

# Music Tourism as Cultural Diplomacy in Underdeveloped Countries: The Role of Nigerian Music Festivals, Cultural Exchange Programmes, and International Collaborations in Cross-Cultural Engagement

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**Abstract:** *This article examines music tourism as more than a leisure activity, framing it as a strategic cultural, diplomatic, and developmental resource for underdeveloped countries. Using Nigeria as a focal case, the paper argues that music tourism can strengthen cultural diplomacy through festivals, cultural exchange programmes, and international collaborations. Nigeria is especially significant because of its rich musical heritage, globally influential popular music industry, diverse indigenous performance traditions, vibrant festival culture, and large diaspora community. However, despite the international visibility of Nigerian music, the country has not fully institutionalized music tourism as a coherent instrument of cultural diplomacy, national branding, and sustainable development. Adopting a conceptual and positional approach, the article draws on cultural diplomacy, soft power, music tourism, cultural sustainability, creative economy, and postcolonial development perspectives. It shows how music festivals, exchange initiatives, and transnational collaborations can promote cross-cultural engagement, intercultural dialogue, national image-building, creative entrepreneurship, and heritage preservation. The article contributes to debates on cultural policy, tourism development, creative economy expansion, and Global South cultural diplomacy.*

**Keywords:** Music tourism, cultural diplomacy, music festivals, cultural exchange, cross-cultural engagement.

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## INTRODUCTION

Music tourism has increasingly emerged as a strategic field within cultural tourism, creative economy development, and international cultural relations. Beyond its entertainment value, music functions as a carrier of memory, identity, affect, heritage, and place-based meaning. In many

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societies, musical performance is not merely an artistic activity but a social institution through which communities narrate their histories, negotiate belonging, preserve indigenous knowledge, and communicate values across generations. Recent scholarship on music and cultural tourism shows that music-related travel contributes to cultural preservation, regional identity formation, economic diversification, and tourist engagement, while also raising questions about commodification, authenticity, and ethical representation (Mazlan et al., 2025; Suhud et al., 2025; Uche, 2025). In this regard, music tourism provides a useful conceptual bridge between cultural production and diplomacy because it transforms festivals, performances, exchange programmes, and artistic collaborations into spaces where cultural meanings are circulated across national and transnational publics.

This paper is positioned against the background of underdeveloped countries whose cultural assets are globally attractive but institutionally under-leveraged. Nigeria offers a compelling case because its music ecosystem, particularly Afrobeats and related popular forms, has gained remarkable continental and global visibility. Yet the diplomatic, developmental, and tourism potentials of this cultural momentum remain unevenly structured. Tella (2022) identifies Afrobeats, Nollywood, diaspora networks, peacemaking, aid, and norm entrepreneurship as important sources of Nigeria's soft power, but also observes a gap between Nigeria's soft-power capacity and its effective foreign-policy realization. This gap is especially relevant to music tourism because Nigerian music festivals, cultural exchange initiatives, and international collaborations often generate cross-cultural visibility without being adequately integrated into national tourism planning, cultural diplomacy strategy, destination branding, or heritage policy.

The problem, therefore, is not the absence of cultural capital but the weak conversion of cultural capital into sustained diplomatic and developmental value. In underdeveloped contexts, music festivals are frequently treated as seasonal entertainment events rather than as instruments of cultural dialogue, destination repositioning, youth empowerment, diaspora reconnection, and international image-making. Similarly, cultural exchange programmes and artistic collaborations are often fragmented, donor-driven, urban-centred, or insufficiently connected to local communities. This limits their ability to foster mutual understanding, correct negative stereotypes, and strengthen the international visibility of indigenous and contemporary musical traditions. The Nigerian diaspora is particularly important in this respect, as diaspora actors can challenge negative perceptions, promote Nigerian culture, circulate remittances, and contribute to technical and cultural exchange (Serres, 2025b; Tella, 2023a).

The central argument of this article is that music tourism should be reframed as a form of cultural diplomacy in underdeveloped countries. Such a reframing moves the discussion beyond tourism revenue alone and foregrounds music as a relational, symbolic, and strategic resource for cross-cultural engagement. Music festivals can create immersive encounters between visitors and host communities; cultural exchange programmes can deepen intercultural learning; and international collaborations can expand the mobility of artists, sounds, values, and narratives. However, as sustainable cultural diplomacy requires institutional continuity, ethical participation, and long-

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term relational investment, these practices must be deliberately planned rather than left to market enthusiasm or isolated artistic success (Faucher & Zhu, 2025). The purpose of this paper is therefore to examine how Nigerian music festivals, cultural exchange programmes, and international collaborations can function as instruments of cultural diplomacy, while also interrogating the institutional, infrastructural, representational, and policy conditions necessary for music tourism to contribute meaningfully to cross-cultural engagement in underdeveloped countries.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

Music tourism refers to travel that is motivated wholly or partly by the desire to experience music, musical places, performers, festivals, soundscapes, heritage sites, and creative communities. It is a specialized form of cultural tourism in which music becomes both the attraction and the medium through which visitors encounter places, identities, memories, and social meanings. Recent scholarship shows that music in cultural tourism contributes to cultural preservation, tourist motivation, economic development, and the shaping of memorable experiences, especially where music is embedded in local heritage and community life (Govedarica, 2025; Mazlan et al., 2025). In this sense, music tourism is not limited to the consumption of concerts or commercial entertainment; it includes festival-based music tourism, heritage-based music tourism, performance-based tourism, artist-centred tourism, community-based music tourism, educational and exchange-based music tourism, and diaspora-oriented music tourism. Festival-based music tourism is organized around attendance at music festivals and large-scale cultural events, while heritage-based music tourism involves travel to places associated with musical history, indigenous traditions, iconic artists, or sacred performance practices. Performance-based tourism focuses on live musical encounters, whereas artist-centered tourism is driven by the popularity, memory, or symbolic value of particular musicians. Community-based music tourism foregrounds local participation and cultural ownership, while educational and exchange-based music tourism includes workshops, residencies, training programmes, and institutional exchanges. Diaspora-oriented music tourism is particularly relevant to Nigeria because music often functions as a bridge between homeland, migration, memory, and return.

