

## **Film Festivals in Nigeria: Behind the Scenes of a Grandeur Celebration**

**Ambrose Oroboh Uchenunu, Ph.D.<sup>1</sup> and Shaibu Hussein, Ph.D.<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Arts,  
University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria  
Email: uchenunua@yahoo.com

<sup>2</sup>Department of Mass Communication,  
Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Lagos, Akoka, Nigeria  
Email: igalaman@yahoo.com

### **Abstract**

Film festivals in Nigeria have not just grown from merely providing a rendezvous for filmmakers, critics and movie buffs, but more importantly an avenue for film professionals to become established in the chain of global film cultures since the 2000s. Nigeria boasts of a number of film festivals among the vast number of festivals ongoing in different parts of the world. Beyond the grandeur celebration, however, the role the festivals play in promoting and enhancing the local industry and impacting on the socio-economic life of the host cities has not been well established. Using the notable Zuma International Film Festival, Abuja International Film Festival, and the African International Film Festival as case studies, this article examines the role of film festivals in the socio-economic development of the film industry and the host cities. Methodologically, the paper relies on in-depth interviews of festival managers, selected festival goers and Nollywood professionals to look into the benefits of film festivals. This elicits the contribution of Nigeria film festivals to the development of Nollywood filmmakers by providing them the opportunity to showcase their works, network, and update their knowledge and trends in the film industry, besides employment opportunities and revenue generation brought to host communities. We recommended that for film festivals to continue to play their roles in the local industry, they should be recognised and supported for their intrinsic socio-economic value to the host cities and the industry, but not used just as field-configuring events.

**Keywords:** Film festival, Nollywood, Film managers, Festival goers, Movie industry.

### **Introduction**

Generally, festivals could be defined as an expressive way to celebrate glorious heritage, culture, traditions and achievements. They are meant to relive special moments and emotions in human lives. They play important roles, and add value to the social lives of individuals in society. In their different forms, they take us away from our mundane lives, by inspiring us and reminding us of the important things and moments in life. One popular genre of world festivals is the film festival, and these have become a growing phenomenon over the last seventy years. They are interesting social phenomena that have grown from merely providing the avenue for film professionals to showcase their works, thus becoming a platform for the filmmakers and enthusiasts to have unique experiences. It has also become a key networking ground for all film industry professionals and an established field and vital links in the chain of global film cultures (C. Ekejimbe, personal communication, August 12, 2018).

Film festivals provide a ready audience where filmmakers and distributors can promote their films before their commercial release. Film festivals also tend to mark what (Ajaere, 2019) described as the conception of new relationships including meeting new contacts, following up on contacts and nurturing existing relationships. Usually attended by filmmakers, film enthusiasts, buyers, sale agents, mainstream critics and the press, the festivals have also served as launch pads for new talents to showcase their shorts, and features. As the festivals opens a market for films, acquisition executives and talent scouts rely on choices made by festival programmers to take effective decisions from the vast array of films showcased.

Film festivals have proved to be very useful and brilliant platforms for generating publicity. They have also emerged as valuable public relations (PR) tools, especially for filmmakers desirous of launching a film ahead of its theatrical release. Ademiju-Bepo noted that film festivals are structures and platforms that have helped the local industry to grow. He cites the Festival of Pan African Cinema and Television of Ouagadougou (FESPACO) which was created by the Federation of Pan African Cineaste (FEPACI), in 1969, as an example of one film festival that have served the purpose of celebrating African cinematic heritage, in addition to focusing

attention on the promotion of African film industries in terms of production, distribution and exhibitions (D. Ademiju-Bepo, personal communication, March 22, 2020). There are numerous film festivals in different parts of the world currently, which include: Cannes International Film Festival, Berlin International Film Festival, Sundance International Film Festival, Rotterdam International Film Festival, Venice International Film Festival and Toronto International Film Festival. These festivals among many others have over the years built a strong reputation based on their programming. Chris Ekejimbe observed that these festivals are uniquely presented and programmed in a manner that usually distinguishes one festival from another, by their budget, focus of the festival and emphasis on competition (Ekejimbe, 2018).

In Nigeria, film festivals are becoming interesting social phenomena. From the pioneering Abuja International Film Festival (AIFF), to Zuma International Film Festival (ZIFF) (initially Nigerian Film Festival (NFF), to the Jos International Film Festival, the Uyo International Theatre and Film Festival, In short International Film Festival and the African International Film Festival (AFRIFF) domiciled in Nigeria, their numbers have continued to grow in the last two decades, each established to fulfil either cultural or commercial purposes or both. Indeed, with the coming of age of Nollywood, the need to have a purposeful film festival cannot be over emphasized. With the proliferation of film festivals in different parts of Nigeria, festival goers perceived that some of these festivals are hosted to score personal or political points when indeed they should exist to enhance the socio-cultural and political development of the hosting communities. Hence, this article examines the purpose and status of film festivals in the development of Nollywood. It is also aimed at examining how the selected festivals inscribe themselves into the context of their localities and specific contributions creativity and unity in the profession. The study is guided by three research objectives, namely, the status and purpose of the selected film festivals; how the selected film festivals impact on the host community; and what specific contributions the selected festivals have on the development of Nollywood.

