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THE STATE OF NIGERIA'S CREATIVE ECONOMY 2026



Executive Summary

This diagnostic captures the lived experience of **377 creative** professionals across Nigeria, gathered in the weeks following NECLive 2025. It maps the structural fault lines between Nigeria's remarkable cultural influence and its ability to sustain, reward, and export that creativity at scale.

The data is unambiguous: Nigeria's creative sector is not held back by a shortage of talent — it is held back by the systems surrounding it: the infrastructure, the financing, the payment rails, the training pipelines.

377	83%	2.84/5
Total Respondents	Lose 10%+ weekly	Talent Score
8 Creative Sectors	To non-creative admin	Mid-tier skills scarce

Four findings define this report:

1. Power and connectivity are the #1 daily obstacle — rated above funding, regulation, and IP theft.
2. **83%** of respondents lose more than **10%** of productive time every week to non-creative administration.
3. **52%** cite poor briefing as a collaboration friction point; **51%** cite payment disputes —a systemic trust deficit.
4. Access to funding and distribution are the top structural gaps, above infrastructure or IP tools.

This report moves the conversation from dialogue to evidence — and from evidence to policy.

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Introduction

For more than a decade, Nigeria has told the world a remarkable story about itself through its culture. Our music sets the tempo in clubs from Lagos to London, our films travel further each year, and our writers, designers, and digital creators are shaping how a generation sees this country.

We have never lacked influence. What we have lacked is evidence about the machinery beneath that influence and the honest conversation that evidence makes possible. That is what this report sets out to provide.

The State of Nigeria's Creative Economy 2026 draws on the lived experience of **377 creative professionals** working across eight sectors, gathered in the weeks following NECLive 2025. We did not ask them what was inspiring. We asked them what was in their way. Their answers are consistent, and they are sobering.

The central finding is unambiguous: Nigeria's creative sector is **not held back by a shortage of talent.** It is held back by the systems that surround that talent; the power and connectivity, the financing, the

payment rails, and the training pipelines that mature creative economies take for granted.

Power outages rank as the single biggest daily obstacle, above funding, regulation, and piracy combined. More than eight in ten professionals lose over a tenth of every working week to non-creative administration. And when our creators try to reach the world, they are blocked not by the quality of their work but by the plumbing of international payments.

None of this is cause for despair. Read correctly, it is a gift. A sector that can name its own constraints this precisely is a sector ready to be built. The pages that follow move the conversation from dialogue to evidence, and from evidence to a set of clear, actionable recommendations for government, investors, and the private sector.

At ID Africa and through NECLive, we have spent years convening the people who make Nigeria's culture. This report, produced in partnership with Frontyard, is our attempt to convene the people who can resource it. The talent has already done its part. It is time the systems caught up.

