



Nollywood: Revisiting the Change Prism towards Sustaining Societal Development

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Abstract

Nigeria's film industry had a significant year in 1992. Since then, numerous films have faced criticism for promoting negative behavior and attitudes. However, this study challenges those claims, demonstrating that Nollywood films can promote positive attitudes and sustainable development. The study analyzed two films: *Daybreak in Udi* and *Nigeria: A Squandering of Riches*. To achieve this goal, Nollywood is expected to facilitate the needed development through productions aimed at persuading the people towards adopting values that enhance a better life and motivating them to greater heights in development. To this end, it was advanced that there was a need for Nollywood to revisit the change prism by making significant films geared towards social and cultural reorientation leading to sustainable national development rather than placing undue emphasis on entertainment value and box office returns. The study appealed to government at all levels and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to come to the aid of the film industry to enable it play this significant role.

Keywords: film, nollywood, positive change, persuasion, sustainable development.

Paper type: Research paper

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Received: 15 March 2023; Received in revised form: 30 October 2023; Accepted: 30 October 2023; Available online: 30 October 2023

Cite this document: Imiti, Aghogho Lucky. (2023). Nollywood: Revisiting the Change Prism towards Sustaining Societal Development. *The Journal of Society and Media*, 7(2), 593-607. DOI: 10.26740/jsm.v7n2.p593-607.



INTRODUCTION

Nollywood, a coinage for the Nigerian film industry, the largest moviemaking industry in Africa, which is gradually slipping into the world's second-largest industry (Igwe 2015), has generated a volume of scholarly debate on its role as an agent of change and societal/national development (Igbashangev 2021; Okpadah and Afolabi 2019; Saripudin, Ilfiandra, and Sunarya 2022); the discourse is still on. In this study, Nollywood encompasses films made in or outside Nigeria about and for Nigerians during the colonial and post-colonial eras.

No doubt, every nation in the world today yearns for development and seeks ways of improving and sustaining it. This is in view of the imbibing of certain behaviours that could lead to an improved standard of living in terms of an increase in the output of goods and services; improved means of transportation with good road networks; better education; and, in fact, better performance of the general economic system. As a result, the issue of development has become topical and critical, particularly in developing countries that are attempting to close the gap between themselves and the developed world. For this to be effective there must be a change. In this case, positive change in order to sustain developmental strides, bearing in mind that change could either be positive or negative.

The issue of change toward sustaining already achieved development also involves the integration of the people in order to cultivate the attitudes necessary for them to achieve their set goals and aspirations with regard to development. Maintaining this trend is not solely the responsibility of the government, but rather a collaborative effort of the government and the people who make up the nation. Since change and development involve this chain of individuals, Nollywood's contribution to the process—which communicates through film—becomes significantly vital. This is because the type of change needed must begin somewhere in society and then spread to other areas. Since the film medium has gained much popularity amongst Nigerians and Africans (Onishi 2016; Onuzulike 2007), it can therefore serve as a veritable tool to enlighten, persuade, and convince the people about the advantages of the new dispensation before they adopt such aspects of change. In fact, no current society can develop its resources without the provision of adequate information. The relationship, then, between the film medium and society is fundamental for the understanding of trends of sustainable development in any society. Film, like any other mass medium, acts as a catalyst for change as

well as provides the necessary information to enable the development and maintenance of resources.

In this regard, no other medium of communication can be more effective than film. Film stimulates through the use of images and sound (Opubor and Nwuneli 1979). Since its inception, film has been an indispensable mass medium whose message is crucial to the process of organised change in any society in which it is used. The potency of the medium cannot be disputed; it is powerful in the sense that, while it performs its primary function of entertainment, it also informs, educates, and indoctrinates its viewers (Imiti 2022). The application of film today also reveals that it can be used as a means of teaching about human behaviour, science, history, and many other subjects capable of engendering sustainable development in society.

