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INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN

University of Lagos

Policy Brief

Advancing Gender Equality in Nigeria's Creative Sector: Policy Recommendations for Addressing the Systemic Marginalization of Women

Executive Summary

Nigeria's creative sector stands as a vital economic force, contributing around 2-3% to GDP, while employing over 4 million people as the second-largest job provider after agriculture. Globally recognized through Nollywood and Afrobeats, it holds immense potential to reach $100 billion GDP contribution and millions more jobs by 2030. However, systemic gender inequities severely undermine this potential for growth.

Young women creatives face pervasive barriers:

Over 90% report at least one form of harassment, including sexual propositions (29%), coercion, forced sex (12%), and denial of work or retaliation for refusal (36%). Economic exclusion persists through wage gaps (46% witnessed, 32% experienced), discriminatory pay policies (41% believe reinforced), stringent collateral requirements limiting finance access, and male-dominated ownership/leadership (mirroring national trends: women hold only ~4.2-4.5% of National Assembly seats per IPU 2026 data, and many companies lack female board representation).

90%

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Cultural stereotypes portray creative fields as "male-only," leading to idea dismissal, extra gendered tasks, biased questioning on family/marriage, and regional restrictions (e.g., in northern Nigeria). Despite high determination (91% committed long-term), only 65% are satisfied with progression, with impacts including low morale (45%), lost roles/income, and quitting thoughts (31%).

Women demonstrate resilience via digital platforms, informal networks, and advocacy, but systemic change requires shifting responsibility to institutions.

Key Recommendations

1. Gender-sensitive regulations:

The Federal Ministry of Art, Culture, Tourism and the Creative Economy (FMACTCE) should initiate a bill for passage by the National Assembly on Creative Sector Anti-Sexual Harassment and Equal Pay Compliance with clear reporting channels and sanctions.

2. Incentivize gender-equitable practices:

FMACTCE, with donors, development partners, and institutions like the Bank of Industry, should launch incentives (grants, tax relief, procurement preferences, awards) for gender-equitable creative enterprises.

3. Strengthen guilds for self-regulation:

Creative guilds and associations, supported by FMACTCE, should adopt/enforce standardized codes of conduct, grievance redress mechanisms, fair pay bargaining, and inclusive leadership.

4. Build female leadership through champions:

FMACTCE, partnering with the Ministry of Women Affairs, civil society, and women's groups, should fund national mentorship, sponsorship, and advocacy programs for women creatives.

5. Establish monitoring data systems:

FMACTCE, with the National Bureau of Statistics and others, should establish gender-disaggregated data systems for monitoring participation, pay, harassment, and leadership, and invest in creative hubs with resources and safe spaces.

National trends:

4.5%

Women hold only **~4.2-4.5%** of National Assembly seats per IPU 2026 data, and many companies lack female board representation

Introduction

Globally, cultural and creative industries contribute 3.1% to GDP and 6.2% of employment (UNESCO, 2022). Nigeria's creative industry contributes 2.5% to the GDP in 2024 (National Bureau of Statistics [Nigeria], 2025). Nigeria is a regional leader, with Nollywood and Afrobeats reshaping global cultural narratives (Nwankwo, 2018; Offiah, 2017). However, systemic gender inequities persist. Women owned creative start ups receive significantly less funding, and wage gaps remain entrenched (Behind the Scenes Project Report Nigeria], 2025). Governance structures are overwhelmingly male dominated, reflecting Nigeria's wider political deficit where women hold only 4.5% of parliamentary seats . These inequities undermine both individual potential and sectoral growth.

Women's exclusion in Nigeria's creative sector is systemic and measurable, with women owned creative startups receiving 23% less funding than male led businesses and 65% of women earning less than men for comparable work, while leadership remains male dominated, reflecting national trends where women hold only 4.5% of National Assembly seats and 52% of publicly listed companies have no women on their boards (Behind the Scenes Nigeria Report, 2025). These inequities are driven by weak institutional and legal frameworks, limited access to finance, cultural stereotypes, and gender norms that constrain women's ownership, leadership, and decision making across the creative value chain and proposes policy recommendation. The brief aims to inform governments, development agencies, guilds, and sector stakeholders on pathways for fostering a more gender-inclusive and -equitable creative economy in Nigeria.

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The Policy Landscape

Nigeria enacted laws such as the Copyright Act (2022) and the Trademarks Act (2004), Cybercrimes Act (2015), alongside regulatory bodies like the National Broadcasting Commission, the National Film and Video Censors Board, Copyright Society of Nigeria, and Musical Copyright Society of Nigeria. Internationally, Nigeria ratified UNESCO's 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, which emphasizes fair remuneration, training, and digital inclusion (UNESCO, 2005). Yet enforcement remains weak, and gender justice is not embedded in these frameworks.

Gaps in these frameworks have prompted new initiatives, including the Nigeria Creative Industries Development Bill (2023), the Creative Economy Support Bill, and the Culture Bill, though their effectiveness in addressing gender-based inequities remains uncertain. Aligned with the UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (ratified in 2007), Nigeria has strengthened support for the creative sector through the Creative Economy Development Fund (CEDF, 2024), providing loans using intellectual property as collateral, and the iDICE program with the African Development Bank to boost entrepreneurship, investor confidence, and global partnerships (Anyanwu, 2024; Federal Ministry of Arts, Culture, Tourism, and Creative Economy [Nigeria], 2025).

The existing laws and frameworks do not ensure gender justice in the creative sector and it remains uncertain whether new laws, policies and guidelines relevant to the creative sector are able to address gender-based inequities in the sector.

