

In partnership with



Gender-based Inequities in Nigeria's Creative Sector

Acknowledgement

The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), Africa Regional Office, provided overall leadership and stewardship of the Behind the Scenes (BtS): Young Women and Gender Inequities in Africa project, including its conceptualization, strategic direction, coordination, and implementation oversight. The Implementation of the project was made possible through the collective efforts of individuals and institutions committed to advancing safer, more inclusive, and equitable creative industries across Africa. We extend our deepest appreciation to the young women creatives, artists, cultural practitioners, policymakers, industry stakeholders, and community actors who generously shared their experiences, reflections, and expertise throughout the research and engagement processes. Many participants spoke with honesty and courage about the opportunities and challenges shaping their professional and personal lives. Their voices and lived experiences form the foundation of this evidence and continue to inform the project's vision for meaningful change within Africa's cultural and creative sectors.

We are especially grateful to the Country Principal Investigators, Youth Researchers, field mobilisers, and institutional partners whose commitment and professionalism made the successful implementation of the study and related activities possible. We acknowledge the valuable contributions of the Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA) in Ethiopia, the University of Rwanda, the University of Cape Coast in Ghana, the

University of Lagos in Nigeria, LAREM in Senegal, and ICRW teams in Uganda and Kenya. Their collaboration strengthened the project's participatory and youth-centred approach to evidence generation and engagement.

We also appreciate the support provided by government institutions, creative industry associations, civil society organisations, and academic partners that contributed to consultations, validation processes, and dissemination efforts across the participating countries.

This report was developed with support from the Mastercard Foundation.

DISCLAIMER

This report was produced in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation. This report is shared as a public good and may be freely used, cited, and built upon for non-commercial purposes. The views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the Foundation, its staff, or its Board of Directors.

Portions of this document were developed with AI-assisted tools. All content was reviewed, edited, and approved by the author(s), who remain responsible for it.

Authors

- Samrawit Amare
- Atuhura Zalia Balinda
- Florence Nweke
- Michael Kunnuji



90%

Over 90% of respondents reported experiencing harassment, including sexual propositions, hostile work environments, and retaliation for refusing advances.

Executive Summary

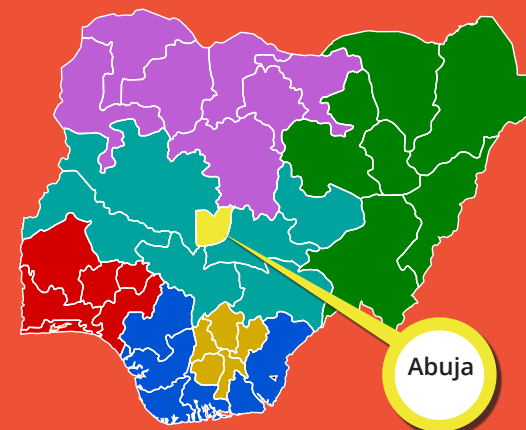
Nigeria's creative sector is a major driver of cultural identity and economic growth, yet young female creatives face persistent exclusion from leadership, ownership, and decision making roles due to structural barriers, weak policies, and entrenched cultural norms. This evidence brief from the Behind the Scenes project reveals that despite being educated, digitally active, and committed to long-term creative careers, women experience discrimination in hiring, pay, and role allocation, with restricted access to technical and high value positions.

Over 90% of respondents reported experiencing harassment, including sexual propositions, hostile work environments, and retaliation for refusing advances. Women's progress is further constrained by unequal pay, limited finance access, unsafe working conditions, gender stereotyping, and absent reporting and accountability mechanisms, undermining both individual potential and the creative economy's broader development. Despite these challenges, young female creatives are resilient and view their work as fulfilling and dignified, actively pursuing professional growth through digital platforms and personal networks. The findings highlight the urgent need for coordinated, multi-level efforts to address systemic barriers, strengthen protections, and create safer, more equitable environments within the creative sector.

