

FROM MILITANCY TO MELODY: MUSIC PRODUCTION AS A PATHWAY TO ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND LIVELIHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN THE NIGER DELTA

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Abstract: The Niger Delta region of Nigeria, historically defined by crude oil extraction and socio-economic ostracism, is witnessing an emergent swing towards the creative economy as a vehicle for youth empowerment. This non-empirical research examines music production as a premeditated interpolation for economic empowerment, entrepreneurship, and livelihood improvement in the region. Drawing on strategy creativities including the Niger Delta Development Commission's "Project HOPE" and the Niger Delta Music and Arts Programme, and engaging with the scholarship of Nigerian musicologists, particularly Dr Margaret Efurhievwe of Delta State University, Abraka, and the study analyses the theoretical and practical dimensions of creative entrepreneurship. The research identifies fundamental opportunities and impairments to enacting music production as a sustainable means of support, proposing a multi-stakeholder framework integrating technical training, infrastructure development, intellectual property protection, and entrepreneurial mentorship. Music production, when strategically situated within economic branching out efforts, offers a viable corridor for maintainable peace and youth enablement.

Keywords: Music Production, Niger Delta, Economic Empowerment, Entrepreneurship, Creative Economy, Youth Development, Niger Delta Development Commission

Introduction

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria presents a profound contradiction. As the nation's primary oil-producing region, accounting for over 80% of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings, it has engendered enormous wealth for the Nigerian state. Yet, the communities that host this oil wealth have experienced decades of ecological dilapidation, infrastructural abandonment, and socio-economic sidelining. This structural segregation has fuelled cycles of youth restiveness, militancy, and criminality, as successive generations have found themselves excluded from formal fiscal involvement. The region's reputation as a conflict zone has additionally dissuaded investment and reinforced narratives of hopelessness that obscure the industriousness and creative potential of its youth (Ogolo, 2024).

Within this thought-provoking context, the Nigerian creative economy has arisen as a significant economic sector, with the music industry alone generating an estimated \$2 billion annually (Maikori, cited in Federal Ministry of Information, 2025). Nevertheless, the development of this sector has been exceedingly concerted in cosmopolitan epicentres, particularly Lagos, while regions like the Niger Delta have not developed the mandatory formal structures such as recording studios, distribution networks, intellectual property enforcement mechanisms, and professional associations etc. to support justifiable innovative source of revenue. The region's abundant musical talent and cultural heritage remain largely unexploited resources for economic development.

Contemporary policy mediations by the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), including Project HOPE (Holistic Opportunities Projects of Engagement) and the Niger Delta Music and Arts Programme (NDMAP), signal a recognition of this potential. These programmes aim to create occupation prospects and empowerment enterprises across numerous subdivisions, with music production, cinematography, scriptwriting, and creative content development identified as premeditated skill sets for youth empowerment (Fubara, 2024). However, the execution of these programmes has encountered weighty challenges. By February 2025, two years after its inauguration, Project HOPE had not achieved full implementation, leading to increasing frustration among registered youth (Fubara, 2025). This implementation discrepancy reflects

broader structural challenges in translating policy ambition into tangible outcomes.

The research problem, consequently, is multi-dimensional. It encompasses structural economic exclusion that has historically disregarded the Niger Delta from Nigeria's economic development; inadequate institutional support for creative enterprise, including disjointed policy agendas and weak infrastructure; persistent implementation challenges that undermine the effectiveness of empowerment programmes; and the persistence of negative stereotypes that obscure the region's creative assets. Additionally, as Efurhievwe (2014) observes, the socio-economic and cultural challenges facing music production in contemporary Nigerian society are particularly acute in regions where infrastructure discrepancies and institutional feebleness constrain creative innovativeness. Addressing this problem requires not only technical training but also reconceptualization of music production as a legitimate entrepreneurial pathway capable of generating sustainable livelihoods and contributing to regional economic diversification.

The scholarly literature on music production in Nigeria has grown substantially, with researchers examining technological, ethical, and entrepreneurial dimensions of creative practice. However, relatively little attention has been paid to the specific context of the Niger Delta, where the intersection of resource conflict, youth unemployment, and creative potential presents unique opportunities and challenges. This research addresses that fissure by providing a methodical exploration of music production as a pathway to economic empowerment in the region.

