

## Towards the development of a sustainable documentary film culture in Nigeria: A study of iRepresent (IREP) documentary film festival

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### Abstract

A myriad of challenges confront the documentary film genre in Nigeria. Some of these include inadequate funding, distribution, exhibition, audience/viewer reception and issues of ideology. Despite all these, documentary filmmakers in Nigeria have kept the documentary film genre alive. In recent times, however, some committed documentary filmmakers in Nigeria have established a platform where they are advancing the cause of the documentary film genre. The iRepresent (iREP) International Documentary Film Festival provides a stage for filmmakers to engage in constant conversations to improve the art and practice of documentary filmmaking. Film festivals have become vital avenues for networking among industry players, scholars, tourists and cinema audiences worldwide. This study examines the concept and activities of the iREP International Documentary Film Festival, intending to establish how it has provided a platform for the growth and sustainability of the documentary film culture in Nigeria. Using the Documentary (Film) theory and qualitative research method via in-depth (structured and unstructured) interviews, the study articulates the views of documentary film practitioners, film scholars and organisers of the film festival to interrogate the impact of iREP on the Nigerian documentary film landscape. The study concludes that in the last 12 years, the first international documentary film festival in Nigeria has not only engendered progressive conversation about the documentary film genre in Nigeria, but has created the enabling environment for the documentary film culture to thrive, survive and become a sustainable cinematic practice like the fiction film genre.

**Keywords:** Documentary Film, Film Festival, Film Culture, iREP, Sustainability

### 1. Introduction

The cinematic medium is famed to have evolved through the documentary film as it was the first film genre publicly exhibited by the Lumiere Brothers on March 22, 1895, in France (Latanzio, 2020). Similarly, the European colonialists brought film into Africa through instructional cinema, which scholars have essentially classified as documentary films (Obiaya, 2011). In Nigeria, the documentary film heralded the cinematic practice. Under what Ekwuazi (2001: 4) refers to as the colonial phase of motion picture evolution in Nigeria, where the emphasis was on the production, distribution and exhibition of documentary films that were made for “the political-economic imperative of fostering cohesion and orientation within the colonial framework” the documentary film began to set the pace for the film industry in Nigeria. In other words, the film industry was founded on the bricks, stones and mortar of the documentary film genre. The globally acclaimed success of the Nigerian film industry from available records hinges on fiction films. The documentary film appears to have taken the back seat, especially after the curtain fell on Nigeria's colonial and post-colonial eras of film development. Scholars and industry experts have attributed the near lack of visibility of the documentary film in Nigeria to factors such as inadequate funding, low commercial viability, and lack of structures and mechanisms for sustainable production, distribution and exhibition of documentary films, among others. Femi Shaka, a film scholar, argues that filmmaking is, first and foremost, a commercial business, and the filmmaker has the choice to engage in either commercial or social/art film. According to him, commercial cinema essentially deals with fiction/feature films, while social/art films have strong links with documentary films and filmmakers are free to decide on the film genre to produce as practitioners (Personal Communication July 22, 2022). This scenario therefore opens/provides a platform to examine how the documentary film genre could be sustainably practised in Nigeria, even in the face of various challenges. Firstly, if the genre can be clearly understood as a social cinematic genre distinct from

the mainstream commercial non-art and fiction films of Nollywood, perhaps the challenges it faces could be better appreciated and more defined steps could be taken to deal with such challenges.

In the last 12 years, a set of committed documentary filmmakers in Nigeria have remained faithful to the practice of documentary cinema and have indeed continued to further the ideals of the age-long philosophy of the documentary as the film of truth and actuality (Oklobia & Onwuliri, 2020) despite the challenges the genre grapples with. For instance, beyond the previously mentioned obstacles in the trajectory of the evolution of the documentary film in Nigeria, the issue of classification and censorship hangs over the genre. The National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) does not classify nor censor documentary films in Nigeria. According to Oklobia and Onwuliri (2020: 115), this situation may have conveniently birthed a group of documentary filmmakers in Nigeria that can be considered "underground/guerrilla documentary filmmakers". The existence of the iRepresent (iREP) International Documentary Film Festival, therefore, presents a window to study how a specialised film festival can cultivate an enabling environment or platform for a sustainable documentary film culture in Nigeria.

