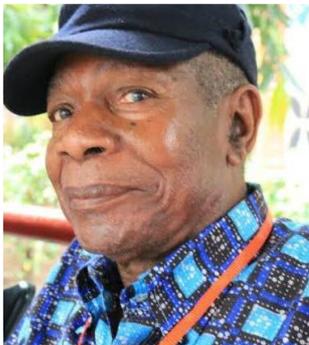


...A refuge to otherwise disrespected professionals

By Tam Fiofori



Through persistence and hard work, iREP has steadily repositioned documentary films in Nigeria over the years. It has erased the bogus notion that documentary films are a poor cousin of feature films... a systematic rebranding of the documentary genre (that) has helped in educating the audience in documentary appreciation.



[Tam Fiofori - Wikipedia](#)

iREP Film Festival has been a lifeline, a survival net for filmmakers like me who deliberately have decided to work only in the documentary genre.

Documentary films have never been 'hot' in Nigeria, for managers-exhibitors as well as viewing audiences. I should know.

In May 1974, when I made my first celluloid 30-minute Documentary film *Odum and Water Masquerades*, the obvious and only exhibitor then, the NTA, was both uninterested and quite discouraging.

At that time, we the pioneer independent Nigerian filmmakers, were working in a hostile environment deliberately created by the Ministry of Information/Culture and NTA; because the top management of both institutions, were basically old-fashioned control freaks and power mongers!

Maybe they felt threatened that we were invading their space and eroding their control and power. It was like, "Who are these small boys who do not want to work at NTA or the Film Unit, so that they will greet/bow to us every day and, we will always tell them what to do? Oh, they think they can set up their own film companies; we will show them!"

The NTA and the supervising Ministry NEVER encouraged independent and documentary film making in Nigeria. The NTA never educated or grew an audience/viewership for documentary films.

At that time, it cost 1,000 Naira to produce 1 minute of celluloid film, yet NTA was offering a measly 50 Naira to air your film as a favour.

We were no intellectual or social slouches. We were, contemptuous of these self-appointed gatekeepers, for their ignorance and the big threat they posed for the health and full development of the film industry in Nigeria.

Thankfully, the genre of documentary films and the professionals who make them in Nigeria, have survived and, outlived those who unsuccessfully tried to thwart the growth and development of the documentary film genre in Nigeria.

Survival is a very crucial state of being. Equally important and complimentary, is sustenance. This is why it is noteworthy that the genre of documentary films, has survived and been sustained in Nigeria for over fifty years.

iREP seamlessly fits into the bigger picture. It is the first and only independent annual specialist international film festival in Nigeria [and Africa], that caters solely for documentary films. It has fulfilled this noble mission, uninterrupted, for a decade. BRAVO!

It is extremely significant that iREP is independent. Why it has successfully run uninterrupted for 10 years, is the reality that it is organised by a cohesive body that includes seasoned and award-winning filmmakers, knowledgeable and genuinely sympathetic lovers of film and the arts, and hardworking administrators and volunteers. Collectively, they respect the film industry and filmmakers.

Documentary film making in Nigeria needed iREP, and it has come to the rescue. There was the urgent need to reposition Documentary films within the film industry and for film viewers.

Give Documentary films their pride of place as a vibrant equal partner with feature [*Nollywood*] films; that offer education, information and entertainment [infotainment].

Through persistence and hard work, iREP has steadily repositioned documentary films in Nigeria over the years. It has erased the bogus notion that documentary films are a poor cousin of feature films.

iREP's other achievements include a systematic rebranding of the documentary genre. It has shown a multiple variety of documentaries in sub-genres and on a wide diversity of topics, to demonstrate the limitless spectrum of documentaries. This has helped in educating the audience in documentary appreciation.

It has grown the audience for documentaries and has generated a lot of interest in the young and the youth. With a lot of free tutorials on filmmaking, iREP has now inspired a young generation of filmmakers [male and female] who have brought new energy and concepts into the genre.

It is brave to organise a four-day all-documentary film festival; without entry fees for participants and free entrance for the audience. Remarkably, iREP has pulled it off.

It has become an annual global film festival where about 50 documentaries from half as many countries are shown. It attracts filmmakers, film-business people, academics, students, film buffs and the general public, at the relaxing nature-friendly Freedom Park, Lagos, Nigeria.

I am a senior member of the iREP family, humbly inducted into its Hall of Fame in 2011 and have exhibited five Documentaries so far.

Happy 10th Anniversary and Happy Survival

- *Fiofori, filmmaker, photographer and art activist, is director of Biodun Olaku: Nigerian Painter; and J. D. 'Okhai Ojeikere: Master Photographer. and others*