

PORT HARCOURT JOURNAL OF AFRICAN MUSICAL
ARTS AND THE HUMANITIES
Vol. 1 Issue:1 December, 2025

**A STUDY OF COPYRIGHT LAW AND PIRACY IN THE NIGERIAN
MUSIC BUSINESS**

Etukudo Udo Bassey

PhD Student, Department of Music,

University of Port Harcourt,

Email: etukudobassey@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper discusses piracy in Nigeria's music industry, with reference to copyright law and its application in tackling piracy from both theoretical and practical perspectives. It will highlight the applicable provisions of the Nigerian Copyright Act 2022 that grant holders exclusive rights to use, distribute, and reproduce their works. Piracy takes many forms, including unauthorised duplication, reproduction, and distribution of hardcopy compact discs, digital copies, and music files sold or distributed in both physical and online markets. These physical copies have primarily been found in the Alaba International Market; the online copies, on the other hand, mostly appear as unauthorised links used to download them illegally. It also adversely affects royalty streams and discourages investment in the music industry, resulting in annual losses of millions of naira. At the same time, there are practical issues with monitoring and enforcement activities by regulators such as the Nigerian Copyright Commission (NCC) and the limited impact of criminal sanctions on curbing piracy. There are also challenges associated with CMOs not functioning effectively as rights managers/licensors or rights collectors due to system- and market-based constraints. The existing Copyright Act 2022 has taken an appropriate direction, but it also faces issues with organisation and other social and economic factors that encourage piracy. At the same time, strict enforcement and regulation, publicity campaigns, education of musicians on their contractual rights, and modification to the fast-changing digital environment can help ensure the sustainability of musicians' livelihoods and the creative industries.

Keywords: Copyright Act 2022, piracy, contract law, intellectual Property (IP), collective management organisation (CMO)

Introduction

Despite Nigerian pop music's recent international successes, the industry faces legal and economic threats to the rights and income of its artists. Broken contracts, unclaimed royalties, and piracy run rampant, undercutting the success of the industry. While there have been significant strides in the Nigerian music industry, a pattern of unreliability in business contracts and weak enforcement of intellectual property rights persists. Contracts outline ownership of recordings, percentage of royalties, performances, and rights for online streaming platforms, but many artists, particularly new artists, are not well-versed in contract law and may enter into deals that do not fully protect their interests and rights. A lack of contract literacy is common and can lead to exploitation, unfair deals, and disagreements over payments. Piracy, aided by digitisation and mobile streaming, is the industry's greatest challenge. Pirated music is the most widely consumed music format in Nigeria, severely undercutting legitimate sales, streaming, and affecting both local and international investment and support. Enforcement has become more challenging as technology outpaces policy. It is important to consider whether the Copyright Act 2022 is sufficient to address these problems. The Act is a step in the right direction and an improvement over prior Nigerian intellectual property law, with specific mechanisms to address modern challenges like digital piracy and royalties. It also works to provide artists with a more equitable share of their music's revenue, an industry problem that has long plagued Nigerian music. However, it still faces the problem of being difficult to enforce, and a new form of piracy is on the rise with the advent of paid digital streaming services. The gradual decline in artists' revenue underscores the need for legislative reform. Interviews with industry professionals and copyright law experts suggest several themes. A lack of knowledge and understanding of contract law and copyright among musicians and other stakeholders in the industry. Weak enforcement results in a limited impact of existing laws. There is a need for improved data-

informed and more comprehensive policies to align with the best international standards. Recommendations include improved contract terms and templates for protecting the rights of artists and rights holders, enhanced anti-piracy enforcement measures supported by better technology and resources, and improved legal education within the creative industry. In conclusion, some of the most important steps the Nigerian music industry must take to continue its global success are improving artists' and rights holders' legal protections and contract literacy; implementing more comprehensive and digitally-informed piracy enforcement and deterrence; and ensuring that legal education and advocacy are a standard part of the industry. Improvements to contract law and enforcement, as well as enhanced piracy controls, can help ensure artists receive a fair wage for their work, thereby supporting continued investment in and diversification of Nigeria's creative industry. This research will have an impact on the legal and economic fields by shaping policy, business, and consumer behaviour in Nigerian music.

