

## **Enhancing Nigeria's Capacity Development for a Sustainable Future: Opportunities in Art and Art Education**

**By**

**Dr. Onyinyechi O. Ochuba**

Faculty of Education

Department of Educational Foundations

[onyinyechi.ochuba@uniport.edu.ng](mailto:onyinyechi.ochuba@uniport.edu.ng)

**&**

**Primrose Okechi Ochuba**

Faculty of Humanities

Department of Fine Arts and Design

University of Port Harcourt

[primrose.ochuba@uniport.edu.ng](mailto:primrose.ochuba@uniport.edu.ng)

### **Abstract**

Nigeria's current development challenges are shaped by socio-political instability, economic over-dependence on oil, infrastructural deficits, and inadequate integration of education and cultural resources. This paper examines Nigeria's capacity for sustainable development through the lens of fine arts and art education, highlighting their potential as transformative tools for economic growth, social cohesion, and human capital development. Drawing on recent literature and policy frameworks, the study identifies systemic constraints including limited access to quality arts education, weak institutional support for creative industries, and insufficient integration of indigenous knowledge systems into formal education, that impede holistic national development. The paper proposes a multi-faceted, arts-integrated strategy to enhance Nigeria's development capacity. Key interventions include strengthening governance, fostering culturally inclusive and community-based art education, promoting creative storytelling for peacebuilding, leveraging digital creativity and innovation, protecting intellectual property rights, and embedding art and art education in national planning aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By linking cultural heritage with progressive pedagogical practices and creative economy opportunities, these strategies aim to cultivate critical thinking, entrepreneurial skills, digital literacy, and social engagement among youth and communities. The findings underscore that art and art education extend far beyond aesthetic value; they are essential catalysts for sustainable, inclusive, and equitable development. Integrating creative practices into national development planning enables Nigeria to harness its youthful population, rich cultural resources, and innovative potential to generate employment, strengthen social cohesion, and promote long-term economic and social resilience. The paper concludes that a deliberate convergence of artistic creativity and educational innovation offers a viable pathway for Nigeria to overcome current limitations and achieve sustainable national development.

**Keywords: Capacity Development, Sustainable Future, Art and Art Education**

## **Introduction**

Nigeria is widely regarded as a nation endowed with abundant human and material resources essential for national development. Yet, despite its potential, the country has continued to follow developmental trajectories often associated with weak or underperforming states. With a population of approximately 218.5 million people, predominantly young and culturally diverse, Nigeria possesses both the demographic advantage and the cultural richness required to drive sustainable progress (World Bank, 2023). However, persistent socio-economic challenges, institutional weaknesses, and political instability have constrained its development capacity.

Within this broader developmental crisis, the roles of **art** and **art education** have remained largely underexplored, despite their demonstrated importance in fostering creativity, cultural identity, critical thinking, innovation, and social cohesion. Nigeria's artistic heritage, expressed through visual arts, textiles, crafts, music, and contemporary creative industries, constitutes not only a reservoir of cultural capital but also a strategic economic resource capable of contributing to diversification, employment generation, and national branding. Yet, these opportunities remain underutilized due to inadequate cultural infrastructure, limited integration of the arts in national development planning, and insufficient investment in arts education. Art education holds transformative potential for national development by cultivating essential 21st-century skills, enhancing cultural literacy, and supporting youth empowerment. Through culturally responsive pedagogies and creative learning environments, art education contributes to human capital development, an essential pillar for achieving a sustainable future.

Despite notable economic strides by artists and many young Nigerians in other fields, Nigeria struggles with socio-economic disparities, including high unemployment, rising inflation, and infrastructural deficits. A significant concern is Nigeria's over-reliance on the oil industry, which has overshadowed the development of its non-oil sectors. In the 1950s, Nigeria was a leading agro-economy, ranking among the top global palm oil producers, groundnut, cotton, and cocoa (Falola & Heaton, 2008). The arts sector exemplifies this pattern of untapped potential, where despite rich cultural traditions in textiles, crafts, music, and visual arts that historically complemented agricultural economies, creative industries remain undervalued and inadequately integrated into national economic planning. Furthermore, artistic expressions and cultural practices that once

celebrated and sustained agricultural prosperity have been marginalized, representing a loss of both economic opportunity and cultural knowledge systems that could inform contemporary sustainable development approaches. However, the discovery of crude oil led to the neglect of agriculture, causing Nigeria's decline in global market rankings (Udegbumam & Mojeed, 2022). The economy's dependence on crude oil, a volatile commodity, has resulted in an uneven growth trajectory, heavily influenced by fluctuations in oil prices. High inflation rates and a volatile currency further erode the purchasing power of citizens.