### **Film Festivals as Field-Configuring Events**

There is no universally acceptable or agreed definition of a film festival. When scholars and practitioners define it, they often appeal

to an accepted understanding, rather than a formalized definition that identifies its characteristics. One of the most referenced definition of a film festival is the definition cited in Fischer (2009) which succinctly defines a film festival as an organised, extended presentation of films in one or more cinemas or screening venues, usually in a single city or region. This definition merely describes film showcase, which is one of the main activity that takes place during a film festival.

Usually an annual event, film festivals have moved beyond their traditional roles as gate-keepers in the art of cinema and have ventured into a new, international field of transactions in film co-production, investment, promotion and exhibition (Davis & Yeh, 2008, p.140). Large film festivals such as Cannes, Venice, Toronto, Sundance and Berlin have instituted film markets and have provided industry platforms where stakeholders- filmmakers, festivalgoers (mostly film buffs and enthusiast who attend festivals to watch films and catch up with their stars), buyers, sellers, agents and the likes converge to have a stake in investing and or buying films as well to support their country or region filmmaking. This position is supported by Ajaere who asserted that film festivals have in recent time offered stakeholders the opportunity to sell films at the level of pre-production, production and post-production initiatives. Ajaere further claims that at the level of pre-production seminars, panel discussions, residencies and training initiatives are held for stakeholders while at the phases of production and post-production, stakeholders participate in pitching sessions, film markets, co-production and post production meetings (Ajaere, 2019).

Generally, film festivals are vital links in the chain of global film culture. They are seen as a specific type of events and award ceremonies, operating as leading events establishing the reputation of film professionals and as a rendezvous for the film industry, mediating between art and business (Davis & Yeh, 2008). Also, Hope Obioma Opara pointed out that film festivals appear to constitute a well-established field in itself with a quite crystallized structure. He noted that in countries with a tradition in the film industry, cities with film festivals have been present for the last six decades or more (e.g. Venice in Italy, Cannes in France and Berlin in Germany) and specialization among festivals has been an emerging feature profiling festivals on the basis of the participating movies, directors and actors. (O.H. Opara, personal communication, March 14, 2020).

Although, it is not exactly clear how many film festivals exist today on a global basis, but (Jordanova, 2015, p.4) estimated film festivals to be over 3500. Also, (Tamara 2016) espoused that traditional classifications of film festivals include a category for the business type of festival—or the festival with a business agenda and then the audience or a festival that has a geopolitical agenda. He explains that the quintessential business festival is Cannes, while the festivals with business agenda include the Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale), Venice International Film Festival (IFF), and the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF).

Jordanova (2013, p.10) opines that business type of festival is so excessively industry oriented, with a barrage of industry events programmed on the sidewalks of film showcase. On the other hand, festivals with business agenda are festivals that have built up markets and industry networking forums over the years. According to (Jordanova, p.4), quite a number of festivals have adopted the 'business agenda' model as evident in the fact that most film festivals do not only show films, but also engage with film production, training, knowledge development, pitching and distribution. Organisers of the festival have been capitalizing on the constellation of filmmakers and enthusiasts to host talent development programmes such as the Berlinale talent programme dubbed 'Talent Campus' and to provide the forum for interpersonal encounters and negotiations between companies and creative. Indeed, film festivals are fast becoming platforms where participants (filmmakers and festivalgoers) take part in many other aspects—production financing, networking, marketing and distribution, outside traditional exhibitions. Besides the foregoing advantages, film festivals provide strong sales platforms and offer branding opportunities to sponsors in addition to numerous benefits ranging from job creation, multiple trading opportunities, international and domestic tourism income, social cohesion, youth empowerment, recreation and playing a positive ambassadorial role for the country (British Council, 2016). It can be deduced from the foregoing that film festivals are primarily organised to:

- a. support new films, and give them the best possible launch platform;
- b. provide filmmakers with broad and engaged audiences;

- c. provide the places and events where cinema and the moving image can be elevated and celebrated in all its guises and where retrospective titles can be honoured and rediscovered;
- d. provide places of discovery and ritual, places where new filmmakers can reveal their work to world and where film and cinema can be explored and consumed by audiences of all ages and interests;
- e. provide venues where discussions around movies and film industry can be had and plans for the future can be forged;
- f. widen the range and selection of films on silver screens;
- g. provide an alternative distribution channel for non-commercial films;
- h. develop the creative industry by providing skills and talent development, finance and a platform for artistic appreciation;
- i. provide clear socio-economic benefits to host cities; and
- j. afford new talents the platform and environment to meet up with senior colleagues, investors in the profession, and people of like minds.

Indeed, Stringer captured the importance of film festival to any society succinctly when he observed that the essence of national festivals is significant on regional, national and pan-national levels as it bring visitors to cities, revenue to national film industries and national film culture into the world cinema system (Stringer, 2001, p.136).