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Key Challenges in Nigeria's creative sector

Harassment and Safety

Over 90% of female creatives report harassment, including sexual coercion and denial of opportunities (Behind the Scenes Project Report [Nigeria], 2025). This aligns with global findings that women in creative industries face disproportionate risks of exploitation (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021).

Economic Exclusion

Women face wage gaps and limited access to finance due to collateral requirements. Research shows women entrepreneurs in Nigeria receive less venture capital and face higher rejection rates from banks (Adetiloye et al., 2020; Malmström et al., 2024; Njideka & Arinze, 2023).

Exclusion from leadership and decision making

Women are excluded from boards and decision-making roles, they hold only 4.2% of National Assembly seats (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2026) and 52% of listed companies have no women on boards (Abdullahi et al., 2022).

Internalized Bias

Gender stereotypes reinforce discrimination, with women's competence questioned in traditional male dominated creative fields/jobs (Behind the Scenes Project Report [Nigeria], 2025). Research highlights how cultural norms portray creativity as a masculine domain, limiting women's visibility (Behind the Scenes: Nigeria's Creative Sector Project Report, 2025).

Policy and Infrastructure Gaps

Weak cultural policies, poor coordination, and inadequate creative infrastructure such as theatres, cinemas, and creative hubs limit women's opportunities in Nigeria's creative sector, especially in northern Nigeria where cultural and religious restrictions further constrain participation (Muhammad et al., 2024).

Policy gaps directly shape the level and quality of investment, resulting in underfunded and neglected infrastructure and weak implementation, which disproportionately affects women creatives and reinforces their exclusion from opportunities, markets, and professional networks (UNESCO, 2021, 2022).

Women's Coping Strategies

At the institutional and policy level, women's coping strategies translate into collective and systemic mechanisms that reduce individual risk and shift responsibility to duty bearers. Institutions respond to harassment and unsafe work environments by formalizing safeguarding policies, standardized incident documentation, confidential reporting channels, and enforceable codes of conduct, supported by regular training and clear accountability measures.

Professional associations and industry bodies function as protective structures, setting ethical standards, mediating disputes, and advocating for safer and more regulated work environments. In response to economic exclusion and leadership gaps, institutions and policymakers support women-led cooperatives, savings schemes, and access to gender-responsive finance, while recognizing digital platforms and flexible work models within formal policy frameworks.

Mentorship, portfolio-based evaluation, and transparent leadership pathways are institutionalized to improve women's visibility and decision-making power. At the policy level, women's participation in consultations, the use of gender-disaggregated data, and investment in shared creative spaces, cooperative resources, and regional networks serve as structural coping mechanisms that address infrastructure and systemic barriers, embedding resilience within institutions rather than individuals.

Policy Recommendations

Regulatory Approach: Enact and enforce gender-sensitive regulations

The Federal Ministry of Art, Culture, Tourism and the Creative Economy (FMACTCE) should initiate an Executive Bill for passage by the National Assembly on Creative Sector Anti-Sexual Harassment and Equal Pay Compliance with reporting channels and sanctions This approach will prohibit and specify sanctions for discriminatory practices, unsafe work environments and gender-based wage gaps in the creative sector.

Incentive-Based Approach: Provide incentives for gender-equitable practices

The FMACTCE, in collaboration with implementing development partners and financial institutions (e.g., Bank of Industry), should launch incentive initiatives such as grants, tax relief, procurement advantages, and public recognition for organizations that demonstrate gender-equitable practices. This approach addresses barriers related to finance, leadership representation, and safe workplaces by rewarding good practice rather than relying solely on sanctions. It promotes innovation and voluntary uptake but may exclude informal or under-resourced actors.

Guild- and Association-Focused Approach: Strengthen guilds and associations for self-regulation

Creative industry guilds and associations should adopt and enforce standardized codes of conduct, peer accountability, collective bargaining for fair pay, leadership inclusion, and access to shared resources. This approach reduces reliance on informal networks by strengthening sector ownership, trust, and self-regulation, though its effectiveness depends on the capacity and inclusiveness of existing associations.

Female Champion–Led Approach: Build female leadership through champions

The FMACTCE, in partnership with the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, civil society organizations, and women's rights groups, should fund and coordinate a national mentorship program for women creatives. This will help drive cultural change through mentorship, advocacy, sponsorship, and agenda-setting within the creative sector. This approach helps address leadership gaps, confidence barriers, and exclusion from networks by amplifying women's voices and influence. While powerful for norm change, it requires sustained institutional backing to avoid over-reliance on individuals.

Monitoring and Evaluation Approach: Establish monitoring data systems

The FMACTCE, in collaborating with the National Bureau of Statistics, should establish monitoring and evaluation systems by strengthening research and data collection in Nigeria's creative sector, including gender-disaggregated data on participation, employment, income, ownership, earnings, and leadership. This system should track key indicators such as wage gap reduction, harassment reporting rates, and women's representation across the sector and conduct more research across creative sub-sectors to generate evidence-based insights that inform policy and programming. This effort should be strengthened further with the establishment of creative hubs and safe spaces for female creatives.

Conclusion

Nigeria's creative sector cannot achieve its full potential without women's equal participation. Addressing systemic exclusion requires intentional policy reforms, coordinated institutional action, and sustained investment in safe, enabling environments. By embedding gender equity into law, finance, leadership, skills, and infrastructure, Nigeria can unlock the creative power of women as innovators and leaders, advancing inclusive growth and global competitiveness.

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Disclaimer

Authors

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

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