A sustainable future for Nigeria requires more than economic reforms; it demands the strengthening of systems that foster innovation, preserve cultural values, and prepare citizens to solve complex societal challenges. Integrating art and art education into development strategies provides alternative pathways for inclusion, creativity-driven problem-solving, and long-term societal resilience. Therefore, this paper assesses Nigeria's development capacity through the interconnected lenses of fine arts and art education, highlighting how artistic creativity and educational transformation can contribute to sustainable national development. By examining the opportunities embedded within Nigeria's creative and educational sectors, the paper explores how the country can build a future that is economically viable, culturally rooted, and developmentally inclusive.

### **Understanding Capacity Development in the Context of National Growth**

The concept of capacity development has gradually become a central focus in development discourse over the past few years, emerging as an increasingly important strategy in today's development efforts. The United Nations Development Group (UNDG, 2016) defines capacity development as the process through which people, organisations, and society unleash, strengthen, create, adapt, and maintain their ability to manage their affairs successfully over time to achieve development results. Similarly, Kiragu et al. (2020) describe capacity development as a process by which individuals, organisations, and societies develop the ability to perform functions, solve problems, and achieve objectives. In the context of national growth, this capacity is shaped by factors such as economic policies, governance structures, human capital, infrastructure, and social stability. For a country like Nigeria, capacity development is critical to navigating the complexities of its socio-economic landscape. Despite its rich natural resources and large population, Nigeria's

growth has been hindered by systemic issues like corruption, political instability, and inadequate infrastructure. These challenges have restricted the country's ability to fully harness its potential for development. Understanding Nigeria's development capacity in the broader context of national growth requires analysing its ability to mobilise its resources, human capital, and institutional frameworks to drive sustainable progress. Studies also highlight how human capital (via education and skills), institutional quality (governance), and infrastructure investments drive economic diversification and sustainable development in Nigeria, shaping the country's trajectory (Kalagbor & Harry, 2021).

### **Current State of Capacity Development in Nigeria**

The Human Development Index (HDI) is a key indicator of Nigeria's progress, measuring dimensions such as health, education, and standard of living. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2024), Nigeria continues to rank in the low human development category, with education, healthcare, income inequality, and governance being major influencing factors. Nigeria's education sector faces significant challenges. UNICEF (2023) reports that 75% of children aged 7-14 lack basic literacy and numeracy skills. Additionally, the World Economic Forum ranked Nigeria 120th for primary education quality and 117th for tertiary education quality out of 137 countries in 2017/2018. Despite Nigeria's large and youthful population, education remains a major concern due to issues like inadequate infrastructure, outdated curricula, chronic underfunding, and a shortage of qualified teachers. In terms of governance, issues such as bureaucracy, corruption, and inefficiencies continue to obstruct progress and hinder capacity development in Nigeria. This affects foreign direct investment (FDI) and overall capital inflows into the nation. These systemic problems have wide-ranging effects on both public institutions and economic growth. The healthcare system on the other hand also faces a severe shortage of skilled professionals, worsened by the growing trend of medical workers leaving the country in search of better opportunities, often referred to as the "japa syndrome". This brain drain has further strained an already struggling healthcare workforce. Nigeria has a massive infrastructure development deficit, particularly in power, transportation, and telecommunications. The current infrastructure base in Nigeria is grossly inadequate in terms of capacity and quality and is not capable of catering for the anticipated capacity development. Regardless of government investments, Nigeria still has huge infrastructure deficits especially in power generation, as available capacity remains well