Although most deviant behaviours and uncomplimentary attitudes that undermine national goals have been attributed to the influence of film, as noted by Esu cited in Ibagere (2013) and Bittner cited in Imiti (2013), it is equally believed that film, especially Nollywood's, can engender positive attitudes. As a result, it is appropriate for Nollywood to revisit the change prism and right what it has wronged in order for people to develop positive mind-set toward sustainable development. Nollywood is expected to facilitate the needed development through productions that can persuade the people towards adopting values that enhance a better life and motivate them to greater heights in development. This research was motivated by the criticism leveled against the influence of films, with the aim of re-examining the submissions of scholars who have given conflicting views about the influence of the medium in any society, with focus on Nollywood. The thrust of this study, therefore, is to undertake an examination of the role of selected Nollywood films aimed at highlighting the subject matter, even though they were produced before the coinage of the appellation "Nollywood" to describe the Nigerian film industry. This is borne out by the fact that Nollywood is lacking in the production of films of this nature. Present-day producers are more interested in feature films aimed at profit maximization. Prior to the advent of the first home video, Nigerians had been used to watching documentary films, soap operas, and propaganda films, mostly produced by the colonial masters who brought the medium with them. Today, documentaries are few. The few available ones are most often sponsored by

governments and nongovernmental organisations. And since the national and state governments are not interested in the film industry, this genre is waning, as filmmakers are not ready to sacrifice on an unprofitable altar. As a result, this study illustrates the value of this genre by looking at *Daybreak in Udi* and *Nigeria: A Squandering of Riches* as some of the films used to facilitate change during and after the colonial era in Nigeria.

METHODS

The data for this study were secondary, derived from already existing literature and films using a literary research approach. This approach allows the researcher to use written and printed materials as well as archival sources (Ukala 2006). Thus, in this study, data were sourced from textbooks, journals, the internet, and films and qualitatively analysed. This adoption is necessitated by the nature of the research in discussing the content of the paradigm films aimed at engendering the necessary change toward sustaining national development.

Two films, *Daybreak in Udi* (1949) and *Nigeria: A Squandering of Riches* (1984), both produced before the coinage of the appellation "Nollywood" to describe the Nigerian film industry, were chosen to examine the role of film in sustaining national development. This is borne out by the fact that Nollywood is lacking in the production of films of this nature, as the current crop of producers are interested in feature films with commercial intent. Documentaries of this nature are, therefore, few. The few available are most often sponsored by government and nongovernmental organisations, and most times they are sensationalised. More so, since the national and state governments are not interested in the film industry, this genre is waning, as filmmakers are not ready to sacrifice on an unprofitable altar.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts sustainability theory, which came into public domain after a 1972 report, "The Limits to Growth," issued for The Club of Rome. At its most basic, sustainability means the capacity to maintain a process and an outcome over time. Brundtland, in his 1987 report theorises sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987:43). While Cabezas and Fath (2002) believe there is no such

thing as a specific theory of sustainability, the Brundtland report played a significant role in starting a global conversation about sustainability, although critics have criticised it for linking sustainability and development too closely and for emphasising human needs at the expense of other forms of life. Whatever other forms these critics advance, these forms cannot be placed above human needs. The ecological and environmental systems will only be at peace once man's needs have been developed, met and sustained. These arguments have subsequently produced shades of alternative theories, which include:

- i. resilience theory;
- ii. decoupling theory
- iii. the multi-level perspective (MLP) on transitions to sustainability; and
- iv. behavioral change theories of sustainability (Peter and Swilling 2014:1595).

The above emerging sustainability theories "proffer valuable perspectives on how analysis can be used to help decision-makers negotiate the complexity of the challenge of transitioning to whole system sustainability" (Peter and Swilling 2014). Close to this is behavioural change theory of sustainability, which focuses on how transitions to sustainability may occur or can be actualized (Peter and Swilling 2014). This is where film, as a catalyst and an agent of social change, becomes vital in the change agenda.

Film, a change weapon, gained entrance into Nigeria as a colonial import and quickly became a useful tool for conscientisation (Shaka 2004). The earliest imports, traced to the 1920s, were pedagogical documentaries (Cham 1981) aimed at educating Africans about what is obtainable in life and thereby jettisoning a primordial society for a developed one, in addition to embracing social transformation as well as agricultural growth. Some of these are: *Anti-Plague Operations* (1937), which sought to instruct local audiences in better sanitation and health care; *Good Business* (1947), based on agricultural development; and the 1949 documentary *Daybreak in Udi*, which was deplored to conscientise Africans, mostly those opposed to modern development, to have a rethink and embrace modern trend (Ernest-Samuel and Joe 2019; Opubor and Nwuneli 1979; Smyth

1992). The films made during the colonial era were tailored in the aforementioned direction.