Cultural diplomacy refers to the use of cultural expressions, artistic exchanges, heritage, education, and creative collaboration to build relationships, improve mutual understanding, strengthen national image, and support international cooperation (Devkota et al., 2025; Zanella et al., 2024). It may be led by the state through ministries, embassies, tourism boards, and cultural agencies, but it may also be institution-led, community-led, artist-led, or diaspora-led. Contemporary scholarship on sustainable cultural diplomacy stresses that cultural diplomacy is most effective when it moves beyond short-term image projection and becomes embedded in long-term relationships, ethical collaboration, and sustainable cultural policy (Faucher & Yu, 2025). Music is especially important to cultural diplomacy because it can travel across linguistic, political, ethnic, and geographical boundaries. It communicates emotion, identity, spirituality, resistance, joy, memory, and collective experience in ways that formal diplomatic language may not easily achieve.

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The term underdeveloped countries is used here to describe societies facing structural economic constraints, weak infrastructure, dependency, institutional fragility, poverty, limited industrialization, and unequal participation in global economic and cultural systems. The concept must, however, be used critically. Underdevelopment should not be mistaken for cultural emptiness or creative inferiority. Many underdeveloped countries are economically constrained but culturally rich. Their major challenge is often the limited institutional capacity to convert cultural wealth into sustainable diplomatic, developmental, and tourism advantage. Nigeria exemplifies this paradox: it possesses globally visible music, diverse indigenous traditions, vibrant festivals, and a large diaspora, yet its cultural resources are not always systematically integrated into tourism policy or foreign cultural strategy.

Cross-cultural engagement refers to interaction, dialogue, collaboration, and exchange between people from different cultural backgrounds. In music tourism, it occurs when tourists, artists, communities, cultural institutions, governments, and diaspora groups meet through festivals, performances, workshops, residencies, concerts, and collaborative productions. Music festivals are therefore organized cultural events that bring together performers, audiences, sponsors, tourists, communities, and institutions for artistic, economic, spiritual, political, educational, and diplomatic purposes. Studies of music festivals show that they generate experiences of authenticity, place attachment, social interaction, and destination meaning (Skandalis et al., 2024). In Nigeria, examples include Osun-Osogbo cultural performances, Felabration, Calabar Carnival music events, Lagos concerts, Ojude Oba displays, Durbar-related performances, New Yam festivals, and Eyo festival performances (Sunday-Kanu, 2025). Cultural exchange programmes, in turn, are structured initiatives that enable artists, students, scholars, cultural workers, and institutions to interact across borders through residencies, workshops, joint performances, university partnerships, embassy-supported events, mobility schemes, and training programmes. International collaborations are partnerships between musicians, producers, cultural institutions, governments, festivals, universities, and creative organizations across countries. These may produce joint performances, co-produced songs, international tours, research projects, digital productions, festival partnerships, and transnational creative networks. For Nigeria, such collaborations are central to soft power because Afrobeats, diaspora networks, and cultural exports increasingly shape how the country is imagined globally (Ahmed, 2025; Sofola and Wanyama, 2025; Tella, 2023a).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This article is anchored on five mutually reinforcing theoretical perspectives: soft power theory, cultural diplomacy theory, postcolonial theory, creative economy theory, and cultural sustainability theory. Soft power theory provides the primary lens for understanding how music tourism can enable underdeveloped countries to exercise influence through attraction rather than coercion. In this framework, the value of music lies not only in its artistic form but in its capacity to generate admiration, emotional attachment, symbolic recognition, and cultural familiarity. Nigeria offers a particularly instructive case because its creative sector has become one of its most visible sources of international attraction. Tella (2023a) argues that Nigeria's cultural exports, including

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Afrobeats, Nollywood, literature, and fashion, constitute important soft-power resources, even though their diplomatic potential remains constrained by governance deficits, negative stereotypes, insecurity, and weak institutional coordination. Applied to music tourism, soft power theory suggests that Nigerian festivals, musical heritage, artist mobility, and transnational collaborations can enhance national visibility, but only when popularity is supported by cultural policy, destination branding, infrastructure, and strategic diplomatic engagement.

Cultural diplomacy theory extends this argument by explaining how musical encounters become diplomatic practices. Cultural diplomacy involves the use of cultural resources to build relationships, foster mutual understanding, create dialogue, and sustain international cooperation. Faucher and Yu (2025) emphasize that sustainable cultural diplomacy should move beyond short-term image management and should instead cultivate durable relationships among state institutions, cultural organizations, local actors, and international publics. Within this article, music festivals, cultural exchange programmes, and international collaborations are therefore conceptualized as diplomatic spaces where representation, dialogue, mutual recognition, and cultural negotiation occur. This distinction is important because cultural diplomacy is not propaganda. Propaganda projects a controlled and idealized national image; cultural diplomacy, at its best, allows reciprocal exchange, artistic freedom, ethical participation, and intercultural respect.

