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Preserving African Cultural Values in Children's Media: Establishing African Cartoon Channels on Cable Networks

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Summary

While globalisation has increased access to a diverse array of media, there is an urgent need to ensure African children are exposed to programming that reflects their own cultural values. The predominance of Western cartoons on platforms like DSTV presents a gap in culturally relevant content for African audiences. This brief proposes the development of a framework to create, standardise, and distribute African cartoon channels that celebrate African values and traditions. A strategic approach will help maintain African cultural identity among children while providing parents with meaningful alternatives.

Background

The African Union and UNESCO have long highlighted the importance of cultural preservation, especially for youth¹. While globalisation allows for exposure to diverse content, the lack of African representation in children's media limits opportunities for cultural continuity and pride. Various African countries have developed film and television policies to support local content, but implementation remains inconsistent, especially in children's programming.

Countries like Japan have successfully promoted cultural identity through media exports, including anime², which has become popular globally. Similar policies to promote African cartoons can help African children feel a sense of pride and connection to their cultural roots.

Issue:

The prominence of Western values in children's programming has raised concerns about its potential to weaken young African audiences' connection to their cultural heritage. Popular networks on cable platforms like DSTV prioritise Western-produced cartoons, which often do not

¹ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000376964>

² <https://www.ajhssr.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/ZJ24806339348.pdf>



reflect African values, languages, or traditions. This disparity risks eroding African identity and traditions in future generations, who are exposed predominantly to foreign cultures. Closing this gap with African-oriented content would offer a balanced viewing experience, enabling children to appreciate African narratives, languages, and values.

Rationale

Lawmakers need to understand that strengthening African cultural representation in media is not only a matter of preserving heritage but also an educational tool that can instil values, languages, and stories relevant to African children. This calls for collaborative efforts to encourage the inclusion of African cartoon channels on major cable platforms. Policies should focus on incentivising and supporting the creation of high-quality, culturally relevant content while respecting the commercial realities of private broadcast stations and ensuring mutually beneficial partnerships.

Conclusion

Ensuring African cultural representation in children's media is essential for the social and cultural development of African youth. By prioritising a framework for African cartoon channels, legislators can support the creation of culturally resonant content, safeguard African identity, and offer parents greater choice in media that aligns with their values.

Policy Recommendations

1. Mandate Minimum Quotas for African Content on Cable Networks and Strengthen the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) with a Dedicated Unit for Children's Media Standards

The National Assembly should amend relevant frameworks, such as the National Broadcasting Commission Act, to require major cable networks operating in Africa, such as DSTV, to allocate a minimum percentage of airtime to African cartoon channels. This can be facilitated through a quota system, similar to local content quotas in other industries. Such mandates would encourage investment in African animation studios and content creators. The National Assembly can also exercise its oversight functions to ensure compliance with these provisions and support their effective implementation.

The National Assembly, through legislative action, should enhance the mandate of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) by establishing a specialised unit responsible for setting and enforcing standards for children's programming. This unit would oversee content across all platforms to ensure it reflects African values, languages, and cultural narratives while meeting high educational and cultural benchmarks. By integrating this function within the NBC, the initiative would benefit from existing regulatory structures, ensuring seamless collaboration among government, broadcasters, and content creators, and promoting consistency across all media programming for children.

2. Provide Grants and Tax Incentives for African Animation Studios



Through legislation, the National Assembly should mandate the executive to create a fund to support local animation and media production studios by offering tax incentives, grants, and subsidies for content development. A government-funded African Animation Grant Programme could support the creation of African-centric cartoons, educational animations, and culturally relevant stories. This funding would empower local studios to produce high-quality content that meets both cultural and entertainment standards.

By taking these actions, Nigerian lawmakers can help preserve and promote African cultural identity, offer families valuable alternatives in children's media, and support a thriving African media landscape.

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