This research aims to examine the potential of music production as a strategic intervention for economic empowerment, entrepreneurship, and livelihood development in the Niger Delta region. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- i. Analyse the theoretical and conceptual framework linking music production to human development, drawing on the scholarship of Nigerian musicologists to establish the foundations for creative entrepreneurship in the region;
- ii. Appraise recent policy initiatives, including NDDC's Project HOPE and the Niger Delta Music and Arts Programme, assessing their alignment with the needs and aspirations of youth in the creative sector;

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- iii. Identify the structural challenges, institutional gaps, and implementation barriers that impede the formalisation of music production as a sustainable livelihood in the Niger Delta;
 - iv. Propose a comprehensive framework for integrating music production into regional economic development strategies, addressing technical training, infrastructure development, intellectual property protection, entrepreneurial mentorship, and sustainable financing mechanisms.

Research Methods

This study adopts a non-empirical research design, specifically employing documentary analysis and critical theoretical synthesis as its primary methodological approaches. Non-empirical research, as distinguished from empirical research that collects primary data through observation or experimentation, involves the systematic analysis and interpretation of existing scholarly literature, policy documents, institutional reports, and theoretical frameworks to develop new insights and propose innovative solutions to identified problems (Swedberg, 2014). This methodological approach is particularly appropriate for examining the intersection of music production and economic development in the Niger Delta, given the emergent nature of policy interventions and the need to synthesise diverse sources of knowledge.

The research employs the following methodological procedures:

- i. **Documentary Analysis:** A comprehensive evaluation and analysis of policy documents, programme frameworks, institutional reports, and official communications related to creative economy development in the Niger Delta. Key documents analysed include the Niger Delta Development Commission's Project HOPE framework documents, the Niger Delta Music and Arts Programme (NDMAP) implementation guidelines, federal government creative economy policy documents, and reports from media coverage of these initiatives. This analysis enables the identification of policy intentions, implementation mechanisms, and documented challenges.
- ii. **Scholarly Literature Review:** A systematic review of peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and conference proceedings by Nigerian musicologists and creative economy scholars, with particular attention to the extensive body of work by Dr Margaret Efurhievwe of Delta State University, Abraka. The review encompasses works published between 2010 and 2025, covering themes including music production technology,

entrepreneurship, intellectual property, gender equity, and cultural preservation. This scholarly engagement provides the theoretical foundation for understanding the dynamics of music production as a livelihood activity.

- iii. **Theoretical Synthesis:** The integration of insights from multiple scholarly sources to construct a coherent theoretical framework for understanding music production as economic empowerment. This synthesis draws on sustainable livelihoods approaches, entrepreneurship theory, and creative industries scholarship to develop a multi-dimensional understanding of how music production contributes to household and community well-being.
- iv. **Critical Analysis:** The application of critical analytical techniques to identify assumptions, gaps, and tensions within policy documents and scholarly literature. This analysis reveals the structural impediments to creative economy development in the Niger Delta and identifies opportunities for intervention.

The research is guided by principles of reflexivity, acknowledging the researcher's position as a scholar engaged with the Nigerian music production community, while maintaining analytical rigour through systematic documentation of sources and transparent presentation of analytical processes.

Theoretical Foundations: Music Production as Human Development.

The scholarly contributions of Nigerian musicologists, particularly Dr Margaret Efurhievwe, provide a robust theoretical framework for understanding music production as a form of human development. Efurhievwe's extensive body of work, spanning numerous publications, addresses the technological, ethical, cultural, and gender dimensions of music production in Nigeria, offering insights directly relevant to the Niger Delta context.

A central finding from this literature concerns the transformative impact of digital technology on music production practices. Efurhievwe (2019) surveys "The Impact of Technology on Music Recording Studio in Nigeria," arguing that technological advancements have fundamentally altered production workflows, reducing barriers to entry and enabling a new generation of producers to emerge outside traditional studio environments. This democratisation is particularly significant for regions like the Niger Delta, where capital-intensive studio infrastructure has historically been concentrated in Lagos and other metropolitan centres. The implication is that digital technologies have created exceptional

opportunities for youth in marginalised regions to engage in professional music production, provided they have access to appropriate training and equipment.