Postcolonial theory is necessary because music tourism in underdeveloped countries cannot be separated from histories of colonial domination, cultural hierarchy, and unequal global representation. Colonial systems often marginalized indigenous cultural forms while privileging Western artistic standards and institutional models. Omojola (2025) shows that African music continues to engage critically with the historical and political dynamics of colonialism, postcolonial power, and social difference. For Nigeria, postcolonial theory helps to position music tourism as a means of reclaiming cultural agency, challenging deficit-based narratives about Africa, and repositioning indigenous and contemporary Nigerian music as legitimate sources of knowledge, diplomacy, and global cultural value.

Creative economy theory frames music as an economic and developmental resource. The OECD (2022) argues that stronger synergy between tourism and cultural and creative sectors can support innovation, destination development, employment, and wider local economic benefits. In this sense, music tourism generates value beyond ticket sales. It supports hospitality, transport, event management, media production, fashion, food systems, crafts, digital promotion, and youth entrepreneurship. Finally, cultural sustainability theory explains why music tourism must preserve, transmit, and renew cultural practices rather than merely commercialize them. Gaonkar and Sukthankar (2025) demonstrate that cultural sustainability indicators are central to sustainable cultural tourism development. Thus, music tourism becomes culturally sustainable only when host communities participate in controlling, interpreting, transmitting, and benefiting from their cultural expressions. Together, these theories provide a robust framework for analysing Nigerian

music tourism as a diplomatic, postcolonial, economic, and culturally sustainable instrument of cross-cultural engagement.

### **Methodological Orientation**

This article adopts a positional and critical conceptual orientation. It is not designed as an empirical study based on field interviews, surveys, or participant observation; rather, it advances a theoretically informed argument on how music tourism can function as cultural diplomacy in underdeveloped countries, with Nigeria serving as the central illustrative context. As a positional academic paper, it brings together existing scholarship, policy debates, cultural examples, and interpretive analysis to argue that Nigerian music festivals, cultural exchange programmes, and international collaborations should be understood not merely as entertainment or commercial activities, but as strategic platforms for cross-cultural engagement, national image-making, creative economy development, and diplomatic relationship-building.

The research design is qualitative and conceptual. It relies on critical review, theoretical synthesis, and contextual interpretation rather than primary data collection. This design is appropriate because the article seeks to clarify concepts, connect related bodies of knowledge, and propose an analytical framework for understanding music tourism as an instrument of cultural diplomacy. The paper draws on scholarly literature in music tourism, cultural diplomacy, soft power, postcolonial cultural studies, creative economy, and cultural sustainability. It also engages Nigerian cultural policy discussions, tourism development reports, public festival examples, international cultural exchange initiatives, media narratives on the globalization of Nigerian music, and case illustrations from Nigerian festivals and artists.

The analytical approach is thematic. The discussion is organized around recurring themes that emerge from the literature and Nigerian cultural context. These themes include music festivals as diplomatic spaces, cultural exchange programmes as forms of intercultural learning, international collaborations as expressions of soft power, and the structural constraints that limit cultural diplomacy in underdeveloped countries. Through this approach, the article identifies the relationship between musical mobility, cultural representation, tourism development, and international engagement. The methodological value of this orientation lies in its ability to generate a coherent conceptual argument, expose policy gaps, and propose a framework for repositioning Nigerian music tourism as a sustainable instrument of cultural diplomacy and cross-cultural engagement.

### **Music Tourism in Underdeveloped Countries**

Music tourism provides underdeveloped countries with an important opportunity to convert cultural richness into diplomatic, economic, and developmental value. Unlike some forms of tourism that depend heavily on expensive built infrastructure, luxury facilities, or highly capital-intensive attractions, music tourism can be developed around existing cultural practices, community festivals, indigenous performances, local artists, sacred soundscapes, creative industries, and everyday musical traditions. This is particularly significant for underdeveloped

countries where economic constraints may limit large-scale tourism investment but where cultural resources remain abundant, diverse, and socially embedded. Mazlan, Abdullah, Nor Hashim, and Wahid (2025) show that music occupies an important place in cultural tourism because it contributes to cultural preservation, tourist motivation, economic development, memorable visitor experience, and the integration of digital technologies into heritage promotion. In this sense, music tourism should not be viewed merely as leisure consumption; it should be understood as a cultural resource through which communities narrate identity, attract visitors, sustain heritage, and participate in wider national and international cultural economies.

Music tourism also has implications for national image. Many underdeveloped countries are frequently represented in international media through narratives of poverty, conflict, corruption, instability, disease, or dependency. While these challenges may be real, they often produce narrow and damaging representations that obscure cultural sophistication, creativity, resilience, and innovation. Music tourism offers an alternative representational pathway by allowing countries to project themselves through rhythm, performance, hospitality, heritage, youth creativity, and artistic excellence. For Nigeria, this is particularly relevant because its creative sectors, including Afrobeats, fashion, film, and diaspora cultural networks, have contributed to the country's soft-power visibility despite persistent negative stereotypes (Tella, 2023b). When properly organized, Nigerian music festivals, heritage performances, and international collaborations can therefore function as image-making platforms that communicate cultural confidence and complexity to global audiences.