Background information and context

Nigerian music has gone from a beloved cultural phenomenon to a megatrend in the creative economy. It is a genre that oozes contagious grooves and rap flow. Nigeria's music industry is quickly becoming one of Africa's most potent and vibrant creative industries. Its industries create a number of genres, including Afrobeats, Fuji, Highlife, Juju, and Hip-Hop, among others. The country's cultural diversity is driven by its youth culture (Music of Nigeria, 2020; FMACCE | Music, 2021). The confluence of greater digital connectivity and the democratisation of access through streaming has afforded Nigerian artists with global visibility, recognition, accolades and access to international charts (Nigeria's Music Industry: Streaming Giant in the Making, 2024). Artists such as Burna Boy, Wizkid, Tiwa Savage, and Davido are testaments that the Nigerian music industry is still far from its peak. Afrobeats has

become a global phenomenon, bringing international reach and revenue to Nigerian music than ever before. Beyond increasing Nigeria's GDP, it is also influencing Nigeria's soft power and international clout (Akintoye, 2023). However, behind the veneer of this roaring success story is a somewhat brittle legal and structural edifice. A significant number of artists find themselves exposed and without the protection of an effective intellectual property regime or legally binding contracts. While the Nigerian Copyright Act (Cap C28, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004) exists, enforcement and implementation fall short of being an efficient mechanism (Imelda & Nwogu, 2015). The sector is also plagued by weak regulation, poorly resourced regulatory institutions, and piracy, which continuously robs artists of their much-needed earnings. Physical and Digital piracy has been rampant and well-established. The Nigeria Copyright Commission (NCC) has the task of enforcing copyrights but the agency has been lackadaisical when it comes to staffing, funding and public support. The amalgamation of these issues has made the music industry unsustainable, with piracy running unchecked. This problem is further compounded by the informal nature of the Nigerian entertainment industry, where documents are often "ignored, if not misinterpreted." As a result, piracy persists as a significant threat to the sustainability of Nigeria's music industry, since it is largely unchecked and unregulated. The other challenge compounding this situation is the fact that the entertainment business in Nigeria is largely informal, with many players turning a blind eye to and wilfully misunderstanding what the law requires of them. At the same time, the rampant distribution of exploitative music contracts is similarly cause for concern. It is not uncommon for young or emerging artists to enter into legally binding agreements with record labels, marketers and managers without first consulting with an attorney. These contracts often contain exploitative provisions, including, but not limited to, forfeiture of ownership rights, unbalanced royalty splits and onerous exclusivity periods. The combination of poor contract literacy and a general lack of contractually enforceable

industry-wide standards increases artists' vulnerability to exploitation and heightens the potential for conflict in music business relationships. In an attempt to curtail the piracy pandemic that had, over the years, held the country hostage, the Nigerian government passed the Copyright Act 2022. It was in a bid to achieve compliance with international copyright laws, as much as is practical in Nigeria. The Act also extends further provisions for the defence of intellectual property rights by making additional definitions of ownership and distribution of royalties. It also extended the scope of coverage to collective management organisations (CMOs). The Act also made provision for longer periods of protection and enhanced enforcement mechanisms. However, this should not be read as indicating that the Nigerian creative industry is free from copyright infringement, or that the new law will be immediately and effectively enforced. Lack of technical infrastructure, low legal literacy and even examples of institutionalised corruption have been noted as one of the challenges with the implementation of the Act. Positive legal developments, while being welcomed, have also seen the shadow of implementation problems looming over the potential of the system. Existing scholarship on entertainment law and intellectual property in Nigeria has acknowledged these structural and legal deficiencies. Yet, much of the foregoing remains compartmentalised and academic, with little empirical research on the lived experiences of Nigerian music stakeholders. The need for research to examine not just the laws but also their real-world effects on musicians, producers and entrepreneurs in the Nigerian music industry is therefore beginning to assume an increasing sense of urgency. In a similar manner, whereas there have been comparisons of global models for contracting, there are not many that have benchmarked our music industry law in Nigeria or attempted to map global best practices to the Nigerian situation.