### **Film Festival Field in Nigeria**

The film festival scene in Nigeria is arguably a thriving field considering the number of existing festivals in a country with a population of over 207,740,441 million people (Worldometer, 2020), and an industry that is rated second largest globally by UNESCO in 2009. At present, there are only 13 (see table below) notable film festivals that have been consistently held in the last ten years in about three locations in Nigeria (Lagos, Abuja, Uyo and Benin City). A notable festival manager and founder of Inshort International Film Festival, Victor Okhai, considers the number of the festivals inadequate due to the vibrant nature of Nollywood, the proven

ability of the festivals as channels for networking, publicity, talent hunts and distribution of movies (V. Okhai personal communication, March 24, 2020).

The National Film Festival, which was later re-named Zuma International Film Festival is reputed as the first notable film festival in Nigeria. It was formally established in 1992 by the Nigerian Film Corporation (NFC), an agency of government responsible for film promotion and development in Nigeria. It is the only government run film festival in the country till date. The others are independent film festivals managed mostly by filmmakers or film enthusiast who are propelled by the need to celebrate and develop the industry. According to the 2016 British Council report on the festival scene in Nigeria, film festivals account for 11 percent of all festivals including traditional and literary festivals held in Nigeria. The report also indicates that the literary festivals account for 16 percent of the festivals produced in Nigeria while the traditional festivals including the popular Calabar Cultural Carnival, several music and performing arts festivals held around the country and the Argungu Fishing festivals account for 73 percent of the festivals. The table below put together by the researchers is a selection of the most consistent film festivals amid the plethora where a lot are just one-off-the-mill attempts.

## Tables of Consistent Film Festivals in Nigeria

S/NO	NAME OF FESTIVAL	YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT	STATUS	MONTH USUALLY HELD
1	Zuma International Film Festival	1992	Government run festival	December
2.	Africa International Film Festival (AFRIFF)	2010	Independently run festival	November
3.	Abuja International Film Festival (AIFF)	2004	Independently run festival	September
4.	iREP International Documentary Film Festival	2009	Independently run festival	March
5.	Eko international Film Festival (EKOIFF)	2010	Independently run festival	February
6	Real Time International Film Festival	2016	Independently run festival	June
7.	Lights, Camera, Africa Film Festival	2011	Independently run festival	Sept/Oct
8.	Inshort International Film Festival	2010	Independently run festival	December
9.	Uyo International Theatre and Film Festival	2019	Independently run festival	November
10	Africa Student International Film Festival	2015	Independently run festival	June
11.	Kano Indigenous Languages Films Market and Festival (KILAF)	2018	Independently run festival	November
12	Jos International Film Festival	2017	Independently run festival	August
13	Benin City Film Festival	2018	Independently run festival	November

It is evident from the table that the independent film festival account for 99 percent of the festivals held in Nigeria and clearly, their financing pattern differs from a festival like ZIFF which enjoys government support and funding. As observed in the 2016 British Council report on the festival scene in Nigeria, these independently led arts festivals are launched through a mix of self-financed, external investment (family/friends) and grants. Even though they receive support from some agencies of government occasionally, they are also financed through sponsorship and branding opportunities which sponsors exploit to carry out their corporate social responsibilities.

Generally, festivals in Nigeria have a huge social and economic impact, a reason the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture recently declared through the Minister of Information, Lai Mohammed, that it has the mandate to include festivals as part of their agenda to address government's creative industries

development, social cohesion and job creation plans (British Council, 2016). According to (Ekejimbe, 2018) the socio-economic impact of film festivals is evidenced in the accessible platform it provides for filmmakers, stakeholders and industry personnel to develop relationships, improve knowledge and to develop filmmaking and business skills. Jordanova (2015) noted that film festivals also provide strong sales and marketing platforms, skills development, and it attract international tourism with the attendant benefit of creating income for local businesses, enabling community cohesion, and increasing positive perception of Nigeria.

Since the launch of the National Film Festival in 1992, there has been consistent increase in the number of independently run festivals. Notably, among these are, the Abuja International Film Festival henceforth AIFF, the Africa International Film Festival, iREP International Documentary film festival, Eko International Film Festival, Inshort International Film Festival and the Light, Camera, Action Film Festival. Interestingly, all the festivals showcase domestic and international films and with the exception of Inshort International Film Festival which is focused on the short film genre. The other festivals like the best known film festivals in the world-Venice Film Festival, the Cannes Film Festival, the Toronto Film Festival, Sundance Film Festival and Berlin International Film Festival, programme short and feature length films and in different genre including documentaries and animations.

### **Profiles of the Selected Festivals**

**Zuma International Film Festival (ZIFF):** ZIFF was formally known as the National Film Festival. It is facilitated by the Nigerian Film Corporation (NFC) and was renamed after the famous Zuma rock in Suleja Niger State, North Central Nigeria in 2006. ZIFF was conceived as a biennial celebration of the vibrant Nigeria film and video industry. The festival also aims at improving the professional competence of Nigerian filmmakers and stakeholders, promoting the growth and development of the Nigerian motion picture industry, developing a market for the motion picture industry, provision of a platform for professional interaction and exchange of ideas and rewarding and recognizing professional excellence in the motion picture industry. The festival is held over five days, and it features film screenings, panel discussions, workshops and an award ceremony. ([www.nfc.gov.ng](http://www.nfc.gov.ng))

**Abuja International Film Festival (AIFF):** The Abuja International Film Festival is an initiative of the NAFIFO VENTURES an organization registered under the corporate affairs commission BN LIS 001064 of 17th of March 2004. The festival was established to contribute to the understanding and appreciation of film culture of different nations. It offers a contemporary and liberal platform for the filmmakers from different parts of the world to exhibit the excellence of film as an art form. Held annually, the festival receives over 300 films from about 50 countries and each edition features screening of films, industry engagements, networking opportunities, an award ceremony and a media market. The festival is affiliated to a number of other international film festivals, including the Durban International Film Festival, Zimbabwe International Film Festival and the Commonwealth International Film Festival ([www.festhome.com](http://www.festhome.com)).