The local economic value of music tourism is equally important. Festivals and music events stimulate demand for accommodation, transport, food, crafts, event management, security, media coverage, technical production, fashion, photography, and informal trade. The OECD (2022) argues that stronger integration between tourism and cultural and creative sectors can generate employment, diversify local economies, and increase the value of destinations. In underdeveloped countries, such linkages are especially useful because they distribute tourism benefits across multiple sectors rather than concentrating them only in hotels or formal travel agencies. A music festival, for example, may benefit food vendors, transport operators, costume makers, dancers, sound engineers, digital promoters, local guides, artisans, and youth entrepreneurs.

Music tourism also supports cultural preservation when it creates platforms for performance, documentation, intergenerational transmission, and public recognition. Gaonkar and Sukthankar (2025) emphasize that cultural sustainability is central to sustainable cultural tourism development. However, preservation must not become commodification. If communities are excluded from decision-making, sacred traditions may be distorted, performers may be poorly compensated, and cultural meanings may be reduced to tourist spectacle. Therefore, music tourism must be participatory, ethical, and community-centered. It should allow local custodians to control how their music is interpreted, performed, documented, and commercialized.

Finally, music tourism can contribute to youth empowerment in underdeveloped countries where unemployment and limited creative opportunities remain serious concerns. Young people are central to contemporary music production, digital promotion, choreography, festival organization, sound engineering, fashion styling, content creation, and cultural entrepreneurship. Music tourism can therefore become a pathway for skills development, income generation, intercultural exposure, and creative self-expression. For Nigeria and similar contexts, the challenge is to move from spontaneous musical vibrancy to structured cultural policy, so that music tourism becomes a sustainable platform for development, diplomacy, and cross-cultural engagement.

### **Nigeria as a Site of Music Tourism and Cultural Diplomacy**

Nigeria occupies a distinctive position in discussions of music tourism and cultural diplomacy because of the depth, plurality, and global circulation of its musical cultures. The country's musical landscape is shaped by hundreds of ethnic communities, multiple religious traditions, regional performance systems, urban popular cultures, and long histories of ritual, ceremonial, courtly, commercial, and diasporic expression. Nigerian music therefore cannot be reduced to a single genre or industry. It includes traditional drumming, praise poetry, masquerade music, royal court music, work songs, festival music, age-grade performances, Islamic devotional music, Christian choral and gospel traditions, indigenous instrumental ensembles, dance music, and contemporary studio-based genres. This diversity gives Nigeria a strong foundation for music tourism because different regions offer distinct musical experiences that can attract visitors interested in heritage, performance, spirituality, identity, and cultural learning. As Mazlan et al. (2025) observe, music in cultural tourism is closely connected to cultural preservation, tourist motivation, economic development, and the production of meaningful visitor experiences. Nigeria's advantage lies precisely in this intersection between living musical heritage and contemporary creative energy.

The global visibility of Nigerian popular music has further strengthened the country's relevance as a music-tourism destination. Afrobeats has become one of the most recognizable African cultural exports of the twenty-first century, circulating through streaming platforms, social media, international collaborations, diaspora networks, concerts, fashion, dance challenges, and global youth culture. Yet the present prominence of Afrobeats should be understood within a longer Nigerian musical genealogy that includes Afrobeat, Highlife, Juju, Fuji, Apala, Sakara, Gospel, traditional choral music, indigenous instrumental practices, and urban dance forms. These older and regionally grounded traditions remain important because they carry histories of migration, labour, religion, resistance, kingship, spirituality, and communal identity. Omojola (2025) argues that African music continues to interrogate power, history, and postcolonial social experience, suggesting that Nigerian musical forms should be read not merely as entertainment but as archives of cultural memory and social critique. From this perspective, Nigerian popular music and indigenous traditions together constitute a diplomatic resource through which the country can narrate itself to the world.

However, global recognition does not automatically produce structured cultural diplomacy or sustainable tourism development. Nigeria's music is already widely consumed internationally, but consumption alone is insufficient. The challenge is to convert visibility into organized cultural

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infrastructure, destination branding, festival tourism, artist mobility, heritage documentation, and long-term international partnerships. Tella (2023b) demonstrates that Nigeria's creative sectors contribute to the country's soft power, but also implies that soft power requires institutional support if cultural appeal is to become strategic influence. Similarly, Serres (2025a) shows how Nigerian entertainment has been shaped by digital platforms, youth aspiration, and the desire to "make it from Africa," revealing the connection between music, mobility, digital visibility, and global imagination. For cultural diplomacy, this means that Nigeria must move beyond celebrating the international success of individual artists and instead build systems that connect music to tourism policy, foreign cultural relations, diaspora engagement, and local creative economies.

Nigeria's indigenous musical traditions offer equally significant possibilities for music tourism when presented ethically and respectfully. Drumming traditions, masquerade performances, praise singing, ritual music, royal court ensembles, age-grade performances, ceremonial dances, work songs, and community festivals can provide immersive cultural experiences for tourists, researchers, artists, students, and diaspora visitors. These traditions are not static relics; they are living systems of knowledge, spirituality, aesthetics, history, and social organization. They can support cultural tourism by creating spaces for intergenerational transmission, performance documentation, local employment, and intercultural education. Nevertheless, such traditions must not be reduced to tourist spectacle. Community consent, cultural ownership, sacred boundaries, fair compensation, and accurate interpretation are essential if music tourism is to strengthen rather than exploit local heritage.