Analysis of the Copyright Act 2022 and its merits and demerits

The Copyright Act 2022 is one of the most comprehensive pieces of legislation on the development of intellectual property rights in Nigeria. The statute not only offers a robust and modern legal framework that covers all aspects of creative works, but also provides international best practices. It is further drafted in accordance with international standards and protects literary, musical, and artistic works, audiovisual works, broadcasts, and sound recordings, as well as expressions of folklore. It also protects these diverse forms of creative expression, thereby recognising and valuing the cultural and artistic contributions present in the Nigerian context. One of the key features of the new Act is its responsiveness to the digital era. The Act acknowledges the challenges and dynamics of online content creation, digital piracy and unauthorised distribution. In response, it incorporates specific measures to address online infringements. These measures include the use of technological protection measures, anti-piracy provisions and online enforcement tools, such as notice-and-takedown procedures. The Act even authorises account suspension for repeat offenders. By doing so, the Act strengthens the enforcement of copyright in the digital environment. The Act has been commendable in striking a balance between protecting the interests of the creators and the larger interests of the public. The fair use exceptions, such as non-commercial use for private or personal use, research, education, criticism, and news reporting, provide an unencumbered flow of information, and leave room for schools and colleges, researchers, and journalists to carry on with their important work unfettered. These exceptions also protect the public's right to information. In making these exceptions, the Act lays bare its priorities to promote both creativity and the dissemination of knowledge. An important feature of the 2022 Act, in this regard, is that it also squares with international accessibility requirements, by allowing use of copyrighted works to create accessible formats for persons who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise print-disabled. This feature of the Act goes a long way in making culture and

knowledge accessible to all and in building a just and equitable society for all its citizens. In addition to the rights for creators, the 2022 Act also provides for rights and protection for performers. The performers are given moral rights as well as economic rights. Performers can now grant or refuse the public use of their performances and they can also be remunerated where their performances are used for commercial purposes, e.g. by broadcasters or at public events. These new provisions give formal recognition to performers as stakeholders in the creative economy. For the purpose of effective administration and fair remuneration, the Act provides for a legal framework for Collective Management Organisations (CMOs). These are legal entities recognised by law for the purposes of collective management of rights and collecting royalties on behalf of the owners. This framework alleviates the burden on individual artists and ensures fairer, more consistent income for rights holders. Enforcement remains a central pillar of the new copyright regime. The Act empowers the Nigerian Copyright Commission (NCC) to combat copyright infringement and impose penalties on copyright violators. The NCC is also expected to ensure that technology for anti-piracy tracking is provided. These enforcement provisions are significant in order to address the high piracy rate in Nigeria. For years, piracy has cost Nigerian musicians, writers, filmmakers, and other creative professionals income. The Copyright Act 2022 brings Nigerian copyright laws in line with several international treaties and conventions. This will promote international cooperation, boost investor confidence and increase protection for Nigerian works in other countries. The global framework of the copyrights acts positions Nigeria as a credible player in the international intellectual property (IP) space and opens the door for more comprehensive copyright diplomacy. Finally, the law extends the protection term from 50 years after the author's death (as it was previously) to 70 years after the author's death, for literary, artistic, and musical works. This gives creators as well as their

beneficiaries a more extended period of income security, encouraging further investment in intellectual work and creative production.