**African International Film Festival (AFRIFF):** The African International Film Festival (AFRIFF) was established in 2010 by Ms Chioma Ude, an ardent film lover and entrepreneur, the festival is positioned to be the biggest annual appointment for African filmmakers in the region, celebrating the best of African films and stories. The programming of the AFRIFF is themed around African films, filmmakers and African cinematic impulses making the rounds in the international film circuit in categories such as feature, shorts, student shorts, documentary and animation. AFRIFF is held annually in November and it strives in its film programme to showcase an average of 120 films over a 5day period. Besides, showcasing of films, the festival holds keynote conversations on the state of the film industry in Africa and it also host master classes, workshops for skill acquisitions and youth development and discussions on issues of strategic importance in moving the industry forward. Its flagship event is the colourful award ceremony where awards are presented at the end of the festival in such categories as Best Feature, Best Documentary, Best Short Film, Best Director, Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Screenplay, and Special Jury Prize. Indeed, the festival has over the last nine years emerged as an exciting celebration of Cinema and filmmaking talent from Africa and the Diaspora ([www.afriff.com](http://www.afriff.com))

**Theorizing Film Festivals**

This paper is anchored on the concept of Organizational Field and Field-configuring event and the perspective of Institutional Theory. According to (Jordanova, 2009, p.45), citing Lampel and Meyer, who are proponents of the concepts, filmmaking within the audiovisual world is seen as the organizational field and film festivals are seen as field-configuring events. In the context of this paper, the organizational field refers to the broad canvass of motion picture practice while the film festivals are referred to as field configuring events, which plays important roles in the evolution and development of the film industry. Indeed, their contribution to the growth and development of the industry internationally and in the country where the festival is domiciled cannot be overemphasized. Jordanova (2009) further states that film festivals and forums have served primarily as social networking hubs and sites where filmmakers learn of new developments and trends. It is where general knowledge provisions within the field are acquired and enhanced in a way that they influenced the field evolution and growth of the local film industry indirectly. Stringer's essay on the role of film festivals corroborates the assumptions of the concept of field configuring events. The study is a pointer to the meditative influence these festivals have on the industry and the festival goers. He sees the role of film festivals functioning "as a space for mediation, a cultural matrix within which the aims and activities of specific interest groups are negotiated, as well as a place for the establishment and maintenance of cross-cultural relations (Stringer, 2001, 134).

The other relevant theory is Institutional Theory, which basically attends to the deeper and more resilient aspects of social structure. According to (Scott, 2006, 209), it considers the processes by which structures, including schemas; rules, norms, and routines, become established as authoritative guidelines for social behaviour. He explains that it inquires into how these elements and in the context of this discourse how festivals are created, diffused, adopted, and adapted over space and time; and how they fall into decline and disuse. Furthermore, Scott asserts that Institutions are social structures that have attained a high degree of resilience and are composed of cultural-cognitive, normative, and regulative elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide

stability and meaning to social life. The field of film festivals within the audiovisual world according to Scott is considered the social structure or institutions that operate at different levels of jurisdiction, from the world systems to localized interpersonal relationships. We find institutional theory useful because it does not only explain why structures such as film festivals become entrenched, but also how and why change occurs. The theory also explains why and how film festivals came into existence, and the specific role they play in providing stability and meaning to the film industry.

It must be noted that studies in Nigerian film festivals may be relatively new. As such, the researchers could only lay hold on a few extant secondary sources such as Omoera's (2015) report on the Edo Movie and Music Academy Awards, Ajaere's (2019) Nollywood festival travels and Omoera and Otote's (2020) study of the Benin City Film Festival as an emerging tour de force in Nollywood. This, in a way, explains the overt reliance on primary sources. Many of the studies that have been done on film festivals internationally, such as those of Julian Stringer; Thomas Elsaesser; Marijke De Valck and Loist Skadi and Kenneth Turan are focused more on the historical development of the festival in Europe and America and the economical impact of the festivals. For instance, Stringer's work was on global cities and the international film festival economy. He found that beyond the revenue generation potential film festivals function as a space for mediation, a cultural matrix within which the aims and activities of specific interest groups are negotiated, as well as a place for the establishment and maintenance of cross-cultural working relations. The studies by Thomas Elsaesser; Marijke De Valck and Loist Skadi, and Kenneth Turan, focused on the historical development and socio-economic impact of film festivals in Europe. They all affirmed that Europe is the cradle of the film festival phenomenon with Italy hosting the world's first major film festival in 1932. Although, their works touched on the socio-economic and political impact of film festivals to the industry and nation, not much effort was devoted in identifying the specific contributions of the film festivals to the industry and host communities from the perspective of the filmmakers and festivalgoers. The small amount of literature into academic enquiry into the purpose and contributions of festivals to the Nollywood industry and to the host community where the festival is domiciled is the motivation for this paper.