Nigerian festivals represent some of the most visible platforms through which music tourism and cultural diplomacy can intersect. Felabration in Lagos, for example, celebrates the legacy of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and links Afrobeat, political memory, youth culture, performance, and international visitorship. The Osun-Osogbo Festival in Osun State combines sacred procession, music, dance, ritual performance, and Yoruba cosmology within a UNESCO-recognized cultural landscape. Calabar Carnival, Lagos International Jazz Festival, Abuja Carnival, Eyo Festival, Argungu Fishing Festival, Durbar festivals in Northern Nigeria, Ojude Oba Festival in Ogun State, and New Yam festivals across Igbo communities similarly demonstrate how music is embedded in broader systems of costume, dance, food, spirituality, pageantry, memory, and place-making. These festivals should not be understood only as local celebrations. Properly organized, they can become diplomatic platforms capable of attracting tourists, scholars, artists, diplomats, investors, media organizations, cultural institutions, and members of the Nigerian diaspora. Skandalis et al. (2024) show that music festivals shape experiences of spatial authenticity by linking extraordinary festival participation to the everyday meanings of place. This insight is especially relevant to Nigeria because its festivals are rooted in specific histories, communities, cities, sacred spaces, and regional identities. Consequently, Nigeria's music-tourism potential lies not only in exporting sound but in inviting the world into the cultural places, histories, and communities from which those sounds emerge.

The Nigerian diaspora occupies a strategic position in the development of music tourism and cultural diplomacy. Diaspora communities function as cultural ambassadors who circulate Nigerian music, language, fashion, dance, food, and festival practices within international spaces. Through concerts, cultural associations, university events, social media platforms, and transnational networks, they help sustain global interest in Nigerian musical culture. Music tourism can therefore encourage diaspora return visits, especially when festivals are packaged as heritage, homecoming, and cultural reconnection experiences. Events such as Felabration, Calabar Carnival, Ojude Oba, Durbar festivals, and New Yam celebrations can attract Nigerians abroad who seek emotional, ancestral, and cultural links with home. Beyond participation, the diaspora can invest in festival organization, artist promotion, music infrastructure, hospitality, documentation, and international branding. In this sense, diaspora engagement transforms music tourism into a bridge between homeland identity, global visibility, cultural diplomacy, and transnational creative investment.

### **Music Festivals as Instruments of Cultural Diplomacy**

Music festivals are significant instruments of cultural diplomacy because they represent communities, regions, and nations through embodied cultural performance. They communicate identity not only through sound, but also through costume, language, dance, ritual, food, visual symbolism, storytelling, and collective participation. In this sense, festivals operate as public stages on which cultural memory and social belonging are performed before both domestic and international audiences. Recent research on music in cultural tourism emphasizes that music contributes to cultural preservation, tourist motivation, economic value, and meaningful visitor experience (Mazlan et al., 2025; Stipanović and Zubović, 2023). For Nigeria, festivals such as Felabration, Osun-Osogbo, Calabar Carnival, Durbar, Ojude Oba, Eyo, and New Yam celebrations can therefore be read as cultural texts through which local histories, ethnic identities, religious worldviews, artistic skills, and national diversity are made visible.

Festivals also function as platforms for intercultural dialogue. They bring together tourists, performers, scholars, diplomats, sponsors, cultural institutions, media actors, diaspora groups, and host communities within shared cultural spaces. These encounters allow participants to exchange meanings, negotiate difference, and develop mutual understanding through experience rather than formal diplomatic speech. Cultural diplomacy is strongest when it moves beyond symbolic display and creates durable relationships, reciprocal engagement, and sustainable institutional support (Faucher & Zhu, 2025). Music festivals can fulfil this role when they are designed not merely as entertainment spectacles but as participatory spaces for dialogue, workshops, residencies, exhibitions, academic forums, community tours, and artist collaborations.

As soft power mechanisms, successful festivals can enhance Nigeria's cultural attractiveness by projecting creativity, diversity, hospitality, artistic excellence, and cultural confidence. Nigeria already enjoys global recognition through Afrobeats and other creative exports, but this visibility requires institutional translation into tourism development and foreign cultural strategy. Tella (2023a) argues that Nigeria's creative sector contributes to national appeal, yet soft power becomes

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more effective when cultural assets are strategically supported. Festivals can therefore serve as soft-power platforms by transforming musical popularity into place-based experience, international visibility, and diplomatic goodwill.

Festivals are also important tools for place branding. Cities and regions can build distinctive identities around their musical and cultural assets. Lagos can be branded through Afrobeats, Afrobeat memory, jazz, nightlife, and urban creativity; Calabar through carnival performance and hospitality; Osogbo through sacred Yoruba heritage; Abeokuta through Egba cultural display and Ojude Oba-related tourism; Kano and other northern cities through Durbar music, pageantry, and equestrian culture; Abuja through national cultural convergence; and Port Harcourt through live music, youth creativity, and Niger Delta cultural expression. Skandalis et al. (2024) show that music festivals shape spatial authenticity by connecting extraordinary festival experiences with the everyday meanings of destinations. This insight is useful for Nigeria because festivals can brand places through lived cultural context rather than artificial tourist packaging.