However, the establishment of the Nigerian Film Unit, NFU, in 1949, with the aim of decentralising film production, did not alter the status quo (Ekwuazi 1991), as NFU continued to produce and show health-related and educational films to the locals through its mobile cinema vans (Obiaya 2011; Smyth 1992). In the same vein,

The NFU also sought to ‘publicise the goals and activities of government’ in order to generate popular support for official policies, to present ‘newsworthy events’ and to ‘promote the nation’s culture both locally and internationally by dwelling on its achievements (Obiaya 2011:15).

There was, however, a remarkable change in content after the exit of the colonial masters when Nigeria gained her independence in 1960. This marked the dawn of indigenous filmmaking (Anyanwu 2008). Film productions afterward, albeit slow, were geared towards cultural renaissance, integration of Nigerians into the new Nigeria, and the projection of Nigeria's image to the international community (Endong 2018; Ukwueze and Ekwughu 2013). The films produced in this era were not completely devoid of foreign influence, as was also noticed in the films produced under the NFU. This influence is noted by Opubor and Nwuneli (1979) in the multitalented film producer, Ola Balogun's *Ajani Ogun* (1977), produced with Duro Ladipo and his troupe, which had Indian appeal.

Despite the fact that there was much debate about the indigenesness of the films, some of which could be considered trailblazers, a small number of feature and documentary films were produced. These include *Son of Africa* (1970), *Kongi's Harvest* (1970), an adaptation of Wole Soyinka's play of the same title, *Dinner with the Devil* (1975), *Amadi* (1975), *Bisi: Daughter of the River* (1977), *Aiye* (1979), *Jaiyesimi* (1980), *Nigeria: A Squandering of Riches* (1984), *Aropin N'Tenia* (1982), *Kanta of Kebbi* (1978), *Death of a Black President* (1983), and *Ayanmo* (1988), just to name a few.

These productions bring together a complete cycle of films made in the three main Nigerian languages - Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba. These films and others under the discussed period, according to Anyanwu (2008), promoted the cultural traits of the ethnic group whose language was used for the dialogue, and they also retold

historical myths and legends about conquest. Worthy of note is that there was stunted growth in filmmaking in the period under review due to a crunching economy that ushered in high production costs, unavailable resources, and inadequate equipment (Adesokan 2016). Corroborating the above, Anyanwu (2014:9) clearly outlines the basic factors that militated against movie productions in the period as follows:

Prohibitive cost of sourcing materials for production on celluloid from pre-production through exhibition and distribution. The said materials range from raw stock, camera, microphone...personnel (crew) who were to be engaged from outside the country. Devaluation of the Naira and the introduction of the structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) with the devastating effect on the economy. The oil boom era of the 1970s and the apt arrival or rather, the experimentation on the use of the home-video produced on video tape (VHS – Video Home Service) e.t.c....

Nigeria's film industry's annus mirabilis was 1992, after Kenneth Nnuebe's experimental movie got a breakthrough. Since then, there has been such an avalanche of films that the numbers produced on a daily, monthly, and yearly basis cannot be fully accounted for (National Bureau of Statistics 2021; UNESCO 2021). Similarly, the underpinning ideology of filmmaking has changed. Decency and decorum have been let loose, leading to a volume of criticism of the films produced. Today, filmmaking has been mainly considered a money-making venture through the production of feature films, leading to a paradigm shift from conscientisation to true-life stories (Imiti 2022). Thus, films of various themes—ritual, voodoo, gangster, inheritance, and social and contemporary issues—become the trend (Ezegwu, Okechukwu, and Etukudo 2016; Udomisor and Sonuga 2012). Rather than engendering positive change, the majority of the films produced have been bemoaned for encouraging crime (Oyeyemi 2022).