### **Methods**

Methodologically, the paper employed oral interviews for data gathering. Using in-depth interview instrumentation, which provides deep insight to a subject matter (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011, p.74), data were collected through face-to-face interview over a period of 3 years — August 2018 to March 2020, with a midget recorder. It was considered the most appropriate because it offers respondents the opportunity to freely express their views on the subject and also gives the interviewers the opportunity to further probe into issues that might arise in the course of the interview. Three sets of interview questions were designed for the three categories of interviewees: three festival managers who represent the three major festivals and three purposefully selected filmmakers, and five festival goers, with two festival managers lending their voices in the second and third objectives where it matters. This selection is important as it represents all stakeholders in the film festival scene. The purposive nature of the paper allowed the respondents to be chosen based on the fact that they are known, and have useful sources of information on the festival and evidences of festival attendance. Also, the 6 purposefully selected festival goers were chosen based on verifiable proof of attending at least three editions of the ZFF, AIFF and AFRIFF within the last 10 years by proof of ticket, photo-shot or programme. While the festival managers had no problems with their names reflected in this work, a few of the other respondents wanted their identities protected.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The first objective of this paper is to find out the status and purpose of the selected three film festivals, AFRIFF, AIFF and ZIFF. There is no gainsaying that film festivals exist to provide entertainment for the general population. They are also founded to provide strong platforms for professional development and fulfilment and for sales and audience development opportunities. Similarly, festivals exist to develop local film industry by providing avenues for skills and talents; artistic appreciation; film project development and financing. The festival organisers and the majority of the respondents were in unison in their submission that film festivals do much more than providing entertainment for the general population. Both the festival organizers and respondents were extremely positive about

festivals being platforms for artistic development, social cohesion and for viable film business transactions and meetings. As stated by the festival organizers, the need to provide clear socio-economic benefits to the local industry and host community is one key purpose for the establishment of the festivals.

The vision statement of AFRIFF "...is to organically grow the biggest showcase platform for African films and filmmakers. To use cinema to create value for ...youth and create a "skills" revolution that will immensely impact the economic horizon in Africa." According to (C. Ude, personal communication, February, 2020), there is need to enhance the exposure of films, empower and create jobs for the youths, offer skills development for practitioners of the local industry and the need to help boost international and domestic tourism ranks top among the reasons why AFRIFF was established. Ude claimed that "we scanned through the continent of Africa and found that there was no purposefully built annual platform with the vision to use cinema to create value for youth and create a skills revolution that will immensely impact the economic horizon in Africa. We felt that Africa has a lot of talents that must be showcased early if the vision is to propel young filmmakers of the future into their glorious career in filmmaking.

This fulfils one of the purposes of festivals, which also corroborates with Stringer's observation. Ude went further to say that...AFRIFF was ... established to organically grow the biggest showcase platform for African films and filmmakers. It was also founded to connect people from around the world – local and international filmmakers, celebrities, actors, directors, film buyers, distributors, visual artists, film students, amateurs, film lovers and the press, and to present a complete immersion into the world of film making with participation from all over Africa and the diaspora. Ude's response is in unison with AFRIFF vision statement on its official website with keywords such as size, value, youth, skills, and improved economy. Although, it is widely assumed that the purpose of film festivals is basically to showcase films and provide meeting places for filmmakers and film goers among other stakeholders, most festival organisers including Chioma Ude and Fidelis Duker are of the opinion that the purpose of film festivals transcends showcasing films and providing a meeting point for filmmakers and other stakeholders. Abuja International Film Festival (AIFF), vision "...is mainly to contribute to the understanding and

appreciation of cultures of different nations. We hope to present complex human situations of this rapidly changing world in the globalised era” (Festagent).

The founder of Abuja International Film Festival (AIFF), Duker explained further thus: one of the most common reasons that people give for starting film festivals is the provision of the platform for showcasing films from all over the world, especially if it is an international film festival and also the provision of a platform for filmmakers to introduce their works and interrogate issues that concerns the industry, but the main purpose of our setting up the festival is to encourage the growth and development of the film industry, to grow cinema audiences and to boost tourism in Abuja, Nigeria’s sprawling capital. Obviously this is beyond the glamorous festivals of red carpets and dress codes. It is much more about providing a platform where our audiences will be exposed to diverse works from the farthest parts of the world (F. Duker, personal communication, September, 2019). Even though Duker tried to sound differently from Ude initially, the encoded meaning here is still about showcasing of films, but heavily hinged on economic improvement of the filmmakers and the host community. Duker’s response did not take on board the vision on the official website of AIFF which is mainly culturally artistic showcasing of world cultural differences. In-fact, film entries submitted from different parts of the world for each edition of the three festivals contradicts the assumption that the festivals are just about networking and glamour. With global digitalisations, these festivals have emerged as exceptional platforms for exposing a rich diversity of cinematic voices from farthest places of the world.