below installed capacity due to weak infrastructure, high debt, and frequent grid collapses (Esiedesa, 2024). The current state of transportation also falls short due to unreliable and inadequate transport systems, poor road networks, insecurity and urban congestion in large cities like Lagos (Olagboye, 2024). Nigeria still grapples with several security challenges that directly impact its capacity development. Such challenges manifest in the form of youth restiveness, religious and ethnic violence, armed robbery, kidnapping, insurgent bombing, political violence, and cyber crimes (Eziechine, 2022). This negative trend which impedes progress and inhibits meaningful national development has persisted in Nigeria over the years. On a positive note, Nigeria has seen a rise in startup activity in recent years. Major cities like Lagos and Abuja have become hubs for innovation and entrepreneurship, with Lagos alone attracting more than US\$6 billion in tech startup funding between 2019 and 2024 (Sanwo-Olu, 2025), and both cities ranking among Nigeria's top startup ecosystems in the 2025 Global Startup Ecosystem Index (Ibeh, 2025). However, the overall environment for capacity development in Nigeria as it relates to entrepreneurship and economic employment remains constrained by broader systemic challenges. The current state of capacity development in Nigeria is marked by a mix of opportunities and challenges. While there are positive trends, particularly in entrepreneurship and innovation, systemic issues in governance, education, and healthcare continue to constrain the country's full potential.

### **Understanding the Challenges to Capacity Development**

To move forward, Nigeria must address its underlying challenges while building on its human capital, strengthening institutions, and diversifying its economy. However, how can these challenges be addressed if they are not fully understood? The major significant challenges to capacity development in Nigeria are its socio-political reality and economic barriers. These challenges relate to how socio-political and economic barriers affect Nigeria's development capacity, focusing on corruption, political instability, economic disparities, and the country's over-reliance on oil.

#### **A. Socio-Political Challenges**

**Corruption and Political Instability:** Imagine a country blessed with abundant natural resources and human potential, yet struggling to provide basic amenities for its citizens. This is the reality in

Nigeria, where corruption and political instability have cast long shadows over the nation's development prospects. From the halls of power to local government offices, the tentacles of corruption reach far and wide, siphoning off funds meant for schools, hospitals, and roads. According to the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (2023), Nigeria consistently ranks low in crucial areas such as government effectiveness, political stability, rule of law, and control of corruption. It is not just about numbers on a chart; it's about the dreams deferred and the lives impacted. When a politician pockets money meant for a new health clinic, it is not just figures in a ledger that suffer - it is expectant mothers, sick children, and elderly citizens who bear the brunt of this betrayal.

Recent scholarship suggests that corruption continues to be a major drag on Nigeria's socio-economic development and political legitimacy. For instance, Ezeudu (2023) demonstrates that political corruption significantly impedes GDP growth and diverts funding away from infrastructure and education. Institutional corruption likewise weakens economic performance more broadly (AC-Ogbonna, 2024). Corruption also destabilises governance, undermining institutional trust and creating political uncertainty (Adamaagashi, Awakessien, & Awakessien, 2024). Moreover, Njoku, Mbionwu, and Njoku (2025) argue that systemic corruption erodes public trust, fuels inequality, and hinders Nigeria's progress toward sustainable development.

This climate of institutional undermining discourages both domestic and foreign investment: local entrepreneurs may hesitate to scale their businesses, while international firms may be deterred by policy instability and weak rule of law.

**Ethnic and Religious Tensions:** Nigeria's diversity could be its greatest strength, but too often, it has become a fault line of conflict. A vibrant tapestry of cultures, languages, and traditions with over 250 ethnic groups being pulled apart at the seams by those exploiting differences for personal gain. As a result, communities that should be celebrating their unique heritages are instead eyeing each other with suspicion and, at times, outright hostility.

In the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, farmers and herders who once lived side by side now find themselves in deadly conflicts over land and resources. Families are torn apart, villages abandoned, and age-old traditions of coexistence are shattered. Meanwhile, in the northeast, the rise of

extremist groups like Boko Haram has left a trail of fear and devastation. Schools stand empty, markets are deserted, and countless Nigerians live as refugees in their own country. Onapajo and Uzodike (2012) observe that these ethnic and religious conflicts not only result in tragic loss of life and property but also divert significant government attention and resources away from crucial development initiatives. These tensions don't just claim lives and destroy property; they steal the peace of mind and sense of belonging essential for any society to thrive and develop.

**Weak Institutional Capacity:** The challenge facing Nigeria's institutions can be likened to trying to build a house with a faulty foundation and inadequate tools. On paper, the country has all the makings of a powerhouse - Africa's largest economy, a wealth of natural resources, and a young, dynamic population. Yet, when it comes to turning plans into reality, the system often falls short.

Dedicated civil servants, armed with innovative ideas are hamstrung by outdated systems, insufficient training, and a labyrinth of bureaucracy. Bright young graduates are forced to seek opportunities abroad because local institutions can't harness their talents effectively. This brain drain doesn't just represent a loss of skills; it's an exodus of hope and potential that leaves the country poorer in more ways than one.