Evaluating the Limitations of Nigeria's Copyright Act 2022

It is important to note, however, that while the Copyright Act 2022 has its merits, it is not devoid of major demerits. The Nigerian Copyright Act 2022 has some demerits which can be discussed under ten key issues. First is the issue of vagueness which will be caused by some expressions contained in the Act, especially in Section 32 (4) (b) of the Act. Other issues with the Act have to do with its enforcement and a few of the specific provisions of the Act. Section 32 (4) (b) of the Act talks about the use of works in research, private study, criticism, review, or reporting of current events. In this section, the phrases 'amount and substantiality of the portion used' are vague and can lead to different interpretations by different users. As a result, this provision can lead to an influx of litigations into the judicial system, especially when a user of content is unable to determine what is allowed and what is not. The second major problem with the Nigerian Copyright Act 2022 is its length. This can be a challenge because only lawyers can interpret the Act due to its length and technical language. This can be a major problem in Nigeria because a large number of creators and right owners are unaware of their rights and the processes to obtain or protect these rights. This also means that most users of works are unaware of their boundaries as far as the use of these works are concerned. The third major issue with the Copyright Act 2022 is a general lack of awareness. Though there are a few references to awareness creation in the Act, there is no mention of copyright education, which is the primary tool for awareness creation and public enlightenment. As a result, without a formal introduction or education on the Act, many right owners and users will be left in the dark. A failure to achieve wide scale enlightenment on the Act will result in the number of issues. The Act will not achieve its

primary purpose of protection. Instead, many people will continue to infringe on copyright rules unknowingly or with limited knowledge of the law and its consequences. The lack of public enlightenment will be a major setback for the Nigerian Copyright Act 2022. The fourth major issue with the Nigerian Copyright Act 2022 has to do with its enforcement. For instance, Section 25 of the Nigerian Copyright Act 2022 empowers the NCC to enforce the Act. However, this agency has for a long time been hamstrung by issues such as a lack of funds, limited staff, and poor infrastructure. As a result, even with this empowerment, the NCC may not be able to effectively enforce the Nigerian Copyright Act 2022. This will also reduce public confidence in the Act, since the right owners will be left with no other option than to use the overcrowded Nigerian courts to enforce the provisions of the Act. The fifth major issue with the Nigerian Copyright Act 2022 has to do with the fact that the Act makes no provision for other types of traditional knowledge outside the scope of folklore. This is a huge demerit because it excludes a lot of traditional knowledge that are mostly collectively owned and not recorded. This is not to mention the other challenge of the law failing to account for other types of oral traditional knowledge that is neither folklore nor owned collectively. However, a provision for folklore was long overdue as the protection of traditional knowledge mostly referred to in the Act as folklore has been a major bone of contention in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. The sixth major demerit of the Nigerian Copyright Act 2022 is how it deals with copying in an educational environment. In essence, while the law allows for the copying of a work for educational purposes, this can only be up to 5% of the work, and it should be within any three-month period. This provision can be a major problem in a place like Nigeria where a lot of people that work in schools, as well as students themselves, may have issues in accessing copyright works in their entirety for teaching and learning purposes. This demerit will also have a huge impact on the country's educational sector as these people will be forced to access these materials from other means

as provided by law or outside the law. The seventh major demerit of the Nigerian Copyright Act 2022 has to do with the introduction of Technological Protection Measures (TPMs). While this does a lot to protect the rights of content owners and promote responsible content sharing, it can also have the opposite effect of limiting the use of content. This means that, in some cases, this may have adverse effects on the use of digital materials for purposes like research or software development. Another area where TPMs will have a major role to play is in the creation of materials to support persons with disabilities. As a result, the overzealous use of TPMs without considering the user may have a massive negative impact on Nigerian users of copyrighted materials. The eighth major issue with the Nigerian Copyright Act 2022 has to do with the penalties provided by the Act for copyright infringement. The penalty of N5,000,000 or 10 years imprisonment is rather high. This high level of penalty will discourage a lot of Nigerians who may want to access works in breach of the copyright law or are ignorant of the new Copyright Act 2022. The goal of copyright protection is to educate people on their rights and responsibilities as content owners and users. However, a harsh penalty will rather encourage people to go into hiding than to actually learn more about the new law. This means that there is a higher possibility of seeing a rise in the rate of copyright infringements if the law allows for this type of penalty. The ninth major issue with the Nigerian Copyright Act 2022 is that the law places a major burden on internet service providers and online platforms in Nigeria. The notice and takedown system and the prevention of subsequent infringement is a major thing for ISPs and online platforms to do. This will place a lot of burden on the ISPs as these provisions will require them to put up structures and systems that will require an equally large staff. This means that a lot of ISPs will be discouraged from operating in Nigeria. The tenth major demerit of the Nigerian Copyright Act 2022 is its exclusion of artistic works intended to be used for industrial designs from copyright. This section of the law is a major demerit as it goes against

the whole purpose of copyright protection. The exclusion of this area from copyright protection will deny a lot of artists and their works the full protection of the law. This will have a major negative impact on the industry.