The Zuma International Film Festival vision did not present much difference from the other two discussed above. ...the festival seeks to promote productivity and availability of qualitative audio-visual services, entrench professionalism and profitability in cultural products as well as to drive the huge export potentials of Nigerian films to gain wider global acceptance and herald Nigeria as a tourism and film destination hub (Filmfreeway). However, the 2014 ZIFF Manager Afolabi Adesanya’s response though a little off from the vision corroborated the positions the earlier respondents and visions, Zuma was primarily established to celebrate our filmmaking potentials and the craftsmanship that goes into creating a film. We recognize talents working across the filmmaking crafts and provide

the platform for them to meet with their counterparts from other parts of the world, as we believe that the relationship that can develop between them will have an incredible impact on the growth of the local industry. So the purpose of establishing Zuma transcends presenting a film programme. We exist to provide extraordinary experience for the participating filmmakers from all over the world. (A. Adesanya, personal communication, October, 2015).

The second objective of this paper is to determine how the selected festivals impact on the host communities. Respondents here are drawn from the cineastes and the academia who are also film festival goers. A widely travelled filmmaker and film administrator Victor Okhai noted from his observation of how business activities booms because of influx of people into the community during the few days of the festivals. He also observed that film festival does impact on the socio-cultural life of the community immensely. Okhai noted further that film festivals have job creation potentials and possibilities of earning income for people of the host cities in its brief moment (V. Okhai, personal communication, December 2, 2019). Another respondent (A. Rafiu, personal communication, September. 30, 2019) observed that when festivals are hosted in cities, they attract people including tourists from different parts of the world who are expected to pay for services like transportation, accommodation, feeding, purchase of memorabilia and other social events such as clubbing and parties, with attendant benefit of impacting on the local economy. As a cultural good that conveys cultural and social values that affect the local community, and an excerpt from Chioma Ude of AFRIFF expressed similar view She noted that the benefit that a city will have from a festival, includes employment opportunities for young people and the income that will be produced and generated by those who provide ancillary services in the community where the festival is held. Another respondent Julie Okoh who has retired from the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Port Harcourt and now Dean of Faculty of Humanities, Social and Management Sciences at Edwin Clark University, Kiagbodo, opined that apart from bringing investments to the city, one most important contribution of the film festival to the host city/community is in how it promotes and puts the city on the cultural map of the world. (J. Okoh, personal communication. December 4, 2019).

Suleiman Mohammed, a festival goer strongly holds that film festivals are great generators of tourism and income and play a vital role in the cultural life of a city with the attendant benefit of massive publicity for the city which will no doubt positively affects its business and cultural industries whether related to the festival or not (S. Mohammed, personal communication. November 28, 2019). Fidelis Duker noted that in some cases, the success of a festival challenges the government in setting up of more facilities such as airports, hotels and roads that will further contribute to the development of the city. He cites example of a city such as Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, in the South-South region of Nigeria where hotels and road networks have to be developed to reduce the hardship tourists; filmmakers and festivalgoers go through in accessing the state for cultural events such as the Africa Movie Academy Awards (AMAA). A festivalgoer Kayode Adefaye sees the benefit of a film festival to the host community as that which cultivates peoples' interest in cinema. He also submitted that film festivals give the audience access to films that they might not otherwise have the opportunity to see in regular cinemas. (Adefaye, K., personal communication. December 2, 2019). The third objective of this work is to identify the specific contributions of the selected festival on the development of the Nollywood movie industry. A long standing Nollywood filmmaker, Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen noted that the festivals have created the needed platform for getting feedback from the audiences before films are released for wider viewing. He explained that the feedbacks they get from the critical film festival audience are useful in their marketing and distribution plan as well as handling future projects. (L.O. Imasuen, personal communication. March 14, 2020). Also Dalyop a budding filmmaker noted that one of the contributions of film festivals to the local industry is the opportunity it provides for established filmmakers to mentor and in a good way, indoctrinate new comers. Daylop responded that,

It is at film festivals that most new filmmakers get their baptism. I was trained in screenwriting at AFRIFF, some years ago. Before then, my only exposure was through books and online courses. The one-week training was more productive than the books and online courses I had been exposed to before then. The industry sessions were rich, so were the after parties, which happened to be my opportunity to meet with many of the industry big names whose works, I had seen from afar. Today, I brag to know about

lighting design because of the master classes organized by AFRIFF that featured Christian Epps, an award-winning Hollywood lighting designer. (Dalyop, N., personal communication. November 28, 2019)

This testimony finds a base in (Grove, 2017), that beyond showcasing selected films, festivals are established to engage in film production, training, knowledge development, pitching and distribution. Daylop's response is very intimate and a most personal testimony by any one we interviewed in this essay, and in correspondence with an anonymous respondent who points out to workshops, which are usually practical in nature. He observed however, that students do not often attend film festivals as it is not part of the curriculum, he nevertheless opined that the practical sessions have significantly helped to build capacity for the local industry. Okhai lent his voice further that film festivals offer filmmakers the opportunity to attend many master classes and an opportunity to get instant feedback after a screening through the question and answer (Q&A) sessions held after the festival screening. I felt on top of the world when my film was screened at Inshort film festival and at Abuja international film festival. Screening my film made me 'feel' like a filmmaker. These opportunities build 'young' filmmakers and with no box office success to refer to. These are some of the things that make us feel we are not wasting our time making films.