From struggling public utilities to overburdened healthcare systems, the consequences of weak institutions touch every aspect of Nigerian life. Ejiogu, Okechukwu and Ejiogu (2020) provide an empirical investigation into this issue, highlighting how institutional weaknesses manifest in ineffective policy implementation, poor public service delivery, inadequate regulatory frameworks, and limited capacity for long-term planning and sustainable development. It is not just about inefficiency; it is about the grandmother who can't get her pension on time, the entrepreneur whose business is stifled by unpredictable regulations, and the community that watches helplessly as well-intentioned development projects crumble due to poor planning and execution.

## **B. Economic Barriers**

**Poverty and Economic Disparity:** Nigeria faces significant economic challenges that restrict its development capacity. The World Bank (2023) projects that by the end of 2023, approximately 37% of Nigerians will live below the international poverty line. Despite having an abundance of

natural and human resources, the country struggles with widespread poverty. Poverty is exacerbated by income inequality, which limits access to education, healthcare, and other essential services. As Adeniran et al. (2020) assert, income inequality has continued to pose a serious threat to the country's economy. Moreover, economic inequality has reached extreme levels despite Nigeria being Africa's largest economy. This inequality leads to social tensions and reduces the ability of many citizens to contribute productively to the economy, resulting in uneven development.

**Unemployment and Underemployment:** Youth unemployment and underemployment present another significant economic barrier. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2023), Nigeria's youth unemployment rate stood at 42.5% in the second quarter of 2023. With approximately 70% of the population under the age of 30 (United Nations Population Fund, 2023), this high unemployment rate has created a large pool of unproductive labour. This leads to widespread poverty, social unrest, and inefficiencies in the labour market, further discouraging investment and hindering economic growth. Addressing youth unemployment is critical to unlocking Nigeria's development potential.

**Inadequate Infrastructure:** Nigeria's inadequate infrastructure severely limits its development capacity. Oyedepo et al. (2019) highlight that poor transportation systems, including inadequate roads, railways, and ports, increase the cost of doing business and limit market access. Additionally, the country suffers from an unreliable power supply, which affects industries, small businesses, and households. The energy deficit significantly reduces industrial productivity, increases operating costs, and deters investment, thus slowing down overall economic growth.

**Over-Reliance on Oil:** Nigeria's economy is heavily dependent on oil exports, which exposes it to fluctuations in global oil prices. Esu and Udonwa (2015) highlight that this over-dependence on oil has led to neglect of other sectors and increased vulnerability to external shocks. This over-reliance hampers the country's ability to diversify into other sectors, such as manufacturing, services, and agriculture. A lack of investment in these sectors limits job creation and sustainable growth. Additionally, Nigeria's reliance on imports for essentials such as food and machinery strains its foreign exchange reserves and increases inflationary pressures, further weakening the local economy.



These socio-political and economic barriers significantly restrict Nigeria's development capacity. Corruption, political instability, poor infrastructure, unemployment, and over-dependence on oil inhibit the country's ability to achieve sustainable development. Addressing these challenges is essential for unlocking Nigeria's full development potential and achieving long-term economic growth. As Yagboyaju and Akinola (2019) emphasise, Nigeria must address the security of lives and property, promote the rule of law, and provide visionary leadership to overcome these barriers.

### **Fine Arts and Capacity Development in Nigeria**

Within Nigeria's complex developmental landscape, fine arts emerges as a transformative force with profound implications for capacity building and sustainable growth. Far from being merely decorative or entertainment-focused, the arts sector represents a critical component of human capital development, economic diversification, and social cohesion that Nigeria desperately needs to address its multifaceted challenges. Nigeria's creative economy, anchored by fine arts, has demonstrated remarkable resilience and growth potential despite limited institutional support. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2020), the creative industries contributed 2.3% to Nigeria's GDP, with visual arts representing a significant component of this sector. The visual arts, including painting, sculpture, textiles, and contemporary digital media, contribute significantly to employment generation, particularly among youth populations facing limited formal sector opportunities. Artists like El Anatsui and Ben Enwonwu and even more recently, artists like Ozioma Onuzulike, Olarenwaju Tejuoso among several others have elevated Nigerian art to international prominence, creating market value and cultural capital that extends beyond individual success to national branding and tourism development (Okeke-Agulu, 2015). Similarly, traditional crafts such as Adire textiles, bronze casting, and wood carving represent untapped potential for export markets while preserving cultural heritage. These artistic practices create value chains that extend from raw material suppliers to international galleries and collectors, generating foreign exchange and supporting local communities.