Tomiwo Ojo

Head of Content

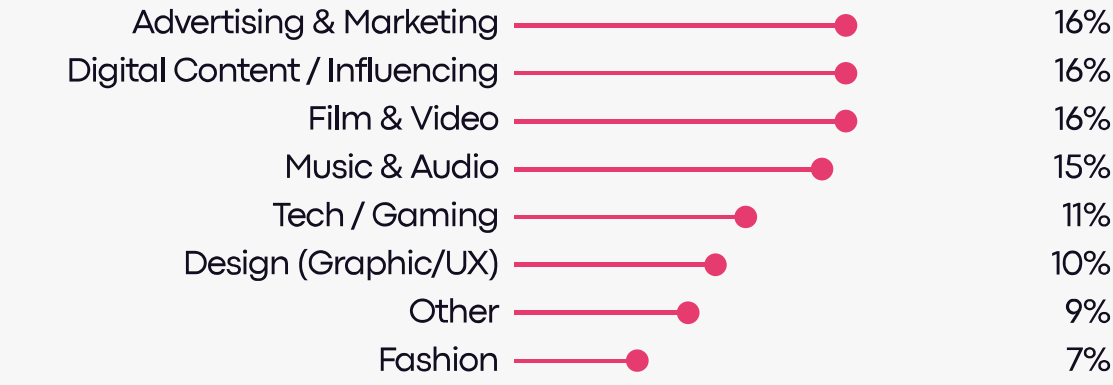
idafrica



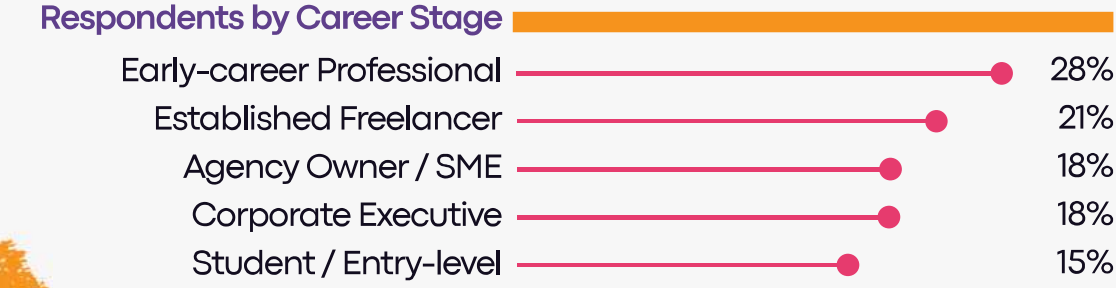
Methodology & Respondent Profile

The survey was distributed to creative stakeholders following **NECLive 2025** — open to Landmark Centre attendees, global broadcast viewers, and the wider NECLive community. Participation was voluntary; responses confidential.

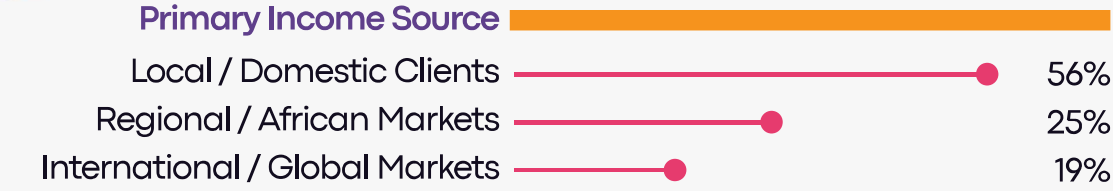
Respondents by Creative Sector



Respondents by Career Stage



Primary Income Source



*Only **19.4%** report international markets as primary income —a figure that resurfaces critically in the export section.*

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Section 1

The Daily Grind – Routine Obstacle

Respondents ranked seven routine obstacles preventing regional or global growth. Lower score = higher priority **(1 = most critical, 7 = least critical).**

Rank		Avg Score
1	Power outages or poor internet disrupting workflows	2.98
2	Team coordination and scheduling issues	3.39
3	Limited access to reliable equipment or tools	3.50
4	Funding delays for materials or travel	3.64
5	Market access barriers like visa or export hurdles	3.98
6	Regulatory red tape slowing daily operations	4.33
7	IP theft or piracy affecting output	4.46

Power and connectivity ranked #1 — above funding delays, IP theft, and all regulatory concerns combined.

The single most impactful intervention for Nigeria's creative sector is reliable electricity and broadband. Until that foundation exists, every other creative economy programme builds on sand.

"Stable electricity supply and better planning — that is the single most urgent fix."

"Having all the equipment required, 24-hour electricity, and faster internet services."

Section 2

Where Projects Bleed - Waste & Loss in Production

Respondents ranked five sources of production waste. The remarkably close average scores indicate near-simultaneous pain points. Creative enterprises are not losing at one point — they are leaking across the entire production chain.

Rank		Avg Score
1	Budget overruns from unexpected on-site costs	2.48
2	Equipment breakdowns or supply chain delays	2.55
3	Opaque payment systems or delayed royalties	2.67
4	Lack of follow-up after production (e.g. promotion)	2.85
5	Mismatches between skills and project needs	3.26



"A more transparent payment tracking system with regular follow-ups would ensure royalties are processed on time."



"Early and easy payments from clients for jobs already done would resolve most of my daily stress."