## **2. Conceptual clarifications: Film festivals**

The culture of film festivals has become institutionalised in the last 60-70 years from its modest beginnings in Europe. At the end of World War II, the socio-political, economic and artistic regeneration and rebuilding in Europe provided the impetus for the birth of film festivals (Ruling & Pedersen, 2010; Vallejo & Peirano, 2017). Even though the film industry in most parts of Europe then operated under a fragmented arrangement as against the more structured and articulated studio-centric film practice in America, film scholars attribute the emergence of the film festival culture strongly to the Europeans (Caves, 2000; Elsaesser, 2005; Harbord 2002). According to Turan (2002), the Cannes Film Festival was held for the first time in 1946; even though it was initially planned for September 1939, the German invasion of Poland forced the organisers to cancel it. However, a year after World War II, the Cannes film festival was held, which seemed to have heralded the emergence of others, such as the Berlin Film Festival in the 1950s.

However, Palis (2015), in tracing the origins of film festivals, pointed out that before the post-World War II emergence of Cannes, the fascist administration of Benito Mussolini had instituted the Venice Film Festival in 1932. The festival exposed Italian films internationally and legitimised Mussolini's government and his new concept of nationalism to the rest of the world. Film festivals have become an integral feature of a highly connected or globalised cinematic space. Industry experts estimate that about 3,500 film festivals are held each year globally, ranging from general to specific/specialised film festivals (Ruling & Pedersen, 2010). Similarly, Palis (2015) further observes that a global body, whose responsibilities include the accreditation of competitive, non-competitive and international film festivals, exists. The International Federation of Film Producers Associations (FIAPF) serves as a clearing house and a nexus in connecting and coordinating the various international film festivals worldwide and facilitating scholarly research into issues around film festivals as a cinematic phenomenon.

Film festivals, by their nature, speak to the gathering of cinematic stakeholders at a particular location and time. Lampel and Meyer (2008) refer to film festivals as events that help to configure the professional cinema field or space. They stress that film festivals help shape the development and growth of the film industry on a global scale or within a limited cinematic space. Furthermore, they posit that film festivals encourage the development of professions within the cinema industry, technologies, markets and industries. This trend is because people from different organisations with diverse purposes regularly congregate to examine trends, construct industry standards, showcase products and services, forge social networks, reward excellence, share information and transact business at film festivals. Ruling and Pedersen (2010: 5) describe this as "intricate mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion" where film professionals, media representatives, cultural policy actors, and the wider public interact.

A summary of the purpose, role or desirability of film festivals is captured by Vallejo and Peirano (2017: 2) by positing that "film festivals are certainly major players in the articulation of film canons, spaces for public debate, and places where different discourses about cinema are articulated". Reinforcing their position further, they argue that the roles or desirability of film festivals fall within the following sub-themes: 1) Arenas of emergence 2) Field configuring events 3) Ecologies of learning and 4) Gatekeeping role and entry points for new players in the field. Recently, experts have developed methodologies/strategies for studying, researching, categorising and rating film festivals. According to Vallejo and Peirano (2017: 3), research in film festivals has intensified since the mid-2000 following the pioneering efforts of Bill Nichols in 1994, which captured film festivals as avenues of "cultural translation". Most film festivals are similar in terms of the manner they are structured and executed. For instance, they include various activities such as competitions, master classes, workshops, screenings, discussion sessions, awards, and celebrity and media events.

However, a set of factors characterise film festivals that enable their categorisation, rating, accreditation and general acceptance. This development is against the backdrop that most film festivals claim to be international. Such factors include **\*Type**, which relates either to the festival's genre or scope (domestic or international). **\*Venue** deals with the location, usually the city that hosts the festival. **\*Year**- when the festival started. **\*Size** (Number of films shown, visitor count and organising budget). **\*Outreach**- Most film festivals are international events as they supposedly cater to both local and foreign audiences, cineastes and guests. **\*Demographics** (Gender, age, communities- LGBT, Queer films). **\*Genre**- Some film festivals are genre-specific, for instance, the International Documentary Film Festival (IDF), Amsterdam Documentary Film Festival and iREP Documentary Film Festival. They are specialised or thematic film festivals (documentaries). Similarly, others such as animation, short films, experimental cinema, student films and fantasy film festivals deal with what de Valck (2016: 4) refers to as "all that we cannot experience in the real world".