Ikem and Efurhievwe (2022) further explore the functionality of music production technology in the 21st century, noting that digital audio workstations, virtual instruments, and online distribution platforms have created opportunities for producers to operate independently, reaching global audiences without the intermediation of major labels. This technological shift aligns with the objectives of NDMAP, which proposes equipping selected producers with industry-standard equipment to institute production facilities within the region (Ogolo, 2024). However, the implication is that technological access alone does not guarantee economic empowerment. Efurhievwe (2020) addresses the insecurity of social media on music production in Nigeria, underlining how digital platforms, although offering unprecedented spread, also expose young creatives to risks including intellectual property theft, exploitative contracts, and the precarity of algorithm-dependent income streams.

The economic feasibility of music production depends profoundly on the ethical functioning of market societies. Efurhievwe and Okpeki (2023) examine the ethical interface of market societies and music production in Nigeria, arguing that sustainable creative economies require transparent contractual relationships, fair compensation practices, and institutional frameworks that protect the rights of creators. This analysis has profound consequences for the Niger Delta milieu, where informal practices and feeble regulatory enforcement have historically disadvantaged local artistes and producers. The authors demonstrate that wealth in the creative sector emerges not merely from individual talent but from the quality of partnerships between artistes, producers, distributors, and institutions.

Music production in the Niger Delta is not solely an economic activity but also a means of cultural preservation and identity formation. Efurhievwe (2016) assesses the cultural values in the production of traditional music in Urhobo land, demonstrating how production practices can either withstand or erode indigenous musical traditions. This cultural dimension is particularly significant given the region's ethnic diversity and the historical marginalisation of its cultural expressions in national discourse. The implication is that music production interventions must be sensitive to cultural contexts and should actively support the preservation and valorisation of indigenous musical heritage.

An important dimension of Efurhievwe's scholarship concerns gender equity in music production. Her work on music recording production and gender discrimination (2018) examines the fundamental barricades that limit women's participation in technical and production roles within the Nigerian music industry. These insights are pertinent to the Niger Delta context, where gender disparities in access to training, equipment, and professional networks may constrain the sector's development. The inference is that policy interventions must incorporate gender-sensitive approaches to ensure equitable participation and benefit-sharing.

Strategy Mediations: Prospects and Enactment Defies

The analysis of recent policy initiatives reveals both significant opportunities and persistent enactment defies. The Niger Delta Development Commission's Project HOPE represents the most comprehensive youth empowerment initiative in the region's history. Launched in 2023 under the leadership of Dr Samuel Ogbuku, the project encompasses agriculture, technology, music and arts, internship programmes, and MSME development (Fubara, 2024). The scale of the initiative is substantial: over 3.2 million youths registered for the first phase, which focused on digital data collection and analysis.

Within this background, the Niger Delta Music and Arts Programme (NDMAP) targets five skill sets: music production, cinematography, scriptwriting, creative content, and visual arts (Ogolo, 2024). The programme's design incorporates a structured corridor from talent identification to professional development: The Interest/Nomination Stage, audition stage, selection/incubation stage, and grand finale/empowerment stage. Selected musicians are offered an industry-standard sign-on fee with a house, car and production sessions for two years, while producers receive equipment to establish production facilities within the region (Fubara, 2024).

A distinctive feature of NDMAP is its ambition to create a regional entertainment industry, including an Entertainment Park that would serve as a breeding ground for young talents (Ogolo, 2024). This infrastructure development approach recognises that sustainable creative economies require physical spaces for production, performance, and collaboration. The programme also incorporates a rebranding dimension, articulated through the "Militech" initiative that implies "From arms to tech" which seeks to transform the region's international image from militancy to technological innovation (Fubara, 2024).

Conversely, despite its ambitious vision, Project HOPE has encountered significant execution challenges. By February 2025, two years after its launch, the project had not achieved full implementation, leading to growing frustration among youth who had registered with expectations of immediate engagement (Fubara, 2025). As Fubara acknowledged, "lots of questions are being asked, standards of our service and practice in line with our service, why we have launched implementation of the project HOPE severally, yet proper implementation is yet to be felt by the people" (Fubara, 2025, para. 4).