However, festival-based music tourism carries risks. Commercialization may distort sacred traditions; elite capture may exclude local communities; insecurity and weak infrastructure may undermine visitor confidence; and poor crowd control may create safety concerns. Environmental pressure, inadequate waste management, cultural stereotyping, and uneven benefit distribution may also weaken festival sustainability. Tourist loyalty to music festivals is shaped by experience quality, emotional response, and perceived value (Zhu et al., 2025), which means that poorly managed festivals can damage rather than strengthen national image. Therefore, Nigerian music festivals must be community-centred, ethically curated, properly funded, secure, environmentally responsible, and institutionally linked to cultural diplomacy, tourism policy, and local development. Only under these conditions can festivals become genuine instruments of cultural representation, intercultural dialogue, soft power, place branding, and community empowerment.

### **Cultural Exchange Programmes and Cross-Cultural Engagement**

Cultural exchange programmes are structured platforms through which artists, students, scholars, cultural workers, institutions, and communities participate in artistic mobility, intercultural learning, and professional development. Within the context of music tourism and cultural diplomacy, such programmes create opportunities for Nigerian musicians and cultural practitioners to move beyond local performance circuits and engage with international audiences, institutions, and collaborators. They are important because they transform music from a product of entertainment into a medium of dialogue, learning, cultural representation, and relationship-building. Recent research on cultural diplomacy emphasizes that sustainable cultural relations require more than symbolic display; they depend on long-term cooperation, institutional support, mobility, and reciprocal cultural engagement (Faucher & Yu, 2025). For Nigeria, cultural exchange programmes can therefore function as bridges between local musical heritage, contemporary creative industries, diaspora networks, and international cultural publics.

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Artist residencies are particularly valuable because they provide time, space, mentorship, and institutional support for creative experimentation. They allow Nigerian musicians, composers, producers, instrumentalists, dancers, and traditional performers to work with foreign artists in contexts that encourage learning, collaboration, performance, and the creation of new musical works. Molho (2026) conceptualizes artist residencies as “creative mobility hubs” that organize and stage mobility while also mediating global hierarchies and local cultural agendas. This insight is important for underdeveloped countries because residencies can open international opportunities, but they may also reproduce unequal power relations if African artists are invited merely as cultural representatives without equal authority, funding, ownership, or curatorial voice. Properly designed residencies should therefore support reciprocal learning, fair compensation, intellectual property protection, and shared authorship.

University-based cultural exchanges also have strong potential for advancing music-based cultural diplomacy. Nigerian universities, conservatories, colleges of education, and performing arts departments can partner with foreign institutions through seminars, exchange visits, joint concerts, collaborative research, student performances, curriculum development, and digital workshops. Such exchanges can deepen intercultural competence, particularly when participants are encouraged to reflect critically on difference, power, history, and artistic practice. Hanley and Chankseliani (2026) show that intercultural competence developed through international mobility is not static but continues to evolve as returnees negotiate institutional realities, professional environments, and civic responsibilities in their home contexts. This means that university-based music exchanges should not end with travel; they should generate lasting academic networks, joint publications, community projects, and locally relevant cultural initiatives.

Embassies, cultural institutes, international organizations, and foreign missions also play important roles in supporting music-based cultural exchange. They can fund concerts, workshops, artist mobility schemes, cultural seasons, exhibitions, recording projects, and collaborative festivals. However, cultural exchange should not be restricted to elite institutions or urban-based artists. Community musicians, traditional performers, local instrument makers, cultural custodians, praise singers, drummers, and festival practitioners must be included if Nigerian music diplomacy is to reflect the country’s cultural depth. Popular music already facilitates intercultural interaction through digital platforms and transnational circulation (Li, 2025), but community-based exchange ensures that indigenous knowledge is not erased by commercially dominant genres.

The benefits of cultural exchange include mutual understanding, artistic innovation, professional networking, language learning, cultural respect, and long-term diplomatic relationships. Yet underdeveloped countries face persistent barriers, including funding limitations, visa restrictions, weak infrastructure, unequal partnerships, poor documentation, and limited international exposure. Mégret (2025) argues that visas often function as infrastructures of unequal mobility, restricting professional and cultural opportunities. For Nigerian artists, addressing these barriers is essential if cultural exchange is to become a genuine instrument of cross-cultural engagement rather than a privilege available only to the well-connected.

### **International Music Collaborations as Cultural Diplomacy**

International music collaborations refer to creative partnerships that connect artists, producers, festivals, universities, media companies, cultural agencies, digital platforms, record labels, and audiences across national borders. In the context of music tourism and cultural diplomacy, such collaborations are not merely commercial arrangements; they are cultural encounters through which sounds, languages, aesthetics, identities, and worldviews circulate internationally. They may take the form of joint recordings, co-produced concerts, festival partnerships, university-led music projects, digital performances, transnational artist residencies, collaborative tours, and multimedia productions. As Li (2025) argues, popular music has become an important medium of cultural exchange in the age of globalization because media platforms enable music to travel across cultural boundaries, stimulate intercultural interaction, and contribute to the formation of global cultural identities. For Nigeria, this is particularly significant because international collaborations have helped amplify the global reach of Afrobeats and have created new spaces for Nigerian rhythms, languages, dance styles, fashion, and urban youth culture within global popular culture.

Collaborations increase the visibility of Nigerian artists and cultural forms by exposing international audiences to the symbolic and aesthetic resources embedded in Nigerian music. When Nigerian musicians work with artists from other African countries, Europe, North America, the Caribbean, Latin America, or Asia, they do more than expand their market reach; they translate Nigerian cultural expressions into global circuits of recognition. Such collaborations allow Yoruba, Igbo, Pidgin English, Hausa, and other Nigerian linguistic and expressive forms to circulate beyond their local contexts. They also project Nigerian fashion, dance, visual style, religious imagery, social narratives, and youthful aspiration. Serres (2025a) observes that Lagos has emerged as a global entertainment hub through the virality of Nigerian content on streaming and social media platforms, showing how digital infrastructures have intensified the global imagination around Nigerian creative production.