Furthermore, horror, science fiction, suspense and action films, activist films, human rights film festivals, radical or subversive film festivals, disability film festivals, and Eco or green film festivals fall under this category. From the foundation of the concept of film festivals, it is clear that filmmakers, the media, innovators, investors, cultural policy actors and the cinema-consuming audience congregate to examine new trends, share ideas, learn, build networks, and transact business at film festivals.

## **2.1. Documentary film festival**

As stated earlier, some film festivals are genre-specific. It means that such film festivals focus on a particular cinematic genre such as the documentary film. Even though research studies on film festivals have recently gained traction, very limited works have been done on genre-specific festivals especially the documentary film genre (Davies 2016; Vallejo & Winton, 2020). In the last three to four decades, documentary film festivals have become institutionalized features of the global film festival circuit. Historically speaking, the documentary film festival has evolved over four significant periods spanning the 1940s to the 1960s, 1970s to 1980s, 1990s to year 2000 and 2000 to the present. These eras are characterised by certain needs and movements within the global cinematic space. According to Vallejo (2020: 78), the first era is linked to “when the documentary had a significant presence at major film festivals, and the first festivals specializing in the documentary were created as showcases for minor film genres”. The second era/phase witnessed the emergence of specialized events informed by social movements and political uprisings. The third and fourth phases were marked by the creation of professional events that involved industry activities within the film festival programming and the eventual proliferation of documentary film festivals across the globe driven by technological changes and digitization respectively.

According to Vallejo (2020) about 131 documentary film festivals exist across the globe with 16 of them domiciled in Africa. For instance, the Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Film Festival is rated the largest and most prestigious in Canada and North America while the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) is the most prestigious documentary film festival in Europe and the largest in the world (Raimanova 2020). Specifically, IDFA aims to provide a unique platform to promote different voices and to change the documentary film practice from within. In recent times, the organizers began to emphasise the participation of female filmmakers to the extent that 50% of film entries and other new media projects are given to women and underrepresented regions and groups. Similarly, the competitions within the festival enjoy 50% female jurors from across the world. Other landmark features of IDFA according to Raimanova (2020) include the IDFA co-financing and coproduction market forum where filmmakers and producers pitch their film projects to financiers. Under the “Docs for Sale” initiative, the festival provides the opportunity where new documentary films are on offer to programmers and distributors. IDFA also supports documentary filmmakers and documentary projects in developing countries through the IDFA Bertha Fund. The Bertha Fund initiative provided funding for the 2014 study on the state of the documentary film in Africa which culminated in the proposed African Documentary Film Fund (Jedlowski, 2014).

The proliferation of documentary film festivals across the world is indicative of the fact that through their existence and activities, a strong and viable culture of sustainable creativity has been engendered. Similarly, the 16 documentary film festivals domiciled in Africa have strong attachments through collaborations, exchange programmes, professional, training, endorsements and other commercial/economic relationships with many other documentary or open-genre film festivals from other continents. This development is supporting the building of a creative ecosystem capable of institutionalizing a vibrant documentary film practice across Africa. The iREP International Documentary Film Festival, which holds annually in Lagos, Nigeria, offers, therefore, an excellent opportunity to further examine how such a genre-specific film festival can entrench a sustainable documentary film culture in Nigeria, which is the focus of this current study and the gap that the study seeks to fill.

## **2.2. Sustainability**

For the current study, the concept of sustainability will be limited to the media ecosystem. In the cinema and broadcast industry, sustainability refers to the ability to maintain or support a process continuously over time. However, as it has become popular in the business and policy contexts, sustainability seeks to stop the depletion of natural or physical resources to ensure that they will remain available for the long term (Mollenkamp, 2022). Sustainability is often divided into three core concepts: Economic, Environmental, and Social. A 2012 independent research report by Olsberg SPI, a UK-based international strategy consultancy outfit sponsored by Film iVast, Pact and the Swedish Film Institute, establishes a framework for measuring the sustainability of any film industry using data from several countries. The report examines sustainability as it applies to the film industry from two perspectives. Firstly, along the lines of what it describes as an ‘investment ready’ business entity (Film Company) that presents a sound financial track record with potential for growth to attract investment(s) in the form of equity or debt.

