

## Music, Creative Economies, and Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

This study examines how music helps reduce socioeconomic inequalities in Nigeria. Although creative industries are increasingly recognised as pathways to inclusive development, research often overlooks how music functions as work, livelihood, and cultural capital for marginalised groups such as low-income youth, women in informal creative work, rural performers, and urban street-level musicians. This article addresses that gap by analysing how music supports employment, entrepreneurship, and economic fairness across indigenous and popular genres. It highlights how Nigeria's music sector enables underserved communities to build income, develop skills, and gain social visibility. Guided by Cultural Capital Theory and the Political Economy of Culture, the study explores how symbolic assets and structural barriers shape access to music-based opportunities. Using documentary and analytical methods, it draws on musical texts, performance media, and secondary data from statistical sources and digital streaming platforms. The findings show that music can generate income, narrate socioeconomic struggle, and promote social inclusion. The study recommends integrating music into national poverty-reduction strategies and calls for stronger cultural policy support within development planning.

**Keywords:** creative economies, music, Nigeria, poverty alleviation.

## Introduction

Creative economies are increasingly recognised for their ability to address structural socioeconomic challenges, especially in regions facing persistent poverty and high youth unemployment. In Nigeria, music holds a distinctive place within this landscape because it serves as a cultural resource, an economic asset, and a means through which communities express identity, resilience, and livelihood. In line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 1 (SDG 1), which calls for the eradication of poverty in all its forms, it has become important to examine how music contributes to inclusive development. However, despite the growing literature on cultural production and creative industries (Throsby, 2010; Hesmondhalgh, 2013); the specific relationship between music and poverty alleviation remains insufficiently theorised in African contexts.

Existing scholarship often relies on Western creative economy models or focuses mainly on the aesthetic and symbolic qualities of music, rather than its labour value, entrepreneurial potential, or role within informal economies (Harrison, 2013; Dirksen, 2015). This tendency obscures the ways in which Nigerian musical practices, both indigenous and popular, support income generation, social mobility, and economic participation among marginalised populations. This study responds to that gap by examining how music functions both as a cultural practice and as an economic strategy within Nigeria's evolving creative economy.

The analysis draws on two complementary theoretical perspectives. Bourdieu's Cultural Capital Theory (1986) offers a framework for understanding how musical skills, networks, and symbolic assets influence access to economic opportunities and support social mobility. The Political Economy of Culture (Garnham, 1990; Pratt, 2009) provides further insight into the structural inequalities, market dynamics, and digital transformations that shape participation in Nigeria's music economy. Together, these perspectives enable a critical examination of how creative labour is produced, valued, and distributed in a context marked by rapid digitalisation, expanding informal labour, and widening economic disparities.

This inquiry is timely given Nigeria's rising youth unemployment, the growth of informal creative work, and the increasing monetisation of digital music platforms. Music has become an important livelihood resource for many young Nigerians, yet access to its economic benefits

remains uneven. By integrating insights from musicology, development studies, and cultural economics, this study offers policy-relevant evidence on how music can be more effectively incorporated into national poverty reduction strategies and creative industry development frameworks. In doing so, it provides a more nuanced understanding of music's role in promoting economic equity and supporting the aspirations of marginalised communities.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To examine how music contributes to income generation, employment, and economic participation among marginalised populations in Nigeria.
2. To identify the structural and cultural barriers that shape access to music-based economic opportunities within Nigeria's creative economy.
3. To analyse how musical texts and practices articulate socioeconomic inequalities and inform policy pathways for poverty alleviation.

### **Research Questions**

1. How does Nigeria's music industry support income generation and employment for marginalised youth populations?
2. What structural and cultural barriers constrain equitable access to music-based economic opportunities in Nigeria?
3. In what ways do musical texts and performances reflect socioeconomic inequalities and inform strategies for poverty alleviation?

### **Literature Review**

Scholarship on the relationship between music and socioeconomic development has expanded considerably over the past two decades, establishing music as both a cultural practice and a form of economic labour. Foundational studies in African and global contexts show that music serves as a communicative medium through which communities express experiences of deprivation, inequality, and resilience. In Nigeria, for example, Olaosebikan et al. (2021) and Ibitoye (2018) demonstrate that popular music often reflects the social realities of young people and shapes public awareness of poverty and marginalisation. Similar work across Africa reinforces this view. Fonju (2012) highlights how Cameroonian musicians use popular music to critique corruption and unemployment, while Akombo (2014) argues that African musicians remain an underutilised economic resource with potential to contribute to national development agendas.