Introduction

The creative industry is widely admired for its dynamism and global reach, yet it remains a space marked by pervasive gender inequalities. In Nigeria, where the creative industry contributes substantially to the country's GDP and employs millions of young people, women face significant challenges. Nigeria has a large youth population aged 18-35 years who can take advantage of the potential of the creative sector. Evidence suggests that the gender norms, cultural and social barriers that keep women from benefiting from societal rewards broadly also keep them from maximizing opportunities in the creative sector (UNESCO, 2021a). Young females are under-represented in the key sectors of the industry (including the technical areas of audiovisual art). In the sectors where they are representative (for example, film-making), they are restricted to subordinate non-leadership roles (UNESCO, 2021a). There is established gender-based unequal remuneration that disadvantages women and their access to funding is poor in relation to men (UNESCO, 2021a). This evidence brief presents findings from the study conducted by ICRW in partnership with Mastercard foundation in seven sites across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones and the Federal Capital Territory Abuja. The study used a mixed-methods approach and participants were purposively selected from diverse creative subsectors to provide relevant and meaningful insights into their experiences. It examines the dynamics, impacts, and challenges of gender-based inequities and illustrates the persistent barriers women face in achieving equitable participation and recognition in the creative sector.

Scope of Study:



This evidence brief presents findings from the study conducted by ICRW in partnership with Mastercard foundation in seven sites across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones and the Federal Capital Territory Abuja.



54%

More than half (**54%**) of female creatives use social media as their creative work space.

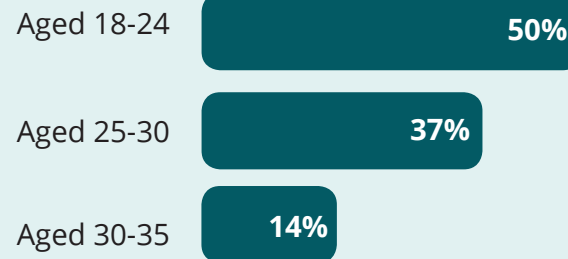


55% of them hold a bachelor's degree, **21%** have a certificate or diploma, **16%** have secondary education, while **8%** have postgraduate qualifications.

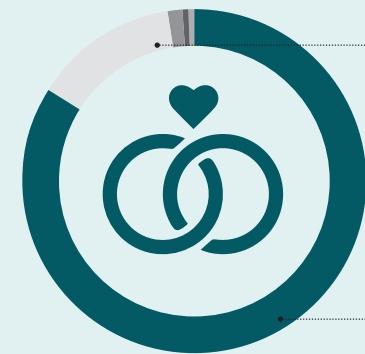
The evidence

Characteristics of survey participants

50% of the respondents were aged 18-24 years, 37% between 25-30 years, and 14% between 30-35 years.



◆ The mean age was 25.3 years (SD = 4.2 years), with all ages ranging from 19 to 35 years



13.5% were married/cohabiting

84 % were single-never married

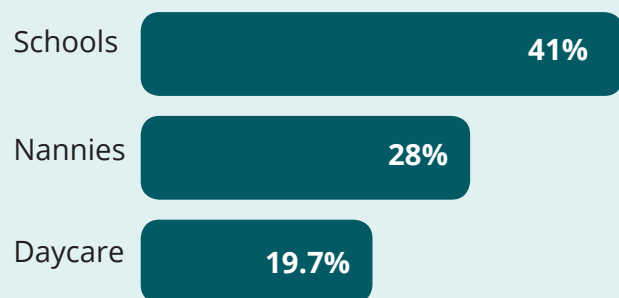
■ **1.4%** are separated

■ **0.6%** divorced and **0.2%** widowed

12% of the respondent had children, the mean number of children was 2 (=1.9; SD = 1.2), ranging from 1 to 5.



For childcare responsibilities during work

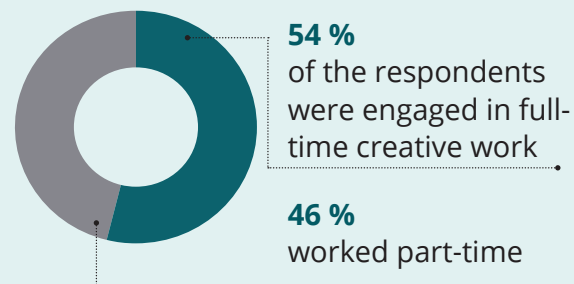


■ **58%** of the survey participants reported formal creative sector training.

■ **91%** expressed determination to pursue long-term careers in the creative sector.



Workspace Environment in the Creative Sector



■ Gender composition varies by sub-sector, with women being under-represented in technical areas like audiovisual arts and evenly represented in film making.