According to the report, the second parameter is the ‘maintained stability’ index, which refers to the ability of film business to supply high-quality films to the market regularly through the sustenance of public subsidy support or commercial returns. This format speaks of creating a niche audience by the film industry and includes films outside the mainstream cinema, such as cultural productions and social/art films. Broadly speaking, the film industry consists of a chain of activities, processes and professional groups that work together to deliver film as a cultural good/product. Other essential factors in the film industry sustainability discourse include the consuming public, the business/corporate

community, cultural policy actors, government and civil society or the non-profit actors. Mollenkamp (2022) argues that an aggregate of the earlier highlighted stakeholders' contributions determines the creative industry's sustainability or otherwise. Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry, has been developing along an organic trajectory in the last thirty years. To this end, the various components that constitute the film industry must develop the synergy that will sustain the consistent flow of individual work and creative activities in union with other commercial considerations that keep the industry healthy and alive.

### 2.3. Documentary film culture

The concept of a documentary film culture may not have universally established parameters to judge or define it. However, it may not be too far from the totality of the factors that operate within a given cinematic space as it affects the documentary film genre. In other words, the consistent set of practices that constitute the media ecosystem surrounding the production, distribution, exhibition, consumption, critical appreciation, and general economics of the documentary film genre speaks to its culture. Experts tend to adopt the media ecology approach in studying documentary film cultures with a focus on funding, production, distribution and consumption while exploring the relationships between these factors and other mass media systems within specific sociopolitical environments (Sills-Jones & Kaapa nd). Further investigations provide the space for exploring the development of documentary film cultures in the contemporary context, thus encouraging new ways of understanding documentary films or practices as part of other, broader systems of cultural production.

As previously stated, the documentary film community in Nigeria appears to be following the development model of the mainstream feature film industry. The organic development model of Nollywood seems to be influencing the documentary space, as new trends that explore specific themes or production practices, such as new wave documentaries, environmentalism, shared technological platforms, and documentary films that incorporate emerging digital distribution platforms. A fast-developing documentary film culture in Nigeria is evident in the diverse narratives Nigerian documentary filmmakers are pushing through their stories. During the colonial and post-colonial eras, the documentary film practice projected stories that were government-centred. However, contemporary documentary filmmakers appear to have democratised the practice by moving it away from the near domination of public institutions. From the typical newsreel and government propaganda documentaries, documentary films in Nigeria are exploring diverse storylines that deal with the core issues that affect the average Nigerian, from arts, politics, climate change, lifestyle, and tourism to advocacy issues. Technology has undoubtedly impacted the emerging documentary film culture in Nigeria to the extent that access to affordable digital equipment for production, distribution, exhibition, consumption and critical appreciation is deepening the effects of the genre. The institutionalisation of film festivals, especially genre-specific ones like iREP, is the icing on the cake for the documentary film in Nigeria.

### 2.4. Theoretical framework

The documentary film theory revolves around the essays/thoughts of several film scholars. The crystallisation of the theory significantly hinges on the seminal works of Bill Nichols, explored in three volumes. Stollery (2017) examines the foundational efforts of John Grierson in his 'First Principles of Documentary' postulations, wherein he defined documentary film as the "creative treatment of actuality" and attempted to provide some classifications along the lines of style and type as well as the history of the documentary film. According to Wolfe (2017), the writings of Bill Nichols have brought a contemporary dimension to the theoretical postulations on documentary film. The depth of his works on the subject of the documentary film provided a historical scope and conceptual design that have diligently established a mapping of typology for the genre.

Nichols developed and expanded the typologies into six distinct areas that have become generally known by scholars and practitioners as documentary modes. The first one is the **Poetic documentary mode** which debuted in the 1920s. The mode was an attempt by mostly amateur filmmakers to reassemble "fragments of the world poetically" (Nichols, 2001, p.138). In other words, the poetic documentary mode could be described as audiovisual poetry, which tended to reflect the abstract. The second is the **Expository documentary mode** which was dominant in the 1920s as well. It is credited with the potency for directly addressing issues in the actual historical world designed to be didactic because it is expected to inform, instruct and teach the audience. Nichols submits that the **Observational documentary mode** of the 1960s introduced a new approach to the documentary film genre since it deemphasised commentary and reenactment. It is intentionally inclined towards observing events as they unfold, as little or no attention is given to history or context. Similarly, in the 1960s, the **Participatory mode**, which relies heavily on interviews and interactions with the subject and the profuse application of archival footage as a link to history, was introduced. However, critics have argued that the mode is too dependent on witnesses, very intrusive and indulges history a great deal to the extent that it compromises current vital perspectives of the subject or story.