#### **A. Cultural identity and social cohesion**

Art serves as a unifying force in Nigeria's ethnically diverse society, providing platforms for cross-cultural dialogue and understanding. Traditional festivals, contemporary art exhibitions, and community-based artistic projects foster social cohesion by celebrating diversity while building shared national identity. Art therapy and community arts programs address social challenges

including conflict resolution, trauma healing, and youth engagement, contributing to social stability essential for sustainable development. The preservation and revitalization of indigenous artistic traditions through fine arts education ensures cultural continuity while adapting to contemporary contexts. This cultural preservation is itself a form of capacity building, maintaining knowledge systems and practices that inform sustainable development approaches rooted in local contexts rather than imposed external models (Ogundimu, 2016).

### **B. Educational Innovation and Critical Thinking**

Fine arts education cultivates essential 21st-century skills including creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication – competencies crucial for Nigeria's knowledge economy aspirations. Art education encourages experimental thinking and innovation, qualities necessary for addressing complex development challenges through locally-generated solutions. Art centers and school-based arts programs provide alternative educational pathways for young people, particularly those unable to access formal higher education. These programs develop technical skills, entrepreneurial capabilities, and cultural awareness while maintaining engagement with education systems, reducing dropout rates and social marginalization.

Contemporary Arts practice increasingly incorporates digital technologies, positioning artists as early adopters and innovators in Nigeria's digital transformation agenda. Digital art, virtual exhibitions, and online art markets demonstrate how traditional creative practices can leverage technology for expanded reach and economic opportunity. Artists working with new media contribute to digital literacy development while creating content that reflects Nigerian experiences and perspectives in global digital spaces. This technological engagement through arts practice provides accessible entry points for broader digital skills development across communities (Eze & Onwuegbu, 2018).

The growth of Nigeria's arts sector depends on both infrastructure and a coherent policy framework that signals real government commitment to economic diversification. Research on creative clusters in Nigerian cities argues for bespoke policy models to nurture creative hubs and stimulate urban regeneration (Nwagboh, 2022). Meanwhile, assessments of national creative-industry policy show that government support has historically been inadequate, limiting investment in cultural infrastructure and structured development (Oke, 2023). Together, these hubs and institutions do

more than exhibit art: they incubate talent, enable creative enterprise, and reinforce innovation ecosystems that drive broader, sustainable economic growth.

### **Strategies for Enhancing Capacity Development**

Enhancing Nigeria's development capacity through art and art education requires a targeted, multi-layered strategy that aligns creative potential with national development goals. Below are key strategies emphasizing the arts–education nexus:

- **Strategy 1: Institutionalise Arts-Education within National Development Policy**

A fundamental strategy for enhancing Nigeria's development capacity is the institutionalisation of art and art education within national policy frameworks. Embedding creative arts as a strategic pillar in cultural and educational policy ensures that art is recognised as a driver of sustainable development rather than a peripheral subject. The Federal Ministry of Art, Culture, Tourism, and Creative Economy (FMACCE) initiated a comprehensive review of Nigeria's National Policy on Culture in collaboration with UNESCO and the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG), signalling a commitment to integrate culture, education, and economic development (Federal Ministry of Art, Culture, Tourism, & Creative Economy [FMACCE], 2025).

Furthermore, strengthening administrative and institutional capacity is vital for effective governance of the creative sector. UNESCO's capacity-building initiatives aim to enhance intellectual property governance, administrative competence, and stakeholder coordination within Nigeria's cultural and creative industries, providing the necessary structural foundation to support sustainable arts education (UNESCO, 2024). Establishing these institutional linkages enables art education to contribute meaningfully to national development, fostering human capital, social cohesion, and innovation.

- **Strategy 2: Expand Creative Arts Education and Build Human Capacity**

A second strategy involves the expansion of arts education and the cultivation of human capital to harness Nigeria's rich cultural heritage and youthful population. Integrating arts

education across primary and secondary school curricula develops creativity, critical thinking, and cultural identity (Echezona & Ogunleye, 2025). Despite the transformative potential of the Cultural and Creative Arts (CCA) curriculum, the current implementation is constrained by limited resources, insufficiently trained teachers, and inadequate institutional support.

Teacher development is central to this approach. Specialist art educators should be trained to deliver learner-centred, culturally responsive pedagogies that combine traditional craft, indigenous art forms, and emerging digital technologies. Beyond formal education, community-based creative hubs and mentorship programs provide alternative pathways for talent development, fostering entrepreneurial skills, social cohesion, and intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge. These initiatives create a sustainable ecosystem where art education actively contributes to national development.

- **Strategy 3: Leverage Art Entrepreneurship for Economic Diversification**

Nigeria's creative economy can only fully contribute to sustainable development if art entrepreneurship is actively supported and scaled. The Ministry of Art, Culture, Tourism, and the Creative Economy (FMACCE) is already deploying its Creative Leap Acceleration Programme (CLAP) to provide mentorship, distribution, co-working spaces, IP support, and access to funding for creators (FMACCE, n.d.). This kind of structured entrepreneurship program is essential, because it helps creative practitioners transform talents into scalable business models rather than remaining subsistence artists.

In addition, securing investment is vital. In 2025, the Nigerian government reported over US\$300 million in investment commitments into the creative economy, signaling growing confidence in creative enterprises' economic potential (BusinessDay, 2025). By combining funding, incubation, and intellectual property protection, the state can help build a robust creative sector that diversifies the national economy and reduces over-reliance on oil.

- **Strategy 4: Strengthen Institutional Capacity and Data-Driven Planning**

For sustained growth, institutional capacity must align with strategic planning and evidence-based decision-making in the creative sector. FMACCE's "Origins" data platform is a promising tool: it collects real-time data on Nigeria's cultural and creative industries to inform policy, investment, and infrastructure development (FMACCE, n.d.). Such data systems are crucial for identifying growth areas, monitoring impact, and prioritising interventions effectively.

Moreover, institutional capacity-building is needed to support this data-driven approach. Through technical partnerships such as the EU–UNESCO capacity building project, Nigeria is working to build administrative competence, enhance governance, and professionalise the creative industries (UNESCO, 2024; UNESCO, 2025). Strengthening these institutions ensures more efficient regulation of IP rights, stakeholder coordination, and policymaking aligned with long-term development aims.

- **Strategy 5: Invest in Creative Infrastructure and Public–Private Partnerships**

Building physical and digital infrastructure that supports the arts is another critical lever for development. Significant government-led initiatives are already underway: the Federal Ministry has announced plans for large-scale creative hubs, including the Abuja Creative City, under its 'CultureRise' infrastructure drive. These hubs are intended as national cultural centres, performance venues, and innovation spaces. (FMACCE, n.d.; Vanguard, 2025)

These infrastructure investments should be paired with public–private partnerships (PPP). For example, the renovation of the National Theatre is being pursued in partnership with the Central Bank of Nigeria, indicating how heritage sites can be revitalised to serve as creative incubators (TheCable, 2024). Such PPPs can catalyse broader urban renewal and anchor arts and culture as viable economic activities.

- **Strategy 6: Foster Cultural Inclusion and Community-Based Art Education**

Art education should actively engage marginalized, rural, and underserved communities to promote social equity, preserve indigenous knowledge, and build locally relevant human capital. Community-based arts programs that integrate storytelling, textile design, pottery, woodcraft, and performance arts can serve multiple development goals: they revitalize indigenous knowledge systems, support rural livelihoods, and provide culturally meaningful education (Grace & Amanze, 2025). These practices encourage intergenerational learning, where elders pass on skills, narratives, and cultural values to younger generations, strengthening cultural identity and resilience. By embedding these approaches in schools, community centers, and cultural hubs, Nigeria can ensure that arts education not only preserves heritage but also serves as a platform for inclusive development. Moreover, culturally grounded art pedagogy fosters creative problem-solving, critical thinking, and entrepreneurial skills that can enable local youth to transform traditional practices into sustainable economic opportunities. This dual focus on cultural preservation and capacity building aligns with Nigeria's broader sustainable development goals, particularly in enhancing education quality, reducing inequalities, and fostering resilient communities (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019).

- **Strategy 7: Promote Creative Storytelling for Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion**

Creative storytelling, encompassing visual arts, narrative performance, photography, and multimedia, can function as a strategic tool for peacebuilding, reconciliation, and fostering social cohesion in Nigeria's multi-ethnic and culturally diverse society. Conflicts along ethnic, religious, and regional lines have historically hindered development and created social fragmentation. Initiatives supported by UNESCO and UNODC have highlighted the potential of creative storytelling to empower youth, cultivate empathy, and build bridges between communities (Oyekunle, 2025). When incorporated into educational curricula, community programs, and cultural festivals, storytelling can encourage dialogue, critical reflection, and civic engagement among participants. For instance, integrating participatory theatre, oral history projects, and digital storytelling within schools or youth centers allows students to explore social issues creatively and collaboratively, fostering problem-solving

and negotiation skills. Such programs not only promote reconciliation and understanding among communities but also contribute to long-term social stability, creating an enabling environment for development initiatives. Ultimately, creative storytelling positions the arts as both an educational and socio-political tool, essential for nurturing inclusive, resilient, and culturally cohesive societies in Nigeria.

- **Strategy 8: Leverage Digital Creativity and Innovation**

Digital platforms and technologies should be systematically incorporated into Nigeria's art-education and creative-economy strategies to expand access, develop skills, and drive innovation. UNESCO and the European Union launched a project in 2024 to strengthen Nigeria's institutional capacity for managing cultural and creative industries (CCIs) in a digital environment, focusing on digital creativity, youth employment, and inclusive policy design (UNESCO, 2024). By integrating digital tools (including virtual galleries, online mentorship, and digital content creation) Nigeria can democratize creative education, overcome geographical and infrastructural barriers, and empower a new generation of tech-savvy artists to contribute to national development.

- **Strategy 9: Strengthen Intellectual Property (IP) Protection and Creative Rights**

A sustainable creative economy in Nigeria requires robust legal and institutional frameworks to safeguard creators' intellectual property. The Federal Ministry of Art, Culture, Tourism and the Creative Economy's eight-point plan explicitly identifies intellectual property protection as a cornerstone of its strategy to develop the creative economy (FMACCE, 2023). In support of this goal, WIPO and the Nigerian judiciary co-organized a judicial workshop in April 2025 to build judges' capacity in IP adjudication, including dispute resolution, criminal infringement, and remedies (WIPO & NJI, 2025). Strengthening IP protections and enhancing legal literacy for creatives will not only protect their work but also attract investment and encourage long-term, innovation-driven business models in the creative sector.

- **Strategy 10: Embed Art Education in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and National Planning**

Aligning art and art education with Nigeria's national development plans and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can amplify their impact. Cultural policy dialogue, such as that between the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG), FMACCE, and UNESCO, has already started to pivot toward economic growth, youth employment, and infrastructure development (Vanguard, 2025). Embedding creative education and art-driven community projects in national SDG planning can promote inclusive growth, environmental sustainability, and social cohesion.

## **Conclusion**

Capacity development in Nigeria is a multifaceted challenge that requires coordinated action across government, private sector, civil society, and local communities. While traditional development strategies such as strengthening governance, investing in human capital, diversifying the economy, and leveraging technology remain critical, the integration of art and art education emerges as a transformative pathway for sustainable development.

The strategies proposed in this paper (including fostering culturally inclusive and community-based art education, promoting creative storytelling for peacebuilding, leveraging digital creativity, strengthening intellectual property protection, and embedding art education in national planning aligned with the SDGs), collectively demonstrate how Nigeria can harness its rich cultural heritage as a driver of inclusive growth, social cohesion, and innovation. By positioning the arts at the intersection of education and economic development, the country can cultivate critical thinking, entrepreneurial skills, and digital literacy among youth, while preserving indigenous knowledge systems and strengthening community resilience.

The contribution of arts and creative education extends beyond aesthetic or cultural value; it represents a tangible avenue for economic empowerment, technological innovation, and civic engagement. Integrating these approaches within Nigeria's national development framework can generate employment, stimulate creative industries, foster national identity, and support sustainable and equitable development outcomes.



Achieving this vision requires sustained political will, long-term policy consistency, and strategic investment in both infrastructure and human capital. While the path to enhanced capacity development is complex and challenging, a deliberate arts-integrated approach provides Nigeria with a unique opportunity to convert its demographic dividend, cultural richness, and creative potential into lasting developmental gains. By embracing these strategies, Nigeria can not only overcome systemic limitations but also emerge as a regional leader in inclusive, innovative, and culturally grounded sustainable development.

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