International collaborations also stimulate creative innovation. Musical encounters across borders can produce hybrid sounds, genre experimentation, new production techniques, and fresh performance aesthetics. Afrobeats itself has grown through interaction with hip-hop, dancehall, R&B, amapiano, highlife, Afrobeat, electronic music, and local Nigerian rhythmic systems. However, collaboration must be distinguished from cultural extraction. If Nigerian sounds are used merely as exotic textures without fair recognition, authorship, royalties, or contextual respect, collaboration becomes appropriation. This concern is especially important in a global industry where ownership, publishing rights, streaming revenue, and contractual power are unevenly distributed. Kaye (2025) warns that contemporary music copyright markets can reproduce inequality by turning royalties into assets while musicians remain vulnerable within exploitative industry structures.

As cultural diplomacy, Nigerian international music collaborations contribute to national branding. When Nigerian sounds circulate globally, they create symbolic value for the country and reshape how Nigeria is imagined. Tella (2023b) shows that Nigeria's creative industries contribute to

national soft power, although this appeal requires institutional support if it is to become strategic influence. Collaborations can therefore support industry development by improving professional skills, production standards, distribution networks, touring opportunities, media visibility, and access to global markets. Yet these benefits require ethical frameworks. Fair contracts, transparent royalty systems, intellectual property protection, equitable representation, community acknowledgement, and shared creative authority are essential. International collaboration becomes genuine cultural diplomacy only when it advances mutual respect, artistic dignity, cultural reciprocity, and sustainable professional relationships rather than unequal extraction.

### **Challenges Limiting Music Tourism as Cultural Diplomacy in Nigeria**

Despite Nigeria's rich musical heritage and expanding global creative visibility, several structural and institutional challenges limit the use of music tourism as an effective instrument of cultural diplomacy. The first major challenge is weak cultural policy implementation. Nigeria possesses abundant cultural resources, but these resources are not always supported by coherent, sustained, and properly funded policy frameworks. Cultural diplomacy requires coordination among ministries responsible for culture, tourism, foreign affairs, education, trade, youth development, and creative economy planning. Where such coordination is weak, festivals, exchange programmes, and international collaborations remain fragmented rather than becoming part of a national cultural-diplomatic strategy. This is problematic because sustainable cultural diplomacy depends on long-term institutional commitment, multi-level partnership, and continuity beyond isolated events (Faucher & Zhu, 2025).

Inadequate infrastructure also constrains music tourism. Poor roads, unreliable electricity, limited performance venues, weak transport systems, inadequate hospitality facilities, and uneven digital connectivity reduce the quality of visitor experience and weaken festival competitiveness. Since music tourism depends on movement, sound production, accommodation, safety, media circulation, and digital visibility, infrastructural weakness directly affects its diplomatic and economic value. Although music can stimulate cultural preservation, tourist motivation, and economic development, these benefits require enabling systems that connect cultural performance with tourism services, technology, and destination management (Mazlan et al., 2025).

Insecurity and negative international perception further undermine Nigeria's music-tourism potential. Concerns about crime, terrorism, kidnapping, political instability, and poor public safety can discourage international visitors, artists, scholars, and investors, even when cultural attractions are strong. Negative media narratives may also reduce Nigeria to crisis imagery, thereby overshadowing its creativity, hospitality, and artistic sophistication. This affects soft power because cultural attractiveness must be supported by trust, safety, and reputational credibility. Tella (2023a) shows that Nigeria's creative sector contributes to national appeal, but such appeal can be weakened by broader governance and image challenges.

Poor funding and sponsorship remain additional barriers. Many festivals, cultural exchange programmes, archival projects, and international promotions depend on irregular funding, short-

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term sponsorship, or personal initiative. This limits professional planning, documentation, artist mobility, publicity, and sustainability. Limited documentation and archiving are equally serious because many indigenous musical traditions remain under-recorded, making it difficult to transmit them through education, tourism, digital platforms, diplomacy, and future scholarship.

Fragmented institutional coordination also weakens outcomes. Government agencies, private investors, universities, embassies, cultural organizations, artists, and host communities often operate independently rather than through shared strategy. Visa and mobility barriers intensify these difficulties, as artists from underdeveloped countries frequently face high travel costs, restrictive documentation demands, visa denials, and limited access to international platforms. Mégret (2024) argues that the visa system functions as a major infrastructure of unequal global mobility, often frustrating professional and cultural opportunities. Finally, commercialization, cultural commodification, and unequal global cultural flows pose ethical risks. Sacred or community-based musical practices may be reduced to tourist spectacle, while international collaborations may reproduce inequality if Nigerian artists and communities are treated as sources of raw cultural material rather than equal creative partners. Addressing these challenges requires ethical policy, community participation, institutional coordination, infrastructure investment, and fair cultural partnerships.

### **Strategic Framework for Music Tourism as Cultural Diplomacy**

A strategic framework for positioning music tourism as cultural diplomacy in Nigeria must begin with policy integration. Music tourism should not be treated as an isolated entertainment activity or as a seasonal cultural event; it should be embedded within national cultural policy, tourism policy, foreign policy, creative economy strategy, education planning, and youth development programmes. Such integration is necessary because cultural diplomacy requires continuity, coordination, institutional commitment, and multi-level partnership rather than fragmented cultural display (Faucher & Yu, 2025). In practical terms, the ministries responsible for culture, tourism, foreign affairs, education, trade, youth development, and digital economy should develop a shared policy platform through which music festivals, exchange programmes, artist mobility, diaspora engagement, and international collaborations are connected to national branding and sustainable development.