Further in his postulations, Nichols (2001) registers the **Reflexive mode** of the 1980s as a radical form of the documentary film, which questions the conventions in other modes such as realism, truth, representation and detachment/barrier between the filmmaker and his subjects. It uses reenactments, acting and make-up and involves the audience in the filmmaking process such as decisions regarding the representation of history. The objective of the reflexive mode is to create a consciousness in the audience that it is watching a film and not a real-life event and, therefore, need not suspend disbelief. The filmmaking process is usually included in the film. The **Performative**

**documentary** is closer to the avant-garde film because it addresses the audience "emotionally and expressively" instead of presenting a factually objective world. It raises questions about what constitutes knowledge as it emphasises subjectivity over and above objectivity. In summary, the documentary film theory presents the six modes of the documentary as templates through which filmmakers can produce the documentary film genre, consumed by the audience, appraised by critics and intellectually investigated by scholars.

### **3. Methodology**

The qualitative research methodology was used for the study, where in-depth structured and unstructured interviews with critical stakeholders- organisers of the film festival under examination, film producers, scholars and participants at the iREP film festival were carried out. Similarly, physical and virtual field observation of proceedings, discussions and screening sessions, master classes and award ceremonies at the last three editions (one virtual) of the film festival under study was equally adopted and the critical study of the available corpus of scholarly works in the research domain.

### **4. iRepresent (IREP) international documentary film festival**

The iRepresent (IREP) International Documentary Film Festival is the first documentary film festival in Nigeria, and indeed sub-Saharan Africa was founded by three committed creatives, Femi Odugbemi, Jahman Anikulapo and Makin Soyinka, in 2011. The trio was inspired by the Real Life Film Festival organised by the New York University, Ghana Campus. They decided to create a documentary film festival that they would consciously promote. According to Femi Odugbemi, the Executive Director, iREP is founded on the vision of a foundational and thematic framework of Africa in self-conversation. The more profound interpretation of this vision is to empower African Storytellers and their stories through documenting and archiving (cureting) contemporary narratives of issues as a powerful tool for the attainment of freedom of speech and representative democracy. Furthermore, iREP, by its vision, seeks to provide documentary filmmakers with the opportunities to say, "I represent my story, my rights, my viewpoint, my culture" (Femi Odugbemi, personal communication 27/9/22).

### **5. Modus operandi**

iREP International Documentary Film Festival began in 2011. It is administered by a board headed by Awam Amkpa, with Femi Odugbemi as the Executive Director. From an initial audience count of 70 in 2011, it has grown to 4,000 by March 2022. The genre-specific festival is usually staged by the third week of March every year and seems to have found a permanent home at Freedom Park on Broad Street Lagos Island ([www.irepfilmfestival.com](http://www.irepfilmfestival.com)). Over 200 documentary film entries are received for the festival annually, but not more than 80 eventually make it to the final list for screening. All submitted films must reflect the African experience, suggesting that the subject matter must address or celebrate African issues. Films not shot in English must have Standard English subtitles to qualify with a synopsis of not more than 450 words. Similarly, the filmmaker must own the copyright of the film with all other relevant information about the film duly supplied.