Beyond African contexts, ethnomusicologists have broadened the analytical scope by examining how music intersects with structural inequality, humanitarian narratives, and global power

relations. Harrison (2013) and Grant (2019) call for deeper engagement with “music of poverty” contexts, emphasising the need to understand how musical practices both shape and are shaped by socioeconomic deprivation. Cameron, Solomon, and Clarke (2022) extend this critique by analysing NGO fundraising soundtracks, showing how musical structure can reinforce narratives of dependency and global inequality. Collectively, these studies position music not only as aesthetic expression but also as a site where economic, political, and ethical tensions converge.

A parallel body of literature focuses on music’s potential to support empowerment, skills development, and livelihood creation. Odunuga and Soretire (2015) highlight the role of skill-based music education in fostering entrepreneurship among Nigerian youth, while Efurhievwe (2024) argues that music production contributes to human development by generating employment and strengthening individual agency. More recent scholarship reflects a shift towards examining music within informal economies, digital monetisation systems, and creative industry structures (Ngobili, 2021; Efurhievwe & Okpeki, 2023). This shift aligns with broader debates in cultural economics and political economy, which conceptualise music as both symbolic capital and material labour embedded within unequal market systems.

Despite these contributions, the literature reveals persistent tensions and unresolved questions. Scholars such as Titon (2013) and Okujeni et al. (2023) advocate for reclaiming music as a tool for social change yet caution that commercialisation may weaken its transformative potential. Ethical concerns also remain. Cameron et al. (2022) critique Western humanitarian uses of music for perpetuating stereotypes, while Harrison (2013) calls for more culturally grounded and politically conscious approaches to studying music and poverty. These debates highlight the need for research that moves beyond lyrical interpretation or cultural critique to examine the structural conditions shaping musicians’ economic realities.

Although, there is broad agreement that music holds cultural and communicative power, limited attention has been given to how music functions as an economic resource within Nigeria’s creative economy or how it contributes directly to poverty alleviation. This gap is striking given the rapid expansion of Nigeria’s music industry, the rise of digital monetisation, and the growing reliance on informal creative labour among young people. Without a clearer understanding of

how music operates simultaneously as livelihood, labour, and advocacy, policy frameworks risk overlooking a sector with significant potential to support inclusive development.

This study positions itself as a necessary next step by situating Nigerian music within global debates on creative economies and poverty reduction. It synthesises insights from musicology, development studies, and cultural economics to examine how musical practices generate income, articulate socioeconomic inequalities, and shape access to economic opportunities. By aligning with SDG 1 and foregrounding African-centred perspectives, the study offers a culturally grounded and policy-relevant contribution to ongoing efforts to integrate creative industries into national development strategies.

### **Research Method**

This study employed an interdisciplinary qualitative design that brought together cultural analysis, musicology, and development studies. This approach was chosen to address the research objectives, which focuses on income generation, structural barriers, and socioeconomic representation within Nigeria's creative economy. It enabled a detailed examination of musical texts, artist discourse, and institutional data, and ensured that both the symbolic and material dimensions of music-based labour were captured. Although, the study was primarily qualitative, it incorporated quantitative indicators such as streaming metrics and publicly available economic statistics to strengthen the assessment of music's contribution to income generation and poverty alleviation. All methodological choices were guided by Cultural Capital Theory and the Political Economy of Culture, which shaped the operationalisation of concepts such as symbolic assets, labour value, and structural inequality.

### **Data Sources and Collection**

Data were collected between February and August 2025 using only publicly accessible sources. This ensured transparency, replicability, and minimal ethical risk. Archival and institutional materials were obtained from the National Bureau of Statistics of Nigeria, UNESCO, the World Bank, and Nigerian creative industry working groups. Of the 48 institutional reports screened, 23 met the inclusion criteria relating to creative industry labour, youth employment, or poverty indicators.

Digital economic indicators were extracted from Boomplay, YouTube, Audiomack, and Spotify. These included stream counts, subscriber numbers, and platform reported monetisation structures. Musical materials consisted of 39 songs, 16 music videos, and 8 live performance recordings across Afrobeats, hip hop, highlife, and indigenous genres. Artist discourse was drawn from 52 verified interviews, televised appearances, press releases, and official social media statements. Additional contextual documentation was sourced from non-governmental organisations, cultural foundations, and creative industry surveys focusing on youth employment and informal labour. The dataset was considered sufficient because it represented a wide range of genres, artist demographics, and socioeconomic themes, allowing thematic saturation to be reached.