As noted above, the majority of Nollywood's productions are based on contemporary issues with a focus on box office returns; little attention is paid to films that engender social change toward sustainable development. As a result, few films in this genre exist, if at all. In order to demonstrate how Nollywood movies have been and can be utilised as a change prism for sustaining national development, the study examines *Daybreak in Udi* and *Nigeria: A Squandering of Riches*. This stems from the view that film creates vivid and lasting pictures in the

mind of the viewer and "could be used not only to gain interest in a topic but also raise critical consciousness" (Williams 1993, as cited in Brown, 2011, p. 234). This validates the usefulness of the sustainability theory in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research focuses on Nollywood as a prism for sustaining societal development. Two films, *Daybreak in Udi* (1949) and *Nigeria: A Squandering of Riches* (1984), were selected for this discourse.

Daybreak in Udi is a documentary set in 1949 in Udi, Enugu, Nigeria, then a British colony. It was sponsored by the British in an effort to persuade the colonised of the need for cultural changes toward a better life. The 40-minute film unravels a society undergoing a transformation crisis from the traditional to the modern. Irika and Dominic approach E.R. Chadwick, the District Officer (DO), to present the need for a maternity facility in Udi to prevent recurrent childbirth, infant mortality, and other health challenges faced in the community. Chadwick keys into the idea and gathers support for the initiative. An elder in the community, Eze opposes the facility's construction because he believes it would damage the village's heritage and culture. He attempts to get his kinsmen to reject the project, but Chadwick is able to convince them, and the project goes through. With community efforts, despite setbacks caused by fear and myth, the project is completed. Days before its official commissioning, a couple arrives. The young mother is in labour pains. She is admitted as the facility's first patient. As the midwife and Irika work to deliver the lady in the labour room, the midwife notices a masked figure peering in through the window. Frightened by the hooded figure, thinking it is a spirit, the midwife screams, but Irika quickly intervenes by pouring boiling water on the spirit-figure. This reveals a fleeing Eze behind the mask. The woman safely delivers her baby.

The villagers turn out in their numbers on the day of the maternity's official commissioning. British Officer Chadwick and Eze are among them. Eze finally accepts the idea and embraces traditional reformation and development. In his final remarks, Chadwick advances the idea that progress should be the main objective of native society, since it may bring forth strength, spirit, and boundless undiscovered possibilities and destinations. Done with this, the villagers begin another project - road construction. It is worth noting that Irika and Dominic represent

progressiveness and modernisation, whereas Eze represents elements of tradition that must be transformed for progress to occur. This is the idea and ideology behind the film.

In *Nigeria: A Squandering of Riches*, the narrator explores a depressing situation in Nigeria using a narrative technique. The 49-minute documentary, shot in 1983 through 1984 before a military takeover in December 1983, reveals the situation before and after the overthrow.

The film begins with a national broadcast of a military president, Maj. Gen. Muhammadu Buhari, after a bloodless overthrow of a democratically elected civilian government in the early hours of December 31st, 1983. Most Nigerians, however, do not welcome the overthrow, despite the fact that the elected civilian government had engaged in reckless embezzlement of public funds and deposited the same in foreign accounts while the Nigerian economy dwindled.

The raconteur recalls that prior to Nigeria's independence from British rule, 20 years earlier, by third-world standards, Nigeria had well-educated elite, productive farming, minerals, and crude oil, and there had been significant development, which the new crop of leaders have failed to sustain. With the new crop of leaders, Nigeria becomes an importer of food that it ought to produce. Nigeria also becomes a bankrupt nation and is well known internationally as a corrupt nation. This forms the basis on which the film *Nigeria: A Squandering of Riches* is made.

The young raconteur, Onyeka Onwenu, in an episodic pattern, using newsreels and live interviews, presents a film on her journey across Nigeria. She captures the rot in Nigeria's leadership system that runs counter to national development. In her tour across major cities in Nigeria, she interviews the professionals—bankers, industrialists, and literary giants—as well as the petty traders and peasant farmers, to reveal their moods on rising dissatisfaction with the economy and with governmental corruption 20 years after Nigeria's independence in a country that seemingly developed under the British government.

This film becomes the first classic movie on corruption in Nigeria, underdevelopment in the Niger Delta region, the subsequent agitation for resource control, and the campaign against environmental degradation in the oil-rich region and economic hub of the nation.