■ **33.1%** of the respondents said their colleagues were mostly women, slightly more than a quarter **25.8%** said 'Mostly men' while **41.1%** said their colleagues were distributed evenly men and women.



92%

The most widely used platforms by respondents are WhatsApp (92.7%), Instagram (88.6%) and TikTok (68.3%) and LinkedIn were the least common, mentioned by 42.1% and 44.3% respectively.

“

Ownership is still linked to men because they have more access to the galleries and networks,

A female chef and photographer from Adamawa

■ **86%** of ownership roles in the industry are occupied by men. A young photographer from Kano captured this sentiment: *“They think it’s for men only and not for females.”*

■ **92%** of female creatives feel respected and valued by colleagues for their creative contributions.



■ **22%** have witnessed instances where women’s creative ideas were dismissed or not taken seriously, and **17%** reported personally experiencing their creative ideas being dismissed because of their gender.

■ Perception of gender equity is positive, with **63%** of respondents having an overall ‘positive’ perception



Experience of Workplace Gender-Based Discrimination

■ **55%** of young female creatives have encountered gender-related barriers. As one participant noted, *“If you are a guy they pick you based on your skills... but for a woman... they overlook your talent.”*



81% young female creatives feel included and valued as team members during collaborative projects.



■ Many creative fields, such as photography, film production, and shoemaking, are widely perceived as male-only spaces.

Gender-pay gap

■ Limited finance access by female creatives. A male producer in Lagos explained, “As we speak, as of today, the only bank you have [offering loans] is the Bank of Industry (BOI). But BOI will tell you that you need to provide 30% equity for whatever you require. And you still present 300% collateral” (KII, Lagos).



■ **46%** of Young female creatives (YFCs) have witnessed gender pay gap; and 32% have experienced gender pay gap.



■ **41%** of Young female creatives believe policies and practices re-enforce gender-based discriminatory remuneration in the creative industry.



“

“As we speak, as of today, the only bank you have [offering loans] is the Bank of Industry (BOI). But BOI will tell you that you need to provide 30% equity for whatever you require. And you still present 300% collateral”

KII, Lagos

“

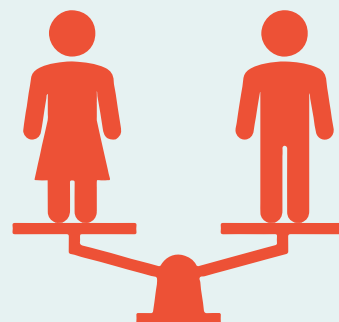
People often ask, 'Can she do it? I have even been denied jobs because of these assumptions. But when someone finally gives me a chance, they quickly realize that I am capable and often very good at what I do.'

Career Expectation of young women Creatives

■ **83%** of YFCs agree that they are thriving in their career as creatives, but only **65%** are satisfied with their career progression and opportunities as female creatives.



■ **68%** of YFCs believe they have equal opportunities for career advancement like their male counterparts.



■ Young female creatives with disabilities face unique challenges. Many encounter doubt, exclusion, and assumptions about their abilities before they are even given an opportunity.