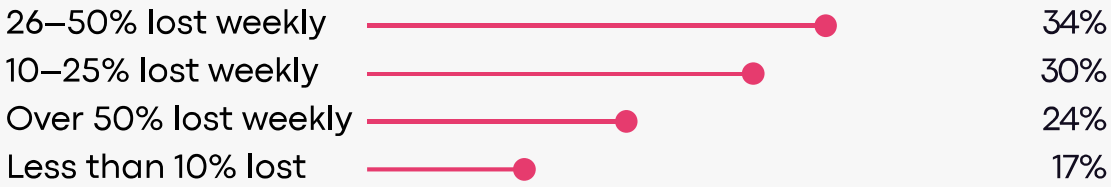


"Clearer budget templates and payment schedules upfront would avoid scope creep and delayed compensation"

Section 3

The Administration Tax - Productive Time Lost

How much weekly productive time is consumed by non-creative tasks: logistics, sourcing, chasing payments?



83%
Lose 10%+ weekly
To non-creative admin

53.6%
Lose 26%+ weekly
Over a quarter of their week

19.6%
Lose 50%+
Admin exceeds creative time

More than one in five creative professionals spends more time on administration than on creative output. This reflects the absence of reliable financial infrastructure and legal frameworks that mature markets take for granted.

If Nigeria's creative sector reclaimed just half the time lost to administration, productive output would double — without a single new hire or fund.

"Having someone else handle admin and communication tasks so I can focus on creative work."

"Money — most of the problems I face can be resolved with extra liquidity."

Perspective

The Culture is World-Class. The Plumbing? Not Yet.

We have fallen in love with the idea of the "African Creative Explosion." It makes for great headlines. It's undeniably true that our culture — our films, our music, our design — has become one of the most vital exports in the global marketplace. We are a cultural superpower.

Our culture has crept on the whole world and is being celebrated, but we are seeing headwinds, and there is a dangerous complacency in that narrative. If we keep celebrating the output without fixing the inputs, we are setting ourselves up for a ceiling that we may not be able to break through.

Working with NECLive and the team at Frontyard, we went into the field to talk to **377 working creatives** — not the superstars who have already found a way, but the engine room of the industry. The people who build the actual work across eight sectors. The data we got back wasn't about a lack of creativity, vision or skill. It was a report card on our infrastructure. The product is world-class; the plumbing? Effectively broken.

Here is the reality of the industry today, stripped of all the hype.

1 You can't broadcast without a signal

We asked our respondents to rank their biggest day-to-day hurdles. The answer wasn't "funding" or "piracy" or "regulation." It was power and the internet.

I think we all can agree on one fact: you cannot build a digital economy on a generator. When we lose billions to bad power — and the World Bank data is clear that we are — we create an economic blockade that affects everyone. If your studio can't render, or your team can't upload, you are already out of the game before you start. Every government initiative that doesn't prioritise basic power and broadband as "creative infrastructure" is building on sand.

2 The "Administration Tax" is killing our margins

This was perhaps the most sobering statistic in the report: **83% of our creatives lose more than 10% of their productive time** every single week to routine administrative tasks. They aren't creating; they are chasing payments, managing logistics, or fighting over contracts.

In a mature media or tech business, those are back-office functions. In Nigeria, they are a tax on the creator. If we could just standardize our contracts and automate the payment rails, we would effectively double our national creative output without needing a single extra Naira of investment. We definitely need more capital and all the resources you can think of. But it might all come to naught if we do not develop better systems that are built on resilient infrastructure.

3 We built the culture, but we forgot the cashier

When we looked at the barriers to exporting our work, the picture became crystal clear. The friction isn't the quality of the content. It's the payment stack. **57% of our export hurdles come down to payment processing and FX issues** (you can see this easily with the social media conversations around getting paid and the amount of effort invested in VPNs).

We are globally relevant, but we are commercially locked out. We have created a world-class IP, but we haven't built the "cashier" to bring the money home. We are the ones doing the heavy lifting, yet we are the ones struggling to collect the bill. That is a structural failure, with profound consequences for practitioners, their backers, and the national economy.

4 The AI gap is all about the bill

There is a lot of talk about AI training and re-skilling. That matters, but it's missing the bigger picture. When we asked creatives why they weren't using AI, the barrier wasn't "I don't know how." It was "I can't afford the subscription." We are creating a two-tier industry where the best tools are only for the top 1%. If we don't democratize access, we are just widening the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

What must we do next?