Festival development and branding should form the second pillar of the framework. Nigerian festivals should be professionally organized, adequately funded, internationally marketed, and linked to tourism packages, hotels, transport systems, museums, universities, heritage sites, and local creative economies. Since music contributes to tourist motivation, cultural preservation, economic value, and memorable visitor experiences (Bola et al., 2025; Mazlan et al., 2025; Olabosinde, 2025), festivals such as Felabration, Osun-Osogbo, Calabar Carnival, Durbar, Ojude Oba, Eyo, and New Yam celebrations should be curated as cultural-diplomatic platforms rather than occasional performances. This requires quality event management, security planning, digital publicity, visitor services, archival documentation, and international media engagement.

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Community participation is central to the ethical sustainability of this framework. Host communities must not be reduced to objects of tourist consumption; they should be active stakeholders in planning, interpretation, performance, benefit-sharing, and heritage protection. Community musicians, dancers, instrument makers, costume producers, food vendors, transport workers, youth groups, and cultural custodians should be incorporated into festival economies. This approach protects cultural ownership and ensures that tourism benefits circulate locally. It also responds to the need for cultural sustainability indicators that measure not only tourist numbers but also heritage continuity, community welfare, cultural transmission, and stakeholder inclusion (Gaonkar & Sukthankar, 2025).

Public-private partnerships are also necessary. Government agencies should collaborate with record labels, event companies, airlines, hotels, tourism operators, media organizations, universities, digital platforms, and financial institutions. International cultural partnerships should also be strengthened through embassies, cultural institutes, UNESCO-related institutions, African Union cultural programmes, universities, diaspora organizations, and artist residency networks. Digital promotion should support this process through festival websites, online archives, documentary films, virtual concerts, streaming platforms, social media campaigns, and digital storytelling, especially because media platforms now play a major role in global musical circulation and cultural exchange (Li, 2025).

Finally, education, ethical representation, diaspora engagement, and monitoring must sustain the framework. Universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, and cultural institutes should train students in music tourism, festival management, cultural diplomacy, heritage documentation, music business, and creative entrepreneurship. Ethical guidelines should guarantee community consent, fair compensation, respect for sacred traditions, intellectual property protection, and accurate cultural interpretation. Nigeria should also create structured diaspora-oriented programmes such as heritage music tours, homecoming festivals, diaspora artist residencies, and cultural investment forums. Monitoring and evaluation should assess visitor numbers, community income, youth employment, media visibility, international partnerships, artist participation, cultural preservation outcomes, and diplomatic impact.

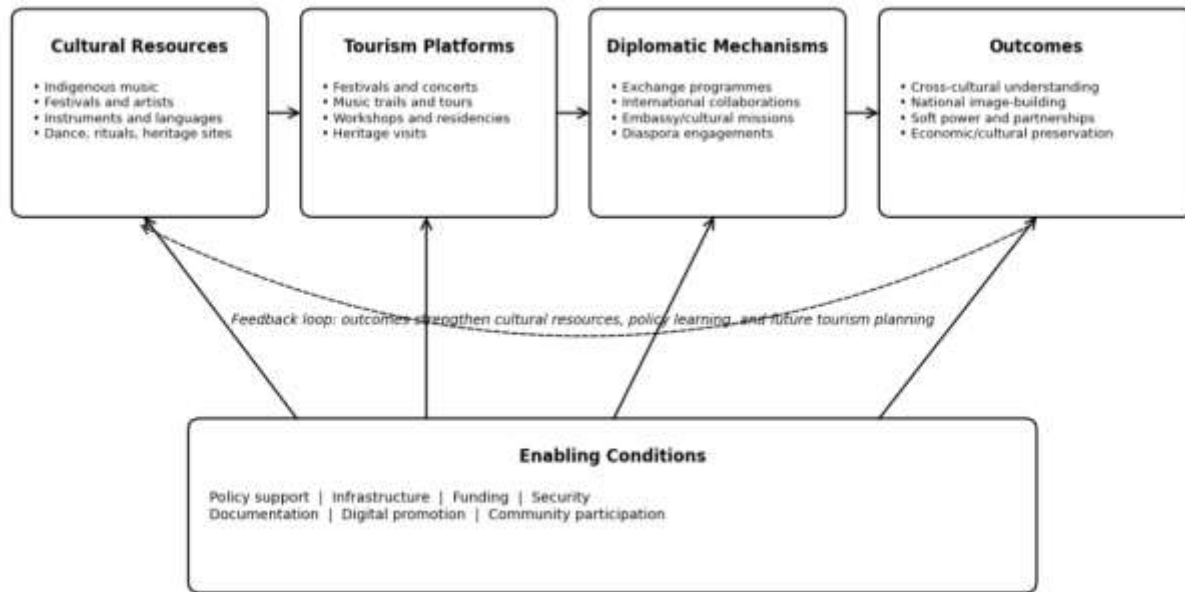
**Proposed Conceptual Model**

Figure 1: The proposed conceptual framework

The proposed Music Tourism–Cultural Diplomacy Nexus in Figure 1 explains how musical resources can be transformed into diplomatic, developmental, