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Hurray for Nollywood

By STEPHEN HEYMAN OCT. 22, 2014

Nigerian cinema may be little known outside of Africa, but the country's homegrown movie business, called Nollywood, produces about 1,000 films a year — a cinematic output that eclipses Hollywood's and is second only to India's Bollywood. And the industry continues to develop. Nigerian box office revenues, which have nearly doubled since 2009, are projected to grow an additional 70 percent by 2018, to \$171 million a year, according to a report by the consulting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers.

By international standards, the typical Nollywood film is a bare-bones affair: Budgets rarely exceed \$40,000, cameras are handheld, set design is nearly nonexistent, and filming and post-production take just a few weeks. But the casual, do-it-yourself nature of this industry belies its size and importance, said Vicki Myburgh, a media and entertainment analyst in South Africa for PwC, who said that the Nigerian movie business was thought to be the country's second largest employer after agriculture.

While such statistics are impressive, Ms. Myburgh said that considering that Nigeria sometimes makes more than 100 films a month and has a population of more than 170 million people, its domestic movie business should be generating much more revenue. In 2013, all filmed entertainment in Nigeria — including video, streaming and box office sales — grossed just \$178 million, according to PwC.

The biggest problem, Ms. Myburgh said, is that the majority of Nigerian films are bootlegged immediately after release. She cited the World Bank's estimate that 90 percent of the DVDs in circulation in Nigeria are illegal copies. "If you factor all those pirated films in, you begin to get a sense of how big the industry really is," she said. The lack of modern cinema screens also limits Nollywood's potential, Ms. Myburgh said, noting that Nigeria has about one movie theater per five million inhabitants. Most of the country's current box-office grosses come from informal single-screen "video shacks" that are sometimes attached to cafés.

As Nigerian cinema grows, its offerings are becoming more ambitious, especially since the announcement in 2010 of a \$200 million government film fund to improve the quality and distribution of Nollywood features. The hotly anticipated psychological thriller "October 1," directed by Kunle Afolayan and released last month, is a prime example of this new wave. Its budget was \$2 million — an astronomical sum by local standards (and partially subsidized by the Lagos State Government and companies like the Japanese automaker Toyota). Mr. Afolayan said he was unwilling to confine the success of the film to Nigeria or even Africa. "I want to be able to compete — to travel to Cannes, to big film festivals, to have my work compete with the likes of Quentin Tarantino," he told BBC News recently. "I want to be seen as an international filmmaker — not someone who operates only within my territory."

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