### **Sampling Criteria**

Sampling followed a structured and reproducible protocol designed to ensure that all materials were directly relevant to the study's focus on poverty, livelihood, and economic participation. Musical works were selected if they explicitly referenced poverty, economic aspiration, inequality, or livelihood, if the artist was Nigerian or based in Nigeria, and if the work was released between 2010 and 2024, a period characterised by rapid digital expansion in the Nigerian music industry. Artist statements were included only when they were publicly attributed to the artist and circulated through verifiable media channels. Institutional reports were selected when they contained quantitative or qualitative data related to creative industry labour or poverty indicators. All data were stored in encrypted folders and catalogued systematically with metadata such as source, date, genre, and access link to ensure full traceability throughout the research process.

### **Analytical Procedures**

Analysis followed a three-stage process designed to maximise rigour and replicability. The first stage involved content analysis of the selected musical works, focusing on lyrical semantics, performance aesthetics, and genre conventions. Coding was carried out in two cycles. The initial cycle used a deductive frame derived from Cultural Capital Theory, concentrating on symbolic assets and markers of social mobility, while the second cycle adopted an inductive approach to capture emerging themes. The second stage applied discourse analysis to artist interviews and

public statements to identify recurring themes related to empowerment, advocacy, economic struggle, and structural exclusion. This stage examined how musicians frame their labour, articulate socioeconomic concerns, and mobilise audiences around issues of inequality. The third stage involved documentary review and data triangulation, comparing artistic narratives with socioeconomic indicators drawn from institutional reports. Digital monetisation metrics, including stream counts, views, and subscriber growth, were interpreted as proxies for income generation and entrepreneurial activity, allowing the study to link symbolic expression with measurable economic outcomes.

All analyses were conducted manually and supported by NVivo 14 qualitative data management software, which enabled systematic coding, theme development, and cross-source comparison. Although coding was performed by a single researcher, reliability was strengthened through repeated coding cycles and cross-checking across data types. No automated scraping tools or proprietary datasets were used, ensuring that the study can be replicated using the same publicly available materials.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical principles were applied throughout the research process. Because all data were publicly available, institutional ethics approval was not required. Copyrighted materials were quoted sparingly and attributed accurately. Indigenous musical forms and marginalised narratives were interpreted with cultural sensitivity to avoid misrepresentation. The study prioritised inclusive representation by ensuring that informal musicians, youth-led creative enterprises, and women-centred initiatives were reflected where possible. No direct contact with human participants occurred, and no personal data were collected, eliminating risks related to confidentiality or consent.

### **Findings**

The findings present a comprehensive picture of how music functions as labour, livelihood, and social commentary within Nigeria's creative economy. Drawing on musical texts, artist discourse, institutional reports, and digital platform analytics, the results address the study's core objectives by examining income generation, structural barriers, and the expressive dimensions of

musical practice. The evidence shows that music contributes meaningfully to economic participation, yet access to these benefits remains uneven across different groups.

### 1. Music as a Source of Income and Economic Participation

To address the first research objective, the study examined how musicians generate income through digital platforms. Table 1 summarises average monthly earnings, the proportion of youth-led accounts, and revenue growth rates across four major streaming services.

**Table 1.** *Income Generation through Streaming Platforms (2022–2024)*  
 Source: Aggregated from quarterly reports published by Boomplay, Audiomack, Spotify, and YouTube Nigeria (2022–2024)

Platform	Average Artist Monthly Income (₦)	% Youth Led Accounts	Revenue Growth Rate (%)
Boomplay	₦70,000	61%	24.8
Audiomack	₦55,000	67%	18.5
Spotify	₦85,000	42%	29.3
YouTube	₦95,000	58%	34.1

Table 1 shows that digital platforms have become an important, although uneven, source of income for Nigerian musicians. Earnings ranged from ₦55,000 to ₦95,000, with YouTube offering the highest average income and Spotify recording the fastest revenue growth. Boomplay and Audiomack hosted the largest share of youth-led accounts, suggesting that younger musicians rely more on platforms with lower entry barriers and stronger local reach.

To further explore income equity, Table 4 compares total streams with average monthly income for youth-led enterprises between 2021 and 2024.