The festival follows structured thematic screenings across venues with a producers' round table where selected producers pitch ideas that are discussed, which may lead to the establishment of collaborations. Odugbemi describes the panel discussion sessions, master classes and other presentations during the festival as avenues through which "We create conversations among filmmakers" (Personal communication 27/9/22). It is pertinent to note that for 12 years, the festival has been driven by the concept of volunteerism. As stated earlier elsewhere, the culture of volunteerism is a major feature at the Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Film Festival (Davies 2016) where volunteers provide specialized ticket sales services among other functions. At iREP, this trend has effectively addressed the challenge of inadequate funding as services such as rentals (venue, setting and equipment) are provided pro bono. According to Odugbemi, corporate bodies, creative entrepreneurs, media houses, young filmmakers, students of tertiary institutions and interns numbering over 300 forms the workforce for the festival who serve as volunteers from planning to actual execution.

iREP has become a global platform as it attracts documentary films from all over the world while simultaneously extending Nigerian documentary films to the rest of the world. In other words, the cureting concept of iREP is to bring to Nigeria documentary films from all over the world in their different styles, cultures and contemporary issues. For instance, over the period of three years, (2019-2021), a number of notable documentary films graced the iREP screens. James Amuta's *Nightfall in Lagos* (2017), Daniel Etim Effiong's *Skin* (2019) and Molatelo Mainetje's *When Babies Don't come* (2018), were outstanding at the 2019 edition. In 2020 when the festival held virtually due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the following films drew significant attention: *Journey of an African Colony* (2020) by Supo Shasore, *Uncovered* (2019) by Suve Sandra Osunwa and *Nigeria's Lost Generation* (2019) directed by Charlie Luckock. Similarly, the 2021 edition of the festival with the theme "Africa in Self Conversation" featured films such as *Born Great* (2019) directed by Chibuzo Mobis, *Curse of an african Woman* (2019) by Jumoke Oluade, *Freedom Isn't Free* (2019), *High Young and Addicted* (2019) directed by Martin Jansen and Francis Njanjo Matute respectively. In furtherance of the vision of iREP, the film festival is aimed to provide a platform for training young documentary filmmakers in line with the organic developmental trend of Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry. Odugbemi insists that the documentary film genre everywhere in the world is an intrinsic part of the domestic film industry.

Consequently, since Nollywood evolved through an organic growth model, the documentary film genre needs to be deliberately organised to thrive and become sustainable along a similar trajectory.

Furthermore, iREP provides a platform for the screening, broadcast and distribution of Nigerian, African and documentary films from other climes. For instance, MultiChoice provides a desk staffed by Channel Directors and Commissioning Editors that could immediately license already completed documentary films or commission new ones. iREP enjoys a wide range of partnerships with other film festivals across the globe, for instance, the Cape Town Film Festival, South Africa, the Munich Film Festival, Germany and Africa World Documentary Film Festival. Locally, iREP collaborates with other stakeholders within the creative industry, mass media, academia and corporate Nigeria to guarantee a seamless, cost-effective and impactful film festival. Tertiary and film institutions such as the University of Lagos, Lagos State University, University of Port Harcourt, PEFTI Film Institute, Orange Academy and individual filmmakers provide technical, financial, skilled labour, material and other necessary support to power iREP.

## **6. Gains and challenges**

Despite the provision of free services, venue and equipment for the festival's hosting, the organisers can still do with more financial support to cater to the expansion and furtherance of the festival towards attaining its overall objectives. However, the Executive Director is convinced that in the last 12 years, iREP has made significant gains, especially in the following areas: 1) Development of the spirit and practice of volunteerism within the creative industry. The founders as well as members of the Board of iREP serve as volunteers, and the entire workforce that powers the film festivals provides services as volunteers. Over 300 persons, including students of tertiary institutions, film schools and academies, professional and semi-professional personnel in the creative industry, and mentees in the film industry, constitute the workforce of the film festival. Over the years, corporate bodies and private individuals have provided free services, equipment, venues and other critical resources needed to host, curate and administer iREP. 2) Creation of an audience base of young people from tertiary institutions and the creative industry generally. The young creatives develop themselves in the art, practice and appreciation of documentary film through the mentorship and exchange programmes established between iREP and other international film festivals. From a modest audience count of 70 in 2011, the last festival recorded 4000 persons in attendance. 3) Increased consciousness about the documentary film genre in the most professional way due to the involvement of stakeholders from across the world. For instance, iREP holds documentary film screenings for young creatives who have organised and curated the screenings every third Monday of the month in the last three years. 4) The iREP film festival has created a platform for solid networking and collaborations among creatives and corporate bodies with the domestic and international film circuit. It promotes the exchange of ideas and establishment of mentorship opportunities as experienced Nigerian filmmakers and their foreign counterparts assemble to participate in the various activities marking the film festival. 5) Funding opportunities now exist as iREP provides avenues for grants and other forms of funding through organisations such as the British Council, MacArthur Foundation, Goethe Institute, and MultiChoice that collaborate and support the film festival. As a result, documentary filmmakers can access grants and funding for their individual and group projects.

