as oil, may become imbalanced. Just as the money from drilling for oils seen as easy and may make an economy slow to develop alternative business sectors, the simple money from trading in assets, and lending against property, may distort a developed economy.

Nigeria's over reliance on oil has generated economic tensions in the country to the extent that it is almost difficult to find alternative foreign exchange earnings for the attainment of sustainable development goals. Other efforts that Nigerian government have made to diversify the country's economy have not achieved the desired goals. Petroleum, thus, has become a limiting economic variable which has been affecting the attainment of sustainable development in the country. This is because successive governments in Nigeria are reckless with the management of the proceeds from oil sector as evident in failed infrastructural developments, unemployment and poverty.

Nollywood and Sustainable Development

At this crucial time, Nigeria requires economic diversification to attain sustainable development. In the light of this, the government needs to look outside of the box to embark on all inclusive economy which involves harmonisation of formal and informal economic sectors for their economic potential. This view is consistent with A. Olukoshi's (1990: p. 21) review of the basic objectives of structural adjustment programme.

- i. To restructure and diversify the productive base of the economy by curtailing Nigeria's over-reliance or dependence on the oil sector. Through this means, SAP was expected to stimulate the development of non-oil sectors such as agriculture, mining, manufacturing;

- ii. To promote export of non-oil commodities and boost foreign exchange earnings;
- iii. Curtail inflationary growth in the economy by removing all barriers to effective and efficient trade;
- iv. Attract Foreign Direct Investment to Nigeria through the adoption and implementation of deregulation and privatization policies;
- v. Create employment opportunities for Nigeria;
- vi. Reduce public expenditure and entrench fiscal prudence in management of the economy.

There is a gap between the SAP objectives and its implementation. Successive governments have not properly activated the exportation of non-oil commodities to boost foreign exchange earnings and all barriers to effective and efficient trade have not been removed because of the nefarious activities of pirates.

The concern of this paper, therefore, is how Nollywood has fared in this turbulent situation and how this sub-sector of the economy can contribute to the attainment of sustainable development in the present situation. No doubt, Nollywood has come of age and it is imperative for the government to harness the economic and sociological significance of this sub-sector of the economy for sustainable development.

The economic significance of Nollywood is seen in its prospect to contribute to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the overall national income of the country. Owing to the fact that government has not shown committed economic interest in Nollywood, the industry has consistently remained non-bankable and non-taxable. This phenomenon has promoted quackery and sub-standard production which are inimical to sustainable development of the country. Unfortunately, government has suffered revenue loss to lack of committed economic interest in Nollywood. When government shows renewed interest in the economic potential of Nollywood, there will be improvement in the quality and economic contributions of the industry to the national economy. This is because “when an industry’s basic technological platform, economic organisation and ownership change, everything about it will be reshaped and will need to be newly described and analysed” (Haynes, 2016: p. 73). Following Hayne’s observation, attention here is on what stakeholders (government, theatre professional association and theatre practitioners) should do to make Nollywood economically vibrant for sustainable development.

Since charity begins at home, this paper talks on the attitude and practice of theatre practitioners to their trade and profession. The problem, by extension, is connected to the multiplicity of associations that are found in the industry. There is no uniformity in the professional associations and regulations which guide them. Among the Yoruba practitioners, for instance, there are two prominent rival associations – Association of Nigeria Theatre Practitioners (ANTP) and Theatre Arts and Motion Pictures Practitioners Association of Nigeria (TAMPAN) – who contend for recognition and relevance in the industry. The unhealthy rivalry between the two associations can be checked by the coordinating ministry (Ministry of Information and Culture). Through relevant parastatals, the Ministry can put machineries in place to harmonise the ideologies and philosophies of the two rival associations for uniform practice in order to attain sustainable development. Similarly, the Ministry should address the proliferation of theatre and film practitioners' associations across the country. This harmonisation will also assist to have a reliable data bank for the theatre and film practitioners in the country for realistic and formidable policies aimed at sustainable development in the country. The data bank will also bring sanity into the industry and it will also ensure checks and balances among all the stakeholders.

As part of the efforts to re-position the country's film industry, The Nigerian Film Corporation (NFC), a parastatal of Federal Ministry of Information and Culture, instituted training programmes for Nigerian youths across the country. In fact, it is instructive to state that:

The Corporation has also identified cities that will serve as training hubs for direct and impactful skills and entrepreneurial training for youths. The cities include, Asaba, Lagos, Ilorin, Kaduna, Umuahia, Bauchi and Jos. These cities will serve contiguous states in the reinvigorated training strategies that the NFC is introducing from 2020 with youths as target beneficiaries. It is expected that the hubs will be centers of full film production activities with positive impact on employment generation and wealth creation. (Source: NFC Website)

The above proposal by NFC, if judiciously implemented, will impact positive on Nollywood towards the attainment of sustainable development. The youths will be positively engaged to contribute their quota to national economy. The training hub will also improve the professionalism of Nollywood practitioners.