Comparative Perspectives on Copyright Enforcement: Lessons for Nigeria

In the international context, Nigeria's Copyright Act 2022 has gained favourable comparison in legislative alignment. However, countries such as South Africa, the United Kingdom, and Germany have superior levels of enforcement and organisation of copyright law institutions. Notably, Nigeria lacks a tiered approach to enforcement, which allocates corresponding legal remedies to the degree of infringement, an aspect that lowers deterrence and certainty of outcome in law. By contrast, in the UK and Germany, in addition to EU directives, there are local statutory enhancements of enforcement in copyright law. The UK's Digital Economy Act provides for digital rights to be enforced more expeditiously through processes such as the notice-and-takedown system, statutory damages, and interlocutory injunctions. On the other hand, in Germany, for instance, it is reinforced with rigid rights management enforcement and an entire spectrum of statutory remedies that makes the infringement or use of these more predictable and swift to the courts, with that, providing creators and rights owners an assurance and a feeling of certainty when it comes to enforcement of these rules in the digital arena (Intellectual Property Counter-Infringement Strategy, 2022; Eickemeier, 2019). South Africa's legal framework is similarly more proactive. It provides for progressive penalties for recidivists and the criminalisation of the use or distribution of any devices that facilitate piracy. Such deterrence-based measures have been part of the country's public enforcement actions, demonstrating the integration of efforts against piracy with an education component on intellectual property (IIPA, 2021). Such cases demonstrate the need for measures to be aligned with both public participation and institutional capacity. Nigeria, on

paper, is not far behind international standards, but there is a significant implementation gap. The lack of digital takedown processes, institutional processes to support judicial efficiency, and the absence of statutory remedies have made the 2022 Act less valuable on the ground, and this gap can be closed. Nigeria could enhance its copyright law by incorporating enforcement mechanisms similar to those of Germany, South Africa and the UK. These approaches would bolster creative industry support and harmonise Nigeria's IP framework with global standards.

Nigeria's Legal Framework for Musical Copyright: Progress, Pitfalls, and Pathways Forward

The Nigerian music industry has expanded globally, but its copyright law framework has been inadequate in protecting and enforcing intellectual property. The Copyright Act 2004 (Cap C28) did create an intellectual property legal regime, but failed to offer sufficient enforcement. Piracy is rife within the industry, and artists often find it difficult to exercise their rights. The Copyright Act 2022 came into force in March 2023 to modernise the Nigerian copyright law. It has expanded the coverage to address digital copies and has formalised a takedown process for infringing content. Penalties for recurrent offenders have been instituted, with the minimum baseline penalty for individuals set at ₦1 million or a term of five years' imprisonment. The NCC, which is saddled with the responsibility of enforcing copyright, is hamstrung by poor resources, lack of training, low staffing, and corruption (Ochojila, 2023). Between 2011 and 2017, the NCC conducted anti-piracy raids against copyrighted materials, which resulted in the detention of suspects and seizure of pirated goods. However, this raid achieved only limited convictions that failed to serve as an effective deterrent. Digital piracy in the forms of illegal downloading, streaming, and file sharing costs the country an estimated ₦918 trillion in lost revenue each year (European

Commission, 2025). The effects are worse for emerging artists. In Enugu, there is a low social stigma against piracy, which further affects incentives and respect (Nnamani, 2015). Piracy is one issue, but another problem for musicians is vulnerability born of narrow legal literacy and standardised contracts. Artists often find themselves bound by contracts that entrench exclusivity arrangements or relinquish their rights entirely. Musicians sometimes forgo performance royalties and royalties earned from endorsements and sponsorships if they do not have any documentation or an understanding of creative ownership (Simeon & Nwankpa, 2020). Nigerian contract law provides a broad set of general principles on the subject, but offers no music-specific guidance (Copyright Act 2022).

Real-life cases have demonstrated that failures in legal awareness and regimes have adversely affected Nigerian music creators, including veterans. HRH Igwe Prof. Laz Ekwueme, a highly revered composer, has recently stated that he has not received royalties from his works for 3 decades, despite their frequent online and live performances. Similarly, Dr Amaegbe, a lecturer and pop musician, recently stated that he sold the rights to his song early in his career due to a lack of understanding of the legal issues involved. He was, however, well paid, and he bore the loss. Many others were not as fortunate. The case of *Ayo Bankole Jr. v. Ecobank Nigeria Plc* (Suit No: FHC/L/CS/217/2007) reveals both the gaps and occasional successes in Nigeria's enforcement environment. Bankole Jr composed music for a television advertisement, but Ecobank syndicated the advert worldwide without proper compensation. Bankole Jr was represented by Barrister Olumide Ekisola, who proved authorship by bringing sheet music to court, while Ecobank, Rosabel, and Miditone Ltd. couldn't. There was no formal agreement, and he was never an employee. So his claim was legal. Ecobank settled out of court and paid Bankole millions of naira. These cases make clear the value of documentation, legal advice, and clarity of organisation, an important set of contractual awareness and literacy that many artists are not familiar with. The problem of administering

exclusive rights equally underscores the importance of collective rights management. To ease the burden on individual creators and enable wider licensing, the Musical Copyright Society of Nigeria (MCSN) was approved by the NCC in April 2017 as a Collective Management Organisation (CMO) (NCC, 2017). MCSN is empowered to license, enforce, and collect royalties for musical, literary, and dramatic works across Nigeria and internationally. MCSN has also scored several remarkable victories in court. One such was its legal battle with Multichoice Nigeria, which had to pay an out-of-court settlement of ₦2.7 billion, in a suit in which a court awarded MCSN over ₦5 billion (Multichoice vs MCSN, 2018). Other high-profile litigation wins include MCSN v. Union Bank (Suit No. FHC/L/CS/268/2018) and MCSN v. First Bank of Nigeria PLC was transferred to the Lagos State High Court in (Suit No. ADR/105/2016) on the application of the Defendant, which later appealed a decision of the High to the Court of Appeal in (Appeal No. CA/L/653/2017), which advanced through multiple levels of adjudication before ending in successful settlements. They also demonstrate how organisational accountability is increasing, highlighting the value of obtaining legal representation and persisting in enforcement efforts. Although encouraging, structural reforms and wins through CMOs like MCSN face several stumbling blocks: enforcement is usually passive rather than proactive, licensing compliance is patchy at best, and the public's understanding of their rights is generally low. As Dr Amaegbe's experience demonstrates, artists are often willing to part with ownership of their works in exchange for an upfront payment simply because they have little choice. At the same time, several comparative case studies suggest that Nigeria could potentially look to other jurisdictions, such as South Africa, the UK, or Germany, for guidance. The Copyright Act 2022 provides automatic protection upon creation, a 70-year posthumous copyright term for literary, musical and artistic works, and enables a collection and legal support infrastructure to empower creators despite its shortcomings. However, as the Nigerian music industry continues to

develop, the Copyright law must be strengthened through stronger enforcement, cross-sector collaboration, and sustained public awareness efforts.

Conclusion

Reform in Nigeria's copyright regime has proven more achievable than its enforcement. Weaknesses in the current environment leave many artists vulnerable due to low contract literacy, lapses in documentation, and other exploitative loopholes, as well as a lack of institutional support. However, the system has also shown potential for effective reform. Positive outcomes of MCSN, case law, and other best practices in comparative law can and should be emulated to the best of Nigeria's ability. Coupled with education, stricter enforcement, and shared governance, Nigeria's copyright regime can and should leverage the country's large creative talent pool and one of the world's fastest-growing music markets.

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