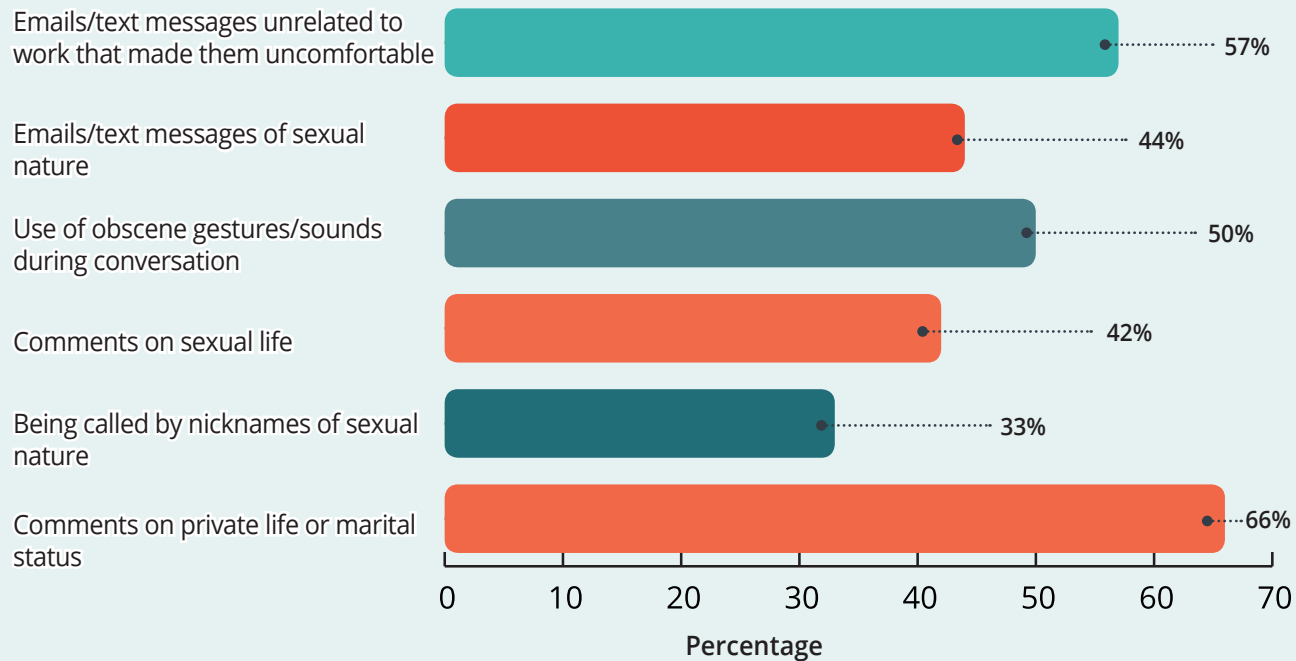


One young woman explained: *“People often question me before I start. They ask, ‘Can she do it? Who knows if she can?’ I have even been denied jobs because of these assumptions. But when someone finally gives me a chance, they quickly realize that I am capable and often very good at what I do.”* (Female Creative, 28 years, Lagos)

Experience of harassment in the workspace

- Young female creatives (YFCs) experience different forms of sexual harassment.

Forms of Sexual Harassment reported by respondents



42%

of respondents reported receiving emails and/or text messages of sexual nature at work

“

“Being a woman makes you prone to unwelcome sexual advances. Women in TV and entertainment face constant pressure to sleep with directors or producers to get roles. I personally had an experience in a TV station where a producer made advances at me. When I refused, he victimized me, took segments of my show away, and stopped me from attending events. This kind of harassment makes women lose opportunities, quit jobs, or face moral dilemmas.”

Experience of harassment in the workspace



Sexual proposition/pressure to have sex and forced sex was reported by **29%** and **17%** of the respondents, respectively



36% of the respondents reported denial of work due to refusal of sexual propositions while **31%** reported same in the last **12 months**



21% of YFCs reported work-related sexual proposition in the last **12 months**



46% of the respondents reported being given additional unrelated gendered tasks like serving tea and welcoming visitors, and **41%** experienced same in the last **12 months**



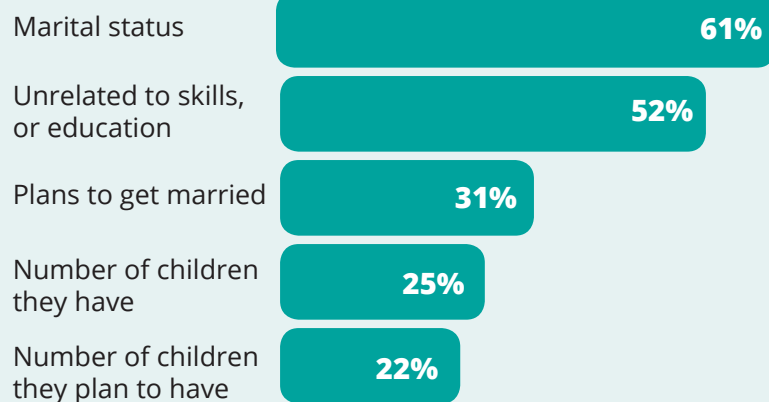
12% reported forced sex by colleagues, managers, clients, or other persons they dealt with while working in the last **12 months**



More than **90%** of YFCs reported experiencing at least one form of harassment, **86%** had the experience in the last **12 months**

Gender Equity and Gender-Based Challenges

During job-related interviews, respondents reported being asked questions related to:



Gender-based reasons for discrimination include being a woman (19.1%), pregnancy (18.3%), family care responsibilities (17%), and plans to have children (4.7%).

