

Leveraging the Entertainment Industry to Drive Nigerian Agriculture: Expanding Agricultural Policy Beyond the Usual

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### **SUMMARY**

Sustaining the momentum of citizens' involvement in agriculture requires innovative approaches from policymakers. Since the entertainment industry has proven to be potent in promoting agriculture along with other desirable social change globally, this brief examined the successful use of the industry to promote agriculture across the world, reviewed its deliberate use in achieving the same in Nigeria, argued for direct government intervention to achieve this end and suggested ways by which the industry's potential can be leveraged for the benefit of the agricultural sector and the nation at large.

Agriculture remains Nigeria's economy's mainstay, contributing 22.36 percent to the GDP in the first quarter of 2022.<sup>1</sup> At some point in the country's life, its importance took a downward turn due to the discovery of oil. However, the need for diversification of the economy and the reality that the reign of oil may soon be over globally forced successive administrations to take a second look at the sector.

Meanwhile, the long desertion of the sector and the attendant social perception of its importance had taken a toll on the psyche of an average citizen venturing to make a career in the sector. A cursory look at the cut-off point for any course in the Faculty of Agriculture of Nigeria's foremost institutions of higher learning compared to courses like Medicine, Law, and Engineering will reveal the less prestigious nature of the sector. Moreover, it has been found<sup>2</sup> that many students studying agriculture often battle with low selfesteem in their first few university years due to the aforementioned reasons. There is, therefore, a need to work on the public perception of the sector if the main drivers and sustainers of change in any society - the youth will be attracted to the sector.

Youths all over the world are in love with the entertainment industry. Apart from being major consumers of the industry's products, they are equally mainly in its involved content production. The situation is different in the Nigerian entertainment industry as the youth have produced and consumed many entertainment media content.

well established that is the entertainment industry can play a significant role in effecting behavioural change.<sup>3</sup> Songs, folk music and drama have been used from time immemorial ills while correct societal to the audience entertaining simultaneously. The industry's power is so much acknowledged by serious governments worldwide that there is always an agency of government overseeing what it releases to society. As a result, the National Film and Video Censors Board was set up by decree number 85 of 1993 to regulate Nigeria's film and video industry.

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It is noteworthy that at the height of the Cold War between the defunct Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the United States of America (USA), films produced in either of the countries projected the superiority of the producing country over the other.

It is also a known fact that the American government had once enlisted the help of Hollywood in its war efforts. At the same time, top musicians have often been flown to military bases to motivate the forces with soul-lifting songs. There are scores of literature documenting the use of the entertainment industry for promoting social change in the past.

In the recent past, the entertainment industry has been deliberately engaged by those in government and the opposition to promote their political agenda. The industry has also been used strategically and meaningfully in the health sector to prevent HIV/AIDS, COVID-19, and other dangerous infections. At the same time, it has also been deployed in the sector to promote safe parenthood and immunisation campaigns, among others.<sup>3</sup>

In acknowledging the success of the entertainment industry in promoting social and behavioural change as well as the attachment of the youths to it, this brief seeks to advocate for a deliberate policy at leveraging the strength of the industry to sustain the drive for citizens' (especially the youth) involvement in agricultural transformation in Nigeria.

The following questions shall be the basis for the advocacy:

- Has the entertainment industry been used successfully elsewhere to promote agriculture?
- How well has the entertainment industry been deliberately used in promoting agriculture in Nigeria?
- Why should the government be involved in the use of the entertainment industry for agricultural purposes?
- How can the entertainment industry be effectively used to drive agriculture in Nigeria?

# **Success Stories from Other Countries on the Use of Entertainment Industry for Agricultural Promotion**

The entertainment industry has been used successfully in many parts of the world to promote social change. Specifically, in agriculture, it has been used in many countries with varying degrees of success. In some instances, the private sector drives the use, while government agencies were instrumental in its deployment.