Okhai's testimony is encouraging to film festival organisers who also will take pride in what they do knowing fully well that they are not wasting their time, (to borrow Okhai's expression). It is also an attestation to one the essences of film festivals. Notable film festivalgoer, scholar and lecturer at Redeemer's University Gbogan, noted that "film festivals create connections between the local industry practitioners and their international counterparts and these connections often leads into quite interesting collaborative and international projects" (T. Onikoyi, personal communication, March. 22, 2020). It is in this light that an Abuja based film enthusiasts and journalist who pleaded anonymity says film festivals also offer opportunities to international filmmakers outside the shores, and this is also a phenomenon the organizers have taken seriously. Filmmakers from other countries like the US, Britain, Cameroon, France, and so on, enter their film for the festivals, in view of making

the connections with the themes that will be explored in a particular year, and, they key into the task of exploring those themes through their works while connecting with the local industries in creating relationships leading, to quite interesting collaborative efforts and international projects. (Anonymous Journalist. personal communication. April 10, 2020).

This corroborates Onikoyi's observation of how film festivals create international collaboration between filmmakers. It is a common practice among festival managers to give screening consideration in their programming to films by upcoming talents and established practitioners of the local industry. That way, they have ample opportunities for their works to be seen and reviewed. Another significant contribution is the training opportunities that it offers talents of the local industry. Imaseun had noted that the film festivals in Nigeria have also become sites for training students who are generally interested in film. Onikoyi agrees and adds that apart from the opportunity to binge-watching a range of films, it has become a networking feast where students and interns can rub shoulders with the best in the industry.

We were able to deduce from the interviews conducted in the course of this research, that majority of the respondents particularly the festival managers and filmmakers were of the view that the festivals have significantly contributed to the growth and development of the industry. They spoke of how the festivals gives consideration to films by the local industry in their programming and how the festivals have afforded them the opportunity to showcase their works, mingle with celebrities and have their horizons broadened. Some responded that beyond the opportunity that film festivals have provided for filmmakers, distributors, critics and other interested persons to attend film showings, and meet to discuss current developments in the film circle, film festivals like other cultural events have helped in no small measure in generating tourism and boosting the revenue and socio-economic life of the host community and country. Also, that film festivals have served to focus attention on the promotion of Nollywood movie production, distribution and exhibitions. They also submitted that the film festivals in Nigeria have given opportunities to filmmakers to showcase their works and talents and provide platforms for them to be heard through well planned and organized curatorial. The conclusion that can be reached based on these positions, is that

beyond providing the platform for showcasing of films, recognition of artistic achievements and the provision of a platform for those interested in the art and influence of the movies as the festival managers have reiterated. Film festivals offer networking and training opportunities that creates relationships leading, to quite interesting collaborative efforts and international projects.

### **Conclusion**

This article went behind the scenes of film festival celebrations to examine the purpose and the role of film festivals in the socio-economic development of the film industry and communities through the perspective of film festival managers, selected filmmakers and festivalgoers. It also examined how the selected festivals have impacted on the socio-economic life of the host cities as well as on the growth and development of the local film industry. The essay also established that beyond providing the platform for showcasing of films, recognition of artistic achievements and the provision of a platform for those interested in the art and influence of the movies, film festivals offers networking and training opportunities that creates relationships leading to quite interesting international collaborative projects. The conclusion reached from the foregoing is that film festivals in Nigeria have contributed significantly to the development of the film industry in Nigeria. The views of the interviewees have proved that these film festivals remain part of the few venues and sites through which budding filmmakers can actually showcase their works, and where new entrants can also learn a lot which can help them decide on what in particular, they wish to do in the broad spectrum of film practices. This finding is consistent with Iordanova, that film festivals and forums have served primarily as social networking hubs and sites where filmmakers learn of new developments and trends and where general knowledge provisions within the field are acquired and or enhanced and that way, they influence the field evolution and growth of the local film industry indirectly.

As well, film festivals are an important vehicle for social cohesion, talent and artistic development and economic enrichment. The authors, therefore, recommend that for film festival to continue to play their expected roles in the socio-economic life of the host cities/communities in developing the local industry, film festivals should be supported and recognised for their intrinsic value to the host

cities and the industry, rather than simply for their use as field-configuring event. The authors recommend that film school curriculum should consider topics if not an entire course bordering on festivals to create an ample awareness among the youths, drawing inference from one of the anonymous respondents who observes that students do not often attend film festivals because it is not part of their curriculum.