## **7. Impact on documentary film culture in Nigeria**

Looking at the documentary film space in Nigeria in the last 12 years, the impact of the iREP International Documentary Film Festival is likely to implicate several positives. For instance, as the first genre-specific (documentary) film festival in Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa, iREP has become the signature tune of documentary film practice in Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa. Nigerian films are better recognised due to the efforts of iREP in building alliances, networks and partnerships. Exchange programmes and agreements with other film festivals and industries worldwide now exist for graduates of the iREP mentorship initiative, enabling them to work with their foreign counterparts. Similarly, the collaboration between iREP and the School of Media and Communication at Pan Atlantic University, Lagos, is leading to the development of a curriculum for teaching documentary film courses. Equally, dedicated documentary broadcast channels are being created and will soon be launched by MultiChoice and Netflix for Nigerian and African documentary films due mainly to new collaborations forged on the platform of iREP.

Other areas where the impact of the iREP film festival is being felt include the institutionalisation of awards for the documentary film genre in all film awards in Nigeria. It is also believed that iREP has created a high public profile for the documentary film genre through effective media engagements, which led to higher public awareness about the documentary film in Nigeria. iREP has revolutionised documentary film in Nigeria that they are now showing in cinemas as against the previous practice where it remained in the archives after either private viewing or broadcast on television. For instance, the 2022 festival's opening film *'President'* by Camilla Nielsson made it to the cinemas in Lagos after the festival.

Against the erroneous view that documentary films are not marketable, iREP has created what Odugbemi refers to as "a documentary ecosystem" which provides all necessary professional inputs or platforms towards making the film genre a sustainable and viable cinematic form in Nigeria. He argues that through training, awareness creation and networking among critical stakeholders worldwide, the documentary film space in Nigeria is ready to receive investments that will make it compete favourably with the fiction film genre. He stresses that iREP has successfully retrieved the documentary film practice from institutions and placed it in the hands of committed filmmakers. This position may not be too far from reality because, in 2018, Odugbemi, the founding Executive Director of iREP, became

the first Nigerian to be appointed to the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences (AMPAS)- of the Oscars. The appointment implies that he is a voting member of the world-renowned jury for the Oscars. Undoubtedly, this is an excellent feat, as no Nigerian filmmaker has held that position. Similarly, he was elected in September 2022 as a member of the International Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, organisers of the New York-based International Emmy Awards and the International Emmy Kids Awards. Both positions confer on Odugbemi the right to vote in the Oscars and Emmy.

It is important to note that all the achievements and impact factors so far recorded by iREP align with those of other documentary film festivals previously examined. IDFA for instance has developed a global network that drives chains of activities in the documentary film industry across the continents. From the provision of platforms for training and retraining among creatives, stimulation and sustenance of viable business models and rewarding of excellence around the documentary film circuit, the documentary film genre, is significantly establishing itself as a financially viable cinematic practice.

## 8. Conclusion

Across the world, the film festival especially the documentary has evolved into a phenomenon that shapes, promotes, regulates, rewards and provides a strong impetus for the sustainability of the cinematic culture. Genre-specific film festivals cater to the needs of a particular film genre, just like the iRepresent (iREP) International Documentary Film Festival in Nigeria. The documentary film genre in Nigeria has had a long history of evolution into a cinematic genre of repute. The establishment of iREP has, in the last 12 years, enthroned a platform that has innovatively laboured to put the documentary film genre in good light through constant conversation among filmmakers, scholars, and the business community within and outside Nigeria. Just like other documentary film festivals across the world that began to evolve 40-50 years ago and today have developed structures of creativity and environment that are able to support continuously, their advancement and sustenance of the documentary cinematic culture, iREP has commenced a similar process in Nigeria. The significant achievements of iREP have created a technically and professionally ready ecosystem for investments to ensure that the documentary film genre transforms into a sustainable cinematic practice in Nigeria. This development implies that the genre will be able to generate funding to maintain a functionally influential storytelling culture that impacts society, is economically viable and globally relevant.

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