This enactment deficit mirrors broader challenges in translating policy commitments into tangible outcomes. The NDDC's Youth Internship Scheme, which promised monthly stipends of 50,000 naira to 10,000 youths across the nine states, similarly faced delays in operationalisation (Ebie, cited in BBC News Pidgin, 2024). These delays risk eroding the confidence that is essential for successful programme delivery. The implication is that policy ambition must be matched by institutional capability for enactment, including clear timelines, adequate resourcing, and accountability mechanisms.

Entrepreneurship and Source of Revenue Development in Music Production

The exploration reveals that music production as a source of revenue activity incorporates multiple entrepreneurial dimensions that extend beyond artistic creation. The modern-day music producer functions not merely as a technical operator but as an entrepreneur managing a complex business enterprise. This entrepreneurial role encompasses technical production, artiste development, content monetisation, brand development, and financial management. Efurhievwe (2016) addresses managerial strategies and music production practices, highlighting the breach between technical proficiency and business management skills among Nigerian producers. This gap is particularly acute in the Niger Delta, where formal business training is limited and access to financial services constrained. The implication is that technical training in music production must be incorporated with entrepreneurship education, digital literacy, and intellectual property management to prepare producers for ecological occupational operations.

A livelihoods perspective provides a useful methodical framework for understanding how music production contributes to household and community well-being. Music production generates multiple forms of capital: financial capital from production services and royalties; human capital through skills and knowledge that enhance employability; social capital through networks that

facilitate collaboration and market access; cultural capital through the preservation and valorisation of indigenous musical traditions; and symbolic capital through status and recognition that can translate into economic opportunities. This multi-dimensional approach recognises that music production's value extends beyond monetary income to encompass social mobility, cultural expression, and community development.

The NDMAP's incubation model, which provides structured support including mentorship and monitoring, reflects recognition that entrepreneurship requires more than equipment provision. As Ogolo (2024) notes, the programme is designed to incubate passionate creatives to help them grow into fully structured, enterprising ventures with requisite mentorship and monitoring. This approach aligns with international best practice in creative industries development, which accentuates the importance of sustained support rather than one-off interventions.

National Creative Economy Initiatives and Collaborations

At the national level, the Ministry of Arts, Culture, Tourism, and the Creative Economy has launched ambitious initiatives that complement regional programmes. The partnership with Chocolate City Group, announced in April 2025, aims to develop small-scale live arenas nationwide, identify and nurture talent, create global distribution channels, and strengthen intellectual property frameworks (Musawa, 2025). This public-private collaboration model offers lessons for the Niger Delta, where similar partnerships could accelerate infrastructure development.

The Ministry has also secured over \$300 million in investment commitments and established the Creative Economy Development Fund (CEDF), managed by the African Export-Import Bank, to provide affordable financing to creative businesses (Musawa, 2025). The government's target of creating two million jobs in the creative economy by 2027 signals the sector's strategic importance to national economic diversification. For the Niger Delta, these federal initiatives offer potential synergies with regional programmes. Nevertheless, harmonization between national and regional institutions remains a challenge, with overlapping obligations and disjointed funding streams potentially adulterating impact. The implication is that effective creative economy development requires comprehensible multi-level governance frameworks that align national, regional, and indigenous initiatives.

Conclusion

The Niger Delta region stands at a precarious juncture in its development trajectory. For decades, the region has been demarcated by its role as Nigeria's oil-producing heartland, a designation that has brought wealth to the nation but tenacious side-lining to local communities. The emergence of the creative economy, and unambiguously music production, as a potential pathway for youth empowerment offers an alternative narrative: one that transposes Niger Delta youth from militants to entrepreneurs, from consumers of culture to creators of value. This research has examined the potential of music production as a premeditated mediation for economic empowerment, entrepreneurship, and livelihood development in the Niger Delta. Drawing on the scholarly contributions of Nigerian musicologists, particularly Dr Margaret Efurhievwe, the study has established the theoretical foundations for understanding creative entrepreneurship as a form of human development. The investigation of recent strategy initiatives discloses both the ambition of current interventions and the enactment defies that must be addressed.