We have the ambition. The government's **$100 billion GDP target for 2030** is bold, but big headline funds won't reach the freelancer in Abeokuta or the studio in Aba. Capital needs to be calibrated to how creative projects actually earn, not tied up in the bank orthodoxy of collateral that doesn't exist.

The path forward is unglamorous. It won't trend on X, and it won't win a popularity contest. But we need to:

- **Prioritize power:** Make it non-negotiable for creative districts.
- **Fix the financial rails:** Build an FX corridor specifically for creative services.
- **Standardize the work:** We need a common code of practice for contracts so we stop wasting 50% of our time on budget disputes.
- **Register the talent:** We need a functioning pipeline, so when a big project lands, we actually know where to find the editors, animators, and engineers to staff it.

We have spent enough years shouting about how good our talent is. That was never the question. The question now is whether we are finally prepared to build the boring, essential machinery that lets that talent get paid, scale, and stay — the boring machinery that turns a beloved culture into a sustainable industry. And it's precisely the work Frontyard exists to do: building the rails, the financing and the structure beneath the noise. More on that later.

John Ugbe

Founder, Frontyard Group



Section 4

The Structure Gap – What Holds The Sector Back

Respondents ranked six structural gaps — the systemic conditions that determine whether a creative professional can build, sustain, and scale a viable enterprise.

Rank		Avg Score
1	Access to affordable funding or micro-grants	2.49
2	Reliable networks for distribution or exposure	2.78
3	Skills training for operational roles	3.02
4	Basic infrastructure like studios or training spaces	3.14
5	Cross-sector teamwork opportunities	3.43
6	Tools for IP tracking or anti-piracy	3.59

Funding and distribution dominate. Nigerian creative professionals are not primarily asking for infrastructure to make things — they are asking for capital to start and routes to reach markets. The product exists. The pipeline does not.



"Local tools and platforms that can scale my work internationally without spending excess foreign currency."



"Funding will unlock access to other tools and human resources that would allow me focus on the bigger picture."

Section 5

If You Had 1 Billion – Allocation Priorities

If n1 billion were available to fix daily issues in Nigeria's creative economy, what would respondents fund first?

Rank		Avg Score
1	Hands-on talent training workshops	2.59
2	Community funding pools for equipment	2.61
3	Shared production spaces or hubs	2.85
4	Local distribution networks	3.04
5	Simple IP protection apps	3.52
6	Data tools for personal analytics	–

Training and community funding top the list — ahead of infrastructure and distribution. Respondents want to be skilled and funded first. This is a sector that knows its own needs with precision.

"Access to resourceful support programmes with workshops available in clusters and zones across Nigeria"

"A shared equipment pool in my area would eliminate my biggest recurring expense."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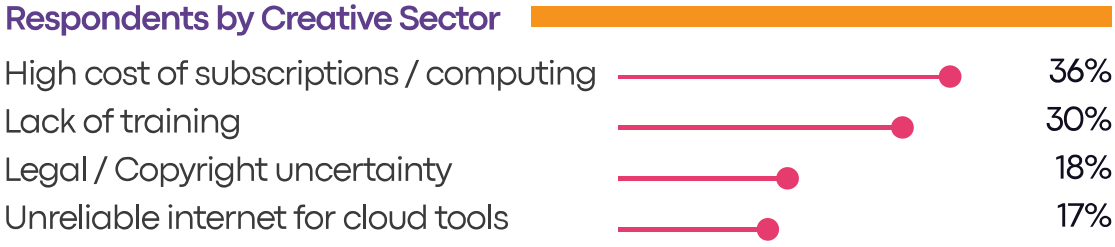
Section 6

AI Integration- The New Access Divide

What is the biggest practical challenge in integrating AI tools? The results expose an emerging frontier of inequality — where access to AI risks becoming yet another marker of who can compete.

Respondents by Creative Sector



Cost is the primary barrier (35.8%), ahead of training (29.7%), legal uncertainty (17.8%), and connectivity (16.7%). Financial access precedes every other concern — this mirrors the survey's entire structural profile

The AI divide is not primarily a skills divide. It is a cost divide — and cost maps directly onto geography and class.