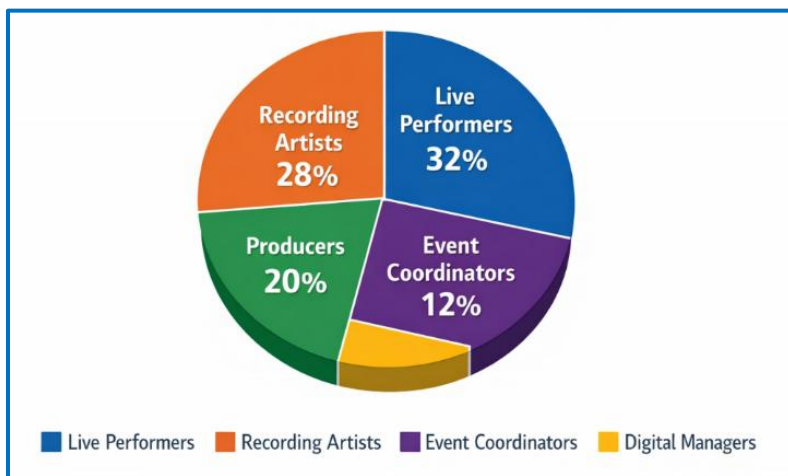
**Table 4.** *Streaming vs. Income Equity (Youth Led Enterprises, 2021–2024)*  
 Source: Aggregated analytics from Boomplay, Spotify, and YouTube Nigeria dashboards

Year	Streams (Millions)	Avg Monthly Income (₦)
2021	180	₦42,000
2022	250	₦55,000
2023	370	₦64,000
2024	440	₦71,000

Table 4 reinforces the finding that digital visibility is closely linked to income. As streams increased from 180 million to 440 million, average monthly income moved from ₦42,000 to ₦71,000. This pattern indicates a positive correlation between digital reach and economic returns, particularly for youth-led creative enterprises.

The broader employment landscape is illustrated in Figure 1, which highlights the distribution of music-related jobs across Nigeria’s creative sector.

**Figure 1.**



*Distribution of Music-Related Employment in Nigeria’s Creative Sector*  
Source: Nigeria Creative Economy Working Group (2023)

Figure 1 shows that live performers and recording artists make up the largest employment categories, followed by producers, event coordinators, and digital managers. This distribution demonstrates that the music sector supports a diverse ecosystem of both formal and informal labour, further underscoring its economic significance.

## **2. Structural and Cultural Barriers to Music-Based Opportunities**

The second research objective focused on identifying structural and cultural barriers that limit equitable access to music-based opportunities.

Table 2 presents excerpts from artist statements that highlight recurring concerns about governance, inequality, and community responsibility.

**Table 2.**  
*Artist Statements on Poverty and Empowerment (2021–2024)*  
 Source: Public interviews, press appearances, and verified social media posts

Artist	Medium	Statement Excerpt
Simi	Arise TV	“Music gave me power when the odds said no. I channel that energy into young girls.”
Phyno	YouTube Live	“We carry the community on our back. Our art speaks for the streets.”
Falz	X (formerly Twitter)	“If governance fails us, our verses won’t.”

These statements reveal how artists frame their work as a response to marginalisation and systemic exclusion. They also highlight the expectation placed on musicians to advocate for their communities in the absence of strong institutional support. The discourse analysis confirms that limited access to production infrastructure, inconsistent monetisation systems, and gendered inequalities continue to restrict participation, particularly for informal musicians and women-led creative enterprises.

### 3. Music as Narrative Advocacy and Socioeconomic Expression

The third research objective examined how musical texts articulate socioeconomic realities. The content analysis shows that Nigerian music consistently expresses themes of economic struggle, aspiration, and resilience. For example, Olamide’s line “*I be common person, but my hustle na king*” reflects a dignity-centred view of labour, while Zinoleesky’s “*Mo fe lowo, mo fe l’aye*” and Bella Shmurda’s “*I dey find money like a searcher*” foreground the pursuit of livelihood and the pressures of survival.

These narratives demonstrate that music functions as a communicative tool through which artists express lived experiences of inequality and mobilise public awareness. The consistency of these themes across Afrobeats, street-hop, and indigenous genres reinforces the role of music as a form of narrative advocacy.

### 4. Music-Based Interventions and Poverty Reduction Initiatives

To assess how music contributes to poverty alleviation in practice, the study reviewed NGO-led initiatives. Table 3 summarises key programmes and their reach.