### References

- Abuja International Film Festival. (n.d.). Retrieved 12 Feb. 2020, from [festhome.com/en/festival/abuja-international-film-festival](http://festhome.com/en/festival/abuja-international-film-festival).
- AFRIFF. Official website of the Africa International Film Festival. (n.d.). Retrieved 12 Feb. 2020, from [afriff.com](http://afriff.com).
- AFRIFF. *Background AFRIFF* (n.d.), Retrieved 12 Feb. 2020, from <https://afriff.com/background/>.
- Ajaere, M. (2019). Reinventing Nollywood through festivals: Nollywood travel festival as case study. Paper presented at the second edition of the African Film Consortium Forum.
- British Council. (2016) *Understanding the festivals scene in Nigeria*. Retrieved 12 Feb. 2020, from [www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/understandingthefestivals\\_scene\\_in\\_nigeria.pdf](http://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/understandingthefestivals_scene_in_nigeria.pdf).
- Davis, D. & Yeh, E. (2008) *East Asian screen industries*. London: British Film Institute/Palgrave.
- Elsaesser, T., (2005). Film festival networks: The new topographies of cinema in Europe. In *European cinema: Face to face with Hollywood*. (pp. 82–107). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press
- Festagent, (n.d.), *Abuja International Film Festival (AIFF)* Retrieved 12 Feb. 2020, from <https://festagent.com/en>
- Filmfreeway, *Zuma Film Festival*. Retrieved 12 Feb. 2020, from <https://filmfreeway.com/zuma-filmfestival>
- Fischer, A. (2009). *Conceptualising basic film festival operations: An open system paradigm*. Retrieved 12 Feb. 2020, from [www.pure.bond.edu.au](http://www.pure.bond.edu.au).
- Grove, E., (2018). *4 reasons filmmakers attend film festivals*. Retrieved 12 Feb. 2020, from [www.raindance.org/4-reasons-filmmakers-attend-film-festivals/](http://www.raindance.org/4-reasons-filmmakers-attend-film-festivals/).
- Iordanova, D., (2009). The film festival circuit. In D. Iordanova & R. Rhyne (Eds.), *Film festival yearbook 1* (pp.23–39)..New York: St Andrews Film Studies with College Gate Press.
- Iordanova, D. (Ed.) (2013). *Introduction to the film festival reader* (pp1–19). New York: St Andrews Film Studies.
- Iordanova, D. (2015) *Film festival as an industry node*. Retrieved 12 Feb. 2020, from [quod.lib.umich.edu/m/mij/15031809.0001.302/—film-festival-as-an-industry-node?rgn=main;view=fulltext](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/mij/15031809.0001.302/—film-festival-as-an-industry-node?rgn=main;view=fulltext).

- Marijke D.V. & Skadi, L. (2009). *Film festival studies: An overview of a burgeoning field*. In D. Iordanova & R. Rhyne (Eds.), *Film festival yearbook 1: The festival circuit 2009*, pp.179–215. Retrieved 12 Feb. 2020, from [www.filmfestivalresearch.org/index.php/ffrn-bibliography/](http://www.filmfestivalresearch.org/index.php/ffrn-bibliography/)
- Nigerian Film Corporation (n.d.) Official website of the Nigerian Film Corporation (NFC) facilitators of the Zuma International Film Festival. Retrieved 12 Feb. 2020, from <https://nfc.gov.ng/>
- Omoera, O.S. (2015). An inquiry into institutional support for the Benin video-film culture in Nollywood. *Venets: The Belogradchik Journal for Local History, Cultural Heritage and Folk Studies*, 6(2), 259-279. <http://www.venets.org/getfile.php?id=213>
- Omoera, O.S. & Otote, E.A. (2020). Benin City film festival: An emerging tour de force in Nollywood. *African Update*, XXVII (I). <https://www2.ccsu.edu/africaupdate/?article=481>
- Stringer, J., (2001). Global cities and the international film festival economy. In M. Shiel & T. Fitzmaurice. (Eds.), *Cinema and the city: Film and urban societies in a global context* (pp. 134-144). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Screen Daily. *What is the purpose of film festivals in the 21st century*. Retrieved 12 Feb. 2020, from [www.screendaily.com/comment/whats-the-purpose-of-film-festivals-in-the-21st-century/5108598.article](http://www.screendaily.com/comment/whats-the-purpose-of-film-festivals-in-the-21st-century/5108598.article).
- Scott, R. (2006). Institutional theory. In G. Ritzer. (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of social theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tamara, F., (2006). The festival film: Film festival as cultural intermediaries. In M. de Valck, B. Kredell, & S. Loist. (Eds.), *Film festival: History, theory, method, practice*. London: Routledge,
- Turan, K., (2009). *Sundance to Sarajevo: Film festivals and the world they made*. California: University of California Press
- UNESCO. *Nollywood rivals Bollywood in film/video production*. Retrieved 12 Feb. 2020, from [www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/nollywoodrivals\\_bollywood\\_in\\_filmvideo\\_production/](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/nollywoodrivals_bollywood_in_filmvideo_production/)
- Vanguard. *Nollywood: Stakeholders laud organisers of abuja film festival*. Retrieved 12 Feb. 2020, from [www.vanguardngr.com/2019/10/nollywood-stakeholders-laudorganisers-of-abuja-film-festival/](http://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/10/nollywood-stakeholders-laudorganisers-of-abuja-film-festival/)
- Wimmer, D. R. & Joseph R. D. (2011). *Mass media research: An introduction*. London: Wadsworth Centage Learning.
- Worldometer (2020). *Nigeria population*. Retrieved 12 Feb. 2020, from <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/nigeria-population/>