Section 7

The Collaboration Problem — Friction Between Creatives

Where does friction arise most during creative collaborations? Respondents could select multiple friction points. The data exposes a trust and communication deficit running across the entire sector.

Respondents by Creative Sector



The near-identical scores for communication failure (52.0%) and payment disputes (51.5%) tell a single story: the sector lacks the operational infrastructure professional industries take for granted — clear briefs, enforceable contracts, reliable payment timelines

"Clearer briefs and better explanations from clients on their specific needs would stop most rework."

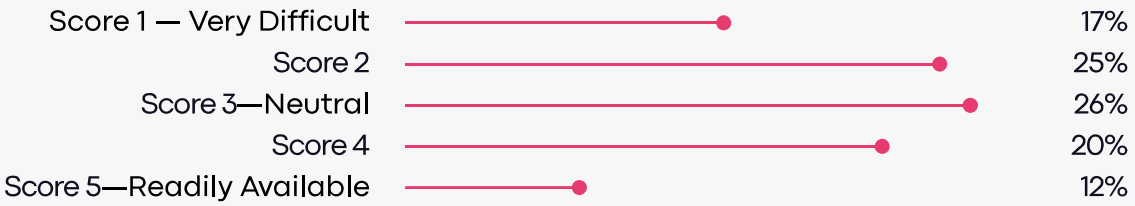
"Legal contract templates would save hours I currently spend negotiating basic terms."

"Fair and fast payment culture from clients — many want to pay only after a project is completed, and this

Section 8

Talent Availability & Export Barrier

Middle-Tier Talent Accessibility (1 = Very Difficult, 5 = Readily Available)



2.85/5
Avg Accessibility
Mid-tier technical talent

42.4%
Score 1 or 2
Find talent difficult

11.9%
Score 5 only
Readily Available

The 2.84/5 average confirms a persistent mid-tier talent shortage. The skills exist in Nigeria — but there is no organised marketplace, training pipeline, or professional certification system to surface and connect them.

Biggest Export Hurdle



Payment infrastructure leads (29.2%), narrowly ahead of logistics (28.4%). Together they capture 57.6% — more than half of Nigeria's creative exporters are blocked not by quality but by the plumbing of international commerce.

Nigeria's creative exports are not blocked by a quality gap. They are blocked by a payment gap.

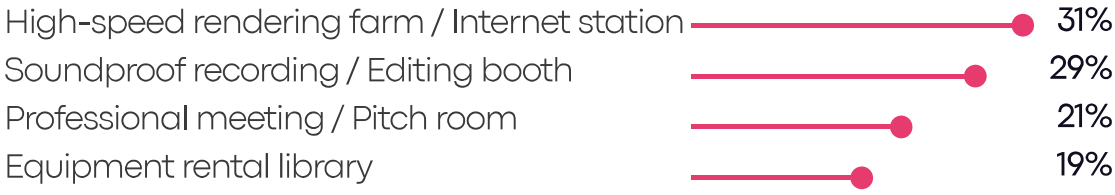
"Being able to receive foreign payments easily would immediately open new markets for my work."

Section 9

Infrastructure Demand — The Creative Hub Question

Which facility would respondents use most if a Creative Hub were built in their neighbourhood?

Respondents by Creative Sector



Digital infrastructure leads (31.3%), followed by recording and editing (28.6%). Nearly 60% prioritise connectivity and technical access. The pitch room (21.0%) underlines the lack of formal business environments. Equipment rental (19.1%) confirms the capital access challenge.

"A one-stop infrastructure system that can provide all that is needed for success."

"A reliable high-speed internet connection and access to powerful computing tools that remove technical delays."

Section 10

Voices — What Would Double Your Output?

375 respondents answered: "What is the single biggest win that would double your creative output this year?" All quotes are drawn exclusively from the first 150 survey respondents, organised by theme.

Theme 1 — Capital & Funding

- "A grant or an Angel investor that would allow me hire the right hands, subscribe for the best tools, and distribute effectively."
- "Funding will unlock access to other tools and human resources that would allow me focus on the bigger picture."
- "Reliable funding for film production, supported by uninterrupted power supply and high-speed internet, would dramatically increase my creative output."