NFC is also commended for positive efforts made to ensure proper financing of films in Nigeria. In another report on NFC website, it is stated that the Corporation has partnered with Access Bank for financing Nollywood movies through Central Bank of Nigeria's (CBN's) Creative Industry Finance Initiative (CIFI). The aim of this finance initiative is to offer funding arrangement to film makers. Similarly, NFC entered agreement with Centre National Du Cinema et de L'image anime (CNC), France. The purpose of this collaboration is to secure grants-in aid for Nigerian film directors/producers. On this collaboration, the NFC website reports as follows:

The partnership with Access Bank follows the recent bilateral production agreement the NFC signed with Centre National Du Cinema et de L'image anime (CNC) of France in January 2020. The CNC/NFC collaboration would among other things ensure that artistic co-production would be financed to the tune of 135, 000 Euros for a Nigerian Director/Producer working in partnership with French Film personnel to make quality films.

What can be deduced from the two financial arrangements made by NFC for Nigerian filmmakers is that terms and conditions are attached. The filmmakers should fulfil some conditions, though these are not categorically on the Corporation's website.

The above efforts by the Corporation to financially invigorate Nollywood may still not achieve sustainable development in the country if proactive steps are not taken to block all the financial leakages in the industry. In this line of thought, this paper aligns its view with Charles Okwuowulu's (2018: p. 45) that:

It is a common knowledge that Nollywood has grown through the undaunted efforts of private sector investors. However, the industry is still very fragile and flexible to the Nigerian socio-culture (sic.) and economic dynamism. This flexible and unpredictable nature of the industry requires stability through strong policy formulation and implementation by the government. This is because the industry is still left in the hands of the business moguls whose major concern is profit making.

Since the sole intention of these private investors in Nollywood is profit-making, they will, perhaps, not hesitate to engage in some sharp practices such as tax evasion or avoidance.

The above point on tax evasion/avoidance leads us to some practices in Nollywood which may militate against the attainment of sustainable development despite the government's

financial commitment to the industry. As stated earlier, there is no data base for theatre and film practitioners in Nollywood. This situation makes it difficult for the government to do proper and adequate taxing for the taxable income of the practitioners. To attain sustainable development through Nollywood, the responsible government agency or parastatal should embark upon objective data collection, through their respective associations/unions. This situation will assist the overnment to know who to pay tax and how much of PAYE an individual practitioner should pay. For proper taxation in Nollywood, data base of the following categories of practitioners are necessary but not limited to them.

- i. Actors/Actresses
- ii. Directors
- iii. Producers
- iv. Marketers
- v. Distributors
- vi. Technical Crew (Sound and light technicians, make-up artists and costumer)
- vii. Editors

These practitioners, among others have been evading/avoiding tax because of the poor data base in the country. If the government see to this, it will go a long way to prevent financial leakages in the industry.

Alternatively, the designated government parastatal such as National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) should be empowered to liaise with Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) in the collection of tax from film producers/directors before censoring any film. This can be done by requestin producers/directors of movies to be censored to present tax clearance of three years and tax clearance certificate from the total budget spent on the production of the film. Unfortunately, NFVCB has not been actively engaging the Nollywood stakeholders in critical dialogues on how to re-position the industry for sustainable development.

Federal Ministry of Information and Culture, through its appropriate parastatal, has significant roles to play to ensure that Nollywood is socially and economically relevant to the on-going quest for sustainable development. The Ministry should ensure that films which provide re-orientation about the need to embrace humanity and respect humane society are censored and made available for the populace. This view is informed by the understanding that sustainable development also includes social and moral development of individuals for humane society devoid of inhumanity to fellow humans. In this direction of argument, this

paper upholds E. Olawale Ogunkola and Festus O. Egwaikhide's (2001: pp. 20-21) view on the conception of development, as given below:

Irrespective of how a better life is conceived and defined, development in all societies carries with it the following three mutually exclusive objectives. First, is to increase the availability and widen the distribution of basic life-sustaining goods such as food, shelter, health and protection to all members of society. Second, to raise levels of living, in addition to higher incomes, the provision of more jobs, better education and more attention to cultural and humanistic values.... Third, to expand the range of economic and social choice available to individuals and nations by freeing them from servitude and dependence not only in relation to other people and nation-states but also to forces of ignorance and human misery.

From the above position by Ogunkola and Egwaikhide, this paper makes a deduction that sustainable development in Nigeria should involve human capital development, moral development, infrastructural development and socio-economic development. All these ranges of development are mutually inclusive for virile and sustainable economy. To achieve all the forms of development, the government of Nigeria should operate all inclusive economy.

Conclusion

This paper has examined how Nollywood can make meaningful contributions to the on-going quest for sustainable development in Nigeria. To reposition Nollywood for sustainable development in Nigeria, the Ministry should look outside of the box and collaborate with other relevant government agencies and parastatal to prevent financial leakages in Nollywood. Over-dependence of Nigeria on petroleum products for foreign exchange earnings have limited the country's economic opportunities of diversification. If properly managed with committed dedication, Nollywood can contribute meaningfully to the achievement of sustainable development in Nigeria. Adequate and workable data base and prevention of financial leakages in the industry will go a very long way to make Nollywood become economically vibrant and relevant to the on-going discourse on sustainable development.

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