Both films emphasise the importance of prioritising development efforts such as hospitals and portable water for a healthy society. While *Daybreak in Udi* emphasises the importance of embracing developmental trends, as depicted in Eze, the antagonist, and his like-minded kinsmen, who fought against such in the name of tradition and culture, *Nigeria: A Squandering of Riches* emphasises the importance of good leadership that can sustain existing development rather than truncate it. Thus, it is made clear that any individual or group involved in any form of illegal enrichment "which had assumed debilitating proportions, *on the country*, (emphasis added) in the last few years will be dealt with ruthlessly no matter whoever may be involved" (Anon 1984).

Similarly, Onwenu's movie confirms the fact that *Daybreak in Udi* yielded a positive result as Nigerians had already developed themselves and there had been relative development in Nigeria under the British colony. Prior to Nigeria's independence in 1960, she claimed, "by Third World standards, we have a well-educated elite, a productive farming economy, and functional health centres" (Anon 1984). The need for education was stressed in *Daybreak in Udi*, and the film was one of the tools used to enlighten colonised Nigerians into embracing western forms of education. This confirms the fact that film, an effective communication medium, was one of the media the British used to convince Nigerians to accept their ideology. This medium was used to pique the interest of Africans by highlighting its educational and entertainment functions. To this end, film performed its chief function of entertainment as it informed and educated.

The select films are intriguing. Besides their exceptional subject focus and presentation, they demonstrate how film, and Nollywood films in particular, may serve as panaceas for change, resulting in development and sustainable development. While *Daybreak in Udi* adopts a docudrama genre, *Nigeria: A Squandering of Riches* uses a documentary structure laced with newsreels and interviews. Since most Nigerians are used to true-life feature films, the techniques are unorthodox and unpopular with them. Even though the former won the 1950 Academy prize for "Best Documentary Feature," it has remained unpopular with Nigerians, whom it should benefit.

Also, as enlightening as these documentaries are, their productions were influenced by the British. This is, apart from the deluge of challenges militating against Nollywood, the bane of the film industry: a lack of sponsorship and

encouragement by the Nigerian government. Significant movies about Nigeria and her citizens are made for Nigerians. For instance, *Daybreak in Udi* was produced before Nigeria's independence, and it was sponsored by the British government. This was, however, not different with the production of *Nigeria: A Squandering of Riches*, which was done after independence, still at the BBC's request and sponsorship, as noted by the raconteur.

Despite the fact that film is such an instrument of conscientisation, the Nigerian government has not found it worthy of investing in; not even the National Orientation Agency is bothered with utilising this all-important medium to enlighten the masses. This has been an age-long challenge bedeviling Nollywood (Ojieson 2017; UNESCO 2021). With proper investment in the nation's film industry by the government and NGOs, the potential of the industry could be unlocked, thereby conscientising Nigerians towards having a positive change leading to its development and sustenance of development.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the need for Nollywood to revisit the change prism by making significant films geared towards social and cultural reorientation leading to sustainable national development rather than placing undue emphasis on entertainment value and box office returns. Film has proven to be a powerful tool in the hands of those who understand its value. It has been used to achieve various feats in the health, educational, cultural, information, and even political sectors (Persson and Persson 2008; Stuckey and Kring 2007; Tisdell 2008; Zaniello 2007). Film is generally accepted and most impactful because it transcends language limitations and cultural barriers through the power of visual images, music, and sound effects, allowing it to succeed in "conveying much the same message" to an heterogeneous audience (Opubor and Nwuneli 1979:1). For the sustenance of development, there must be attitudinal change. This is where Nollywood becomes vital to the process. As a change agent, Nollywood films have to be channelled towards creating the necessary orientation for a national renaissance. Edutainment and infotainment films, such as the paradigms discussed, are required. As it stands, Nollywood lacks films in this direction. Nigerians need conscientisation to attain the developmental sustenance goal. It is therefore time for Nollywood to revisit the

change prism in order to achieve this goal. By way of appeal, government at all levels and NGOs should come to the aid of the film industry to enable it to achieve this significant role

Funding Acknowledgement

This work was not supported by any individual or institution. The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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