Theme 2 — Stable Infrastructure

- "A reliable high-speed internet connection and access to powerful computing tools that remove technical delays."
- "Stable electricity supply and better planning — that is the single most urgent fix."

Theme 3 — Systems & Professional Structures

- "Fair and fast payment culture from clients — many want to pay only after a project is completed, and this disrupts workflow."
- "Legal contract templates would save hours I currently spend negotiating basic terms."
- "Building a consistent system that dedicates protected, distraction-free time each day solely to creating."

Theme 4 — Markets, Community & Networks

- "A single, functional creative industry database that would allow me network for clients, collaborators, and potential employers."
- "Access to distribution and monetisation pathways for content is the single most urgent systemic gap."
- "A community of like minds to work on projects together — without isolation, output doubles."
- "Being able to receive foreign payments easily would immediately open new markets for my work."



Key Findings at a Glance

Power & Connectivity	The #1 daily obstacle — ahead of funding, IP theft, and regulation. Every other intervention is constrained until electricity and broadband are addressed.
The Administration Tax	83% lose 10%+ of their week to non-creative tasks. 19.6% lose more than half their week entirely to administration.
Funding First	Access to affordable funding is the top structural gap. Distribution and training follow. IP tools rank last — capital comes before everything else.
Production Losses	Projects bleed at multiple points: budget surprises, equipment failures, missing post-production follow-up, and delayed royalties.
Collaboration Friction	52% cite briefing failure; 51% cite payment disputes. The creative sector has a systemic trust deficit within its own ranks.
The Export Payment Wall	Payment processing and FX barriers are the #1 export hurdle. Nigeria cannot monetise its cultural exports because of financial plumbing — not quality.
The AI Cost Divide	35.8% cannot afford AI subscription costs. The AI divide is a cost divide that maps directly ontoexisting inequality.
Mid-Tier Talent Gap	Average accessibility score of 2.84/5 for editors, engineers, and technicians. The skills exist; the marketplace to find them does not

Recommendations for Stakeholders

Five action-ready recommendations for government, the private sector, and civil society — derived directly from this data.



Treat Power and Connectivity as Creative Economy Infrastructure

Power outages ranked as the most critical daily obstacle above every other concern. Creative hubs must include power backup as non-negotiable. Advocate for priority grid access in creative districts at state government level.



Launch a Creative Economy Lending Facility

Access to affordable funding is the top structural gap. Partner with fintech companies and DFIs to pilot a creative economy lending window with simplified collateral and repayment structures calibrated to project revenue cycles.



Build a Standardised Contracts and Payments Framework

Communication failure and payment disputes each affect over 50% of collaborations. Develop and distribute a standard suite of creative industry contracts alongside a code of payment practice. NECLive is the natural convener.



Establish a National Creative Talent Registry and Mid-Tier Pipeline

Average mid-tier talent accessibility is 2.84/5. Commission a national registry of creative technical practitioners with verified credentials, anchored to a skills training programme targeting operational roles.



Create a Dedicated Financial Rail for Creative Exports

Payment processing and FX barriers are the #1 export obstacle. Engage the CBN and leading fintech partners to develop a dedicated remittance and licensing payment corridor for creative exports with favourable FX rates.

About NECLive

NECLive is the marketplace of ideas, products and services for the African entertainment industry. Since 2013, NECLive has provided a platform for discussing challenges, exchanging ideas, and finding strengthened pathways for the entertainment industry in Nigeria to thrive. The conference hosts respected guests, speakers, panellists and performers from various sectors of the economy, attracting thousands of participants and millions of viewers globally.

About Frontyard

Frontyard is an innovation and investment engine powering Africa's creative frontier. The company identifies the structural gaps across the creative value chain — from distribution to rights management — and co-builds the ventures that close them. Operating across music, film, and sports, Frontyard incubates ventures that solve the foundational problems holding Africa's creative economy back — making the sector investable, resilient, and scalable. Its aim is a creative economy with the infrastructure to let African creativity scale globally and sustainably.

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