The investigation has established that music production, when purposefully positioned within broader economic diversification efforts, offers a sustainable pathway for youth empowerment, cultural preservation, and maintainable peace in the Niger Delta. The region's musical heritage, its youthful population, and its emerging policy frameworks provide the raw materials for such transformation. What remains is the governmental determination, institutional capacity, and collective commitment to realise this potential. As Dr Samuel Ogbuku observed at the inaugural Niger Delta Cultural Music Festival, supporting young musicians is "not only an investment in their future but also in the future of the Niger Delta" (cited in *The Sun*, 2023, para. 6). This perception captures the essential proposition of this inquiry: that music production, far from being a peripheral cultural activity, lies at the heart of the region's quest for economic diversification, youth empowerment, and lasting peace.

Recommendations

Founded on the outcomes of this investigation, the subsequent recommendations are proposed for enhancing music production as a pathway to economic empowerment and livelihood development in the Niger Delta:

1. Reinforce Enactment Mechanisms

The deferments in executing Project HOPE and NDMAP demoralize youth confidence and waste momentum. A clear enactment timeline with measurable milestones should be established, with regular reporting to stakeholders. The NDDC should consider establishing a dedicated Creative Economy Enactment Unit with definite responsibility for music and arts programmes, ensuring accountability and continuity across political transitions. This unit should be adequately resourced with technical expertise, including secondments from the creative industries sector, and should operate with transparent reporting mechanisms.

2. Develop Combined Training Programmes

Technical training in music production must be combined with entrepreneurship education, digital literacy, and intellectual property management. Curriculum development should draw on the expertise of Nigerian musicologists and industry practitioners, with programmes offered through partnerships with universities and technical institutions in the region. The presence of scholars like Dr Efurhievwe at Delta State University provides a foundation for such academic-industry collaboration. Training programmes should incorporate modules on business planning, financial management, marketing, contract negotiation, and digital rights management.

3. Invest in Production Infrastructure

The provision of equipment to selected producers, as envisaged in NDMAP, is essential but should be accompanied by investment in studio infrastructure, maintenance support, and upgrade pathways. The establishment of community-based production hubs, strategically located across the nine states, could provide affordable access to professional amenities while fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing. These hubs should be designed as sustainable enterprises, with business models that ensure ongoing maintenance and upgrade cycles.

4. Reinforce Intellectual Property Structures

Music production as a sustainable livelihood depends on creators' ability to capture value from their work. The National Intellectual Property Policy, currently under development, should be accelerated, with specific provisions for the Niger Delta context. Awareness programmes on copyright, royalty collection,

and contract negotiation should be incorporated into producer training. The NDDC should consider inaugurating a regional intellectual property support centre to provide legal assistance and rights management services to creative entrepreneurs.

5. Inaugurate Sustainable Financing Mechanisms

The Creative Economy Development Fund offers a potential source of affordable financing for creative enterprises in the Niger Delta. Conversely, access to such funding necessitates financial literacy and business planning capabilities that may be limited among aspiring producers. The NDDC should consider establishing a dedicated loan guarantee scheme for creative enterprises, complemented by business development services. Micro-financing mechanisms tailored to the needs of creative entrepreneurs, including equipment leasing and royalty-backed lending, should be explored.

6. Nurture Public-Private Partnerships

The Chocolate City partnership model demonstrates the potential of public-private partnership in creative infrastructure development (Musawa, 2025). The NDDC should explore similar partnerships with Nigerian entertainment companies, technology firms, and financial institutions to leverage private sector expertise and resources. These partnerships should be structured to ensure mutual advantage and sustainability, with clear frameworks for intellectual property rights and revenue sharing.

7. Incorporate Gender Equity Considerations

Given the gender disparities documented in music production (Efurhievwe, 2018), programme design should incorporate exact measures to reassure and support women's involvement. This may include targeted outreach, mentorship programmes featuring successful women producers, safe spaces for women's creative practice, and gender-sensitive equipment design. Gender-disaggregated monitoring and evaluation should be implemented to track progress towards equity goals.

8. Monitor and Evaluate Impact

The NDDC's assurance to developing metrics for impact evaluation should be extended to the music and arts programmes. Robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks should track not only numbers trained but also business formation, income generation, employment creation, cultural outcomes, and social impacts.

Baseline data should be collected prior to intervention, with longitudinal tracking to assess sustained impacts. Learning from evaluation should inform ongoing programme refinement.

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