**Table 3.**  
*NGO Led Music Initiatives Targeting Poverty (2019–2023)*  
 Source: Annual reports from NGOs and verified partner documentation

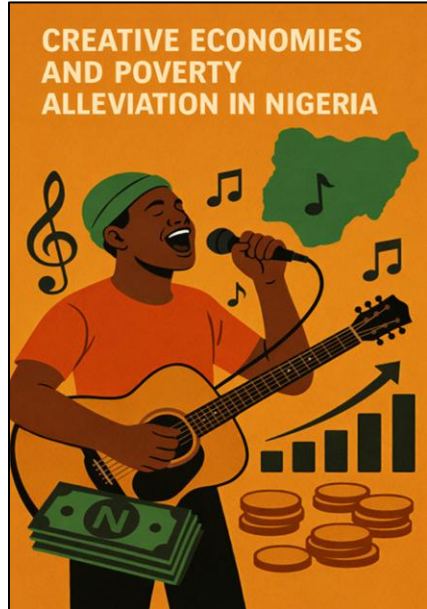
Organisation	Programme Name	Beneficiaries Reached	Focus Area
Music for Life NGO	Rhythms & Livelihoods	15,000 youth	Skill training, studio grants
SoundJustice Africa	Women Sound Economy	7,200 women	Equipment, access, legal aid
CultureWorks Trust	Mic for Empowerment	4,000 informal artists	Mentorship, performance circuits

Table 3 shows that music-based interventions reached more than 26,000 beneficiaries between 2019 and 2023. These programmes provided skills training, equipment access, legal support, and mentorship, with women and youth forming the majority of participants. The findings indicate that music-centred initiatives are increasingly recognised as viable pathways for economic empowerment within informal creative economies.

Across all data sources, four core insights emerge that clarify music’s role in poverty alleviation within Nigeria’s creative economy. Digital platforms provide meaningful income opportunities, particularly for youth-led enterprises, where rising streams are strongly associated with increased earnings. At the same time, structural barriers continue to limit equitable access to these opportunities, including weak institutional support, uneven digital infrastructure, and gendered inequalities in creative labour. Musical texts and artist discourse consistently highlight socioeconomic struggle, showing how musicians use their work to promote visibility, advocacy, and collective aspiration. In addition, NGO led programmes demonstrate that music-based interventions can offer practical pathways for empowerment through skills development, equipment access, mentorship, and livelihood support for marginalised groups. Together, these insights show that music contributes to economic participation while also functioning as a tool for social expression and community uplift.

**Figure**

2.



*The potency of music as a tool for poverty alleviation.  
Source: Original concept, designed using Copilot's App*

Taken together, these findings show that music functions simultaneously as labour, livelihood, and advocacy within Nigeria's creative economy. While its contributions to poverty alleviation are significant, they remain uneven and shaped by broader structural conditions.

## **Discussion**

The central insight emerging from this study is that music functions simultaneously as labour, livelihood, and narrative advocacy within Nigeria's creative economy. This finding is important because it positions music not only as cultural expression but also as an economic and developmental asset. By showing how musical practices generate income, articulate socioeconomic realities, and mobilise public consciousness, the study contributes to wider debates on cultural labour and poverty alleviation in African scholarship and global development discourse.

The results build on existing scholarship that identifies music as both a communicative and economic resource. Studies by Olaosebikan et al. (2021) and Ibitoye (2018) highlight music's capacity to reflect social realities, while Fonju (2012) and Akombo (2014) emphasise its potential for civic engagement and development. This study extends these insights by

demonstrating how digital monetisation, diversified employment streams, and NGO led interventions collectively reinforce music's role in economic empowerment. The strong performance of youth-led enterprises on streaming platforms suggests a shift towards digitally mediated creative labour, echoing Harrison's (2013) call for deeper engagement with music of poverty contexts in contemporary settings. Likewise, the prominence of aspirational and resistance-based narratives in lyrical and discursive materials supports Titon's (2013) argument that music can function as a vehicle for social change, while also showing how these narratives intersect with measurable economic outcomes.

The integration of Cultural Capital Theory and the Political Economy of Culture provides a deeper interpretive lens for understanding these findings. Cultural Capital Theory helps explain how symbolic assets, such as performance mastery, genre fluency, and digital visibility, can be converted into economic and social mobility within informal creative economies. Artist narratives that emphasise resilience, community responsibility, and self-determination illustrate Bourdieu's (1986) notion of habitus, showing how cultural identity becomes a form of economic currency. At the same time, the Political Economy of Culture framework clarifies the structural conditions that shape access to creative labour markets. Infrastructural deficits, inconsistent monetisation systems, and limited policy support reveal how market logics and institutional weaknesses constrain participation. These findings reinforce Hesmondhalgh et al.'s (2015) argument that creative labour requires institutional scaffolding to mitigate precarity, while also showing how NGO led initiatives can act as compensatory mechanisms in contexts where state intervention is limited. Together, the two frameworks illuminate how individual agency and structural constraints interact to shape musicians' economic outcomes.