Systemic barriers faced by FYCs include:

- Stereotyping (40.6%)
- Harassment and hostile environment (26%)
- Poor credit and recognition for work (26%)



- Working in a space with little or no accommodation made for safety (24%)



Major effects of gender discrimination in the creative sector include low morale at work (mentioned by 45% of the respondents), inability to hold good roles (34.7%), low income (33.9%) and the thought of quitting (31.4%).



Dignifying and Fulfilling Work

- **89% and 88%** of FYCs consider their work as creatives dignified and fulfilling, respectively.
- **79%** of Young female creatives believe that they are appreciated and recognized by the people they work with.

Policies and regulatory frameworks in the Creative Sector

- Absence of a robust cultural policy and regulatory frameworks suitable for Nigeria's present-day creative sector.

A participant said: *"The major regulatory document and framework for the sector is the cultural policy, which unfortunately Nigeria does not have as we speak. The last cultural policy was made—signed into law in 1991"* (KII, Lagos).

- The socio-cultural context in some parts of the country, particularly those influenced by religious and cultural norms, restrict women's participation.

Conclusion

The Behind the Scenes project findings show that young women in Nigeria's creative sector face interconnected challenges driven by gender-based violence and harassment, economic exclusion, and entrenched cultural stereotypes. Sexual harassment is often normalized, reporting mechanisms are weak, and gender norms continue to limit women's access to leadership, technical roles, mentorship, and influence within the industry.

Economic inequalities further intensify these barriers, as many women work in insecure, informal roles with limited income stability and access to finance. Despite these obstacles, young women creatives demonstrate strong resilience by adopting innovative strategies and building alternative pathways for growth. Addressing GBVH, expanding financial inclusion, challenging harmful gender norms, and strengthening policy frameworks are essential to creating a more equitable and sustainable creative sector in Nigeria.

Policy and Programmatic Recommendations

This research was conducted in seven sites across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. As a result, the findings reflect a limited geographical scope. They may not fully represent the experiences of young female creatives nationwide.

Government and Regulatory Bodies

- Enact and enforce a Creative Sector Anti Sexual Harassment and Equal Pay Regulation with clear reporting channels and sanctions.
- Expand gender responsive financing and reform collateral requirements while incentivizing gender equitable enterprises.
- Establish national data and monitoring systems to track gender gaps pay, safety, leadership, and access to funding.

Creative Associations, Guilds, and Industry Boards

- ◆ Provide confidential survivor support services and ensure fair access to membership benefits, training, and certification.
- ◆ Strengthen mentoring, training programs, and career pathways for young women into technical and leadership roles.
- ◆ Standardize codes of conduct, grievance mechanisms, and leadership benchmarks across creative subsectors

Creative Enterprises and Workplaces

- ◆ Conduct routine gender audits and implement transparent contracts, pay structures, and recruitment practices.
- ◆ Implement policies that support women's unpaid domestic and care work, including childcare and adaptable working hours.
- ◆ Provide regular safeguarding, ethics, and labour rights training for all staff and contractors.
- ◆ Improve physical and digital workplace safety, including clear reporting channels and flexible work policies.

Donors and Development Partners

- ◆ Fund women led creative enterprises through tailored grants, loans, and accelerator programs.
- ◆ Invest in capacity-building on digital skills, entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and intellectual property rights.
- ◆ Support research, data generation, and gender-safeguarding systems across creative value chains.

Civil Society and Women's Rights Organizations

- ◆ Deliver GBV prevention, reporting, and survivor support services tailored to creative-sector realities.
- ◆ Lead awareness and sensitization campaigns on labour rights, funding opportunities, and safe work practices.
- ◆ Create platforms for women creatives to organize, network, and advocate for policy and institutional reform.

Educational and Training Institutions

- ◆ Establish creative labs and innovation hubs that build women's technical and entrepreneurial skills.
- ◆ Partner with industry to provide internships, mentorships, and exposure to leadership and technical roles.
- ◆ Integrate labour rights, safeguarding, and financial literacy into creative education curricula.



References

Behind the Scenes Project Report. (Nigeria, 2025).

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2021a). ([United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization \(UNESCO\), 2021a\) - Search](#))

Authors

Atuhura Zalia Balinda
Samrawit Amare
Florence Nweke
Michael Kunnuji



In partnership with