In the United States of America, the industry was used to promote the nutritional benefits of milk and increase dairy consumption, initially by the California Milk Processor Board in 1993 with a tagline known as "Got Milk?" and later by the National Milk Processor Education Program in 2014 as "Milk Life". The campaign increased milk consumption and, by extension, sales in California and some other states.4

In China, the entertainment industry has also been used to promote different types of foods and culinary traditions. For instance, "A Bite of China" television show, which began shooting in 2011, was widely received and watched by over 100 million viewers despite being relayed late at night.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs launched a short film competition tagged "My Beautiful Village", which encouraged filmmakers to create short films that promote the beauty and importance of rural life in China.

In India, the government, through its extension arm, The National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE) just launched is organising MANAGE Agri-Film Festival - 2023 to promote the best agricultural films, documentaries and animated videos that capture field-level innovations, best agricultural practices, impact stories, farmers' empowerment, innovations in extension management approaches in the field of agriculture and allied sectors.<sup>6</sup>

This results from the government's belief that the entertainment industry can impact the agricultural sector positively. In Kenya, Shamba Shape Up has been airing for over five years and is still running.<sup>7</sup> It has been used to address topics relating to livestock, poultry, crops, soil fertility and home management. More importantly, it has assisted farmers in Kenya to adopt improved practices which have made their lives better.<sup>8</sup>

**<sup>[4]</sup>** Dadonna, M. (2018). Got Milk? How the Iconic Campaign Came to Be 25 Years ago. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.fastcompany.com/40556502/got-milk-how-the-iconic-campaign-came-to-be-25-years-ago">www.fastcompany.com/40556502/got-milk-how-the-iconic-campaign-came-to-be-25-years-ago</a>

<sup>[5]</sup> Lina, Y. (2012). "A Bite of China" Becomes the Rage. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.news.xinhuanet.com/english/video/2012-05/27/c 131613537.htm">www.news.xinhuanet.com/english/video/2012-05/27/c 131613537.htm</a>

**<sup>[6]</sup>** Manage Agri-film Festival (2023). Manage Agri-film Festival 2023 Guidelines. Retrieved from www.manage.gov.in/misc/agrifilmfestival.pdf

<sup>[7]</sup> Shamba Shape Up (2023). Who We Are. Retrieved from www.shambashapeup.com/about/who-we-are/

# A Review of the Deliberate Use of the Entertainment Industry in Nigeria's Agricultural Agenda

The use of the entertainment industry for agricultural agenda in Nigeria has been sparing and largely inconsistent. Although television series like Cock Crows at Dawn, tracks of old musical albums by King Sunny Ade, Ebenezer Obey and a few national musicians were once used to promote agriculture in Nigeria, it took a while before a film like Yellow Cassava, a musical album like Cocoa and chocolate and a reality TV show like Naija Farmer staged a comeback to the Nigerian entertainment stage. A critical look at the productions revealed that they were voluntary and private more than deliberate public interventions in the sector.

Further scrutiny of government policy and programme documents such as  $(2015)^9$ Nollywood Project Act Agricultural Promotion Policy (2016 -2020)<sup>10</sup> and National Agricultural Technology and Innovation Policy  $(2022 - 2027)^{11}$ showed that the drafters were not deliberate harvesting the gains of complementarity between the entertainment industry and agricultural sector. Although there between attempts in commission stakeholders in the entertainment industry to use their trade to promote agriculture, the lack of articulation of the intention in the implementation plans of the policy documents made the attempts appear like afterthoughts.

**<sup>[9]</sup>** Project ACT Nollywood (2015). Project ACT-Nollywood: The journey so far. Retrieved from <a href="http://projectactnollywood.com.ng/download-documents/">http://projectactnollywood.com.ng/download-documents/</a>

<sup>[10]</sup> Federal Ministry of Agriculture (2016). The Agricultural Promotion Policy (2016 –2020): Building on the Successes of the ATA, Closing Key Gaps. FMARD, Abuja. Pp 32 - 38.

<sup>[11]</sup> Federal Ministry of Agriculture (2022). National Agricultural Technology and Innovation Policy (NATIP) (2022 – 2027). Yetomka Ventures, Abuja. Pp 32.