However, the data also reveal tensions that complicate the broader narrative of opportunity. Although, digital platforms expand access, they can reproduce inequalities related to visibility, algorithmic bias, and resource disparities. The dominance of established artists in public discourse suggests that emerging musicians may struggle to convert symbolic capital into economic gain without targeted support. Furthermore, the aspirational tone of many lyrical narratives may obscure the structural barriers that limit upward mobility, raising questions about the extent to which music can realistically counteract systemic poverty. These tensions highlight

the need for a more nuanced understanding of how creative labour intersects with wider socioeconomic structures.

The study's limitations define the boundaries of interpretation. The dataset is primarily urban-centred, reflecting the concentration of digital infrastructure and industry activity in major Nigerian cities. Rural music economies, which often rely on analogue performance circuits and community-based practices, remain underrepresented. The reliance on publicly available digital metrics may overlook informal income streams that are difficult to quantify but significant in practice. The sample also leans towards well-known artists whose visibility generates more accessible data, potentially obscuring the experiences of emerging or marginalised musicians. These limitations point to the need for ethnographic fieldwork, longitudinal income tracking, and gender focused analyses to deepen understanding of music-based livelihoods.

Despite these boundaries, the study makes several important contributions. Theoretically, it demonstrates how Cultural Capital Theory and the Political Economy of Culture can be operationalised together to analyse creative labour in African contexts, offering a framework that bridges symbolic and material dimensions of musical practice. Methodologically, it shows the value of triangulating musical texts, artist discourse, and institutional data to capture the complexity of creative economies. Empirically, it provides one of the most detailed accounts to date of how Nigerian musicians navigate digital monetisation, informal labour structures, and narrative advocacy in their pursuit of economic equity.

The findings indicate that music is a significant yet underrecognised component of Nigeria's poverty alleviation landscape. By revealing how musical labour generates income, shapes public consciousness, and supports community-based empowerment initiatives, the study underscores the need for policy frameworks that acknowledge and strengthen the developmental potential of the creative sector. These insights offer a foundation for integrating music more deliberately into national strategies for inclusive growth.

## **Conclusion**

This study examined how music functions as an economic, cultural, and narrative resource within Nigeria's creative economy. The findings show that musical labour contributes to income

generation, social mobility, and community advocacy, particularly for young people and informal creative workers. By integrating musical texts, artist perspectives, digital platform data, and institutional reports, the study demonstrates that music operates as a multidimensional form of livelihood and a channel for expressing socioeconomic realities.

The analysis highlights how symbolic assets, digital visibility, and creative labour intersect with structural inequalities, offering insight into the value of applying Cultural Capital Theory and the Political Economy of Culture to African creative contexts. These frameworks help explain how musicians convert cultural identity into economic opportunity while navigating infrastructural and policy constraints. The findings also show that digital platforms, narrative expression, and NGO led initiatives collectively support music's contribution to poverty alleviation.

Future research should explore rural music economies, track income patterns over time, and examine the experiences of women-led creative enterprises. Such work would deepen understanding of how music can be more effectively integrated into national strategies for inclusive development.

## **Recommendations**

- Strengthen national cultural policy frameworks by formally recognising music as a component of poverty-reduction strategy, also ensuring that creative labour is integrated into economic planning, youth development, and social-protection programmes.
- Expand digital-skills and monetisation training for emerging and informal musicians, particularly youth and women-led enterprises, to enhance their capacity to navigate streaming platforms, intellectual-property systems, and online revenue structures.
- Invest in community-based music infrastructure, including low-cost studios, performance spaces, and equipment-access schemes, to reduce structural barriers that limit participation in the creative economy.
- Support NGO-led and grassroots initiatives that demonstrate proven impact in skills development, mentorship, and livelihood creation, and scale these models through public-private partnerships.
- Embed music-for-development approaches in educational curricula, particularly within vocational and informal learning sectors, to align music education with employability, entrepreneurship, and community resilience.
- Promote gender-inclusive creative-industry policies that address disparities in access to capital, visibility, and cultural legitimacy for women-led music enterprises.
- Encourage longitudinal data collection on creative-industry earnings, digital engagement, and informal labour patterns to inform evidence-based policymaking and future research.

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