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Some of the missed opportunities to effectively use the industry in promoting agriculture include:

- The Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) period (2012 - 2015), which overlapped with the unveiling of Project Act Nollywood (2015), of the remains one greatest opportunities to attain synergy between the two sectors. The agenda was flamboyant agricultural programme with the support of major stakeholders worldwide and equally charming and flamboyant the personality as Minister Agriculture at the time. In addition, the programme coincided with the launching of Project Act Nollywood, a unique government intervention in the entertainment industry. It was thus expected that tying a proportion of the financial intervention to the nationwide promotion of the programme agricultural in films, and musical productions movies benefiting from Project Act Nollywood would have been less challenging to do and highly impactful on the sector.
- The Agricultural Promotion Policy (APP) period (2016 – 2020) was another period when agriculture took center stage in the Nigerian discourse.

The Buhari Administration, confronted by challenges arising from the falling price of crude oil in the international market coupled with an inability to meet allocated quota due to theft and other challenges, had to look in the direction of agriculture and even launched the first agricultural reality television show during the period. However, the supposed gains of the show are yet to materialise due to low public awareness of the show. The lack deliberate harvesting opportunities inherent in the synergy between the two sectors reveals a gap in the understanding of the power of entertainment industry the projecting the agricultural programme and policy.

 A look into the National Agricultural Technology and Innovation Policy (2022 - 2027) document temporarily gives one that the entertainment industry may be included in the programme intended under ICTdriven and pluralistic extension services delivery. However, the breakdown reveals that the drafters are still stuck in the usual of way delivering extension services.

## The Need for Government Initiative to Use the Entertainment Industry for Agricultural Purposes in Nigeria

It is a known fact that the primary responsibility of government is to provide security for lives and property. Meanwhile, food security is a crucial component of general security and, therefore, deserves the attention of every stakeholder. Moreover, the entertainment industry in Nigeria grew with little or no support from the government, and the practitioners are into it as a business like any other person in business.

Therefore, the market determines what they produce. Since their involvement in producing different genres of outputs is providing them with the required patronage, diversifying or introducing agricultural-themed productions, which are ordinarily technical, may require some form of incentives.

In addition, Nigeria has a large youth population with attendant high Considering unemployment. that agriculture provides an outlet for the government to mop up the retinue of unemployed youths from the streets, thus preventing them from causing harm to themselves and the nation. Therefore, every kobo spent on be attracting them to gainfully employed within agricultural the sector is well spent.

### The Way Forward

To effectively use the entertainment industry for agricultural purposes in Nigeria, there is a need for the following actions:

# Mainstreaming Agricultural Extension into the Agricultural Policy Framework

Policymaking should be all-inclusive, and as a result, Nigeria's agricultural policy drafting team should reflect the true makeup of the field of agriculture. There is usually the common error of treating agricultural extension as an add-on or a unit external to agricultural programs and interventions. This often affects the overall image of the programs and interventions in the long run. Therefore, trained practitioners in the field of agricultural extension who are abreast of modern trends in extension delivery systems should be part of the policymaking organ right from inception so that the extension implementation will an afterthought in appear as articulation and delivery.

### Giving Entertainment Education its Pride of Place within the Agricultural Extension Policy

There is a need for policymakers to situate entertainment education within the main agricultural extension framework properly. There are distinct specialities within the extension field, and experts should be allowed to practice what they are trained to do.

Entertainment education is a unique field of study with its own rules, so using the entertainment education framework within extension should not be an all-comer affair as it currently is.

# Revisiting the Implementation of Project Act Nollywood (2015)

The the support given entertainment industry in Nigeria through the Project Act Nollywood needs to be revisited. Lessons from the implementation of the project should guide the government on how best to incentivise the industry to continue to play its role in national development. The entertainment industry is known to be a major contributor to the economy in recent times and should be incentivised to continue doing so.

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In practical terms, government support to Nollywood through the revised implementation of Project Act Nollywood or its derivatives should be tied to:

- Using the supported celebrity musicians/artists as influencers or agricultural programme ambassadors.
- Incorporation of positively portrayed agriculture-based plots into supported Nollywood movies to promote the dignity of the agriculture endeavour.
- Production of short clips and documentaries on young achievers across the agricultural value chain to show the youths the possibilities within agriculture.
- Production of full-scale agricultural-themed films and musical videos for public reawakening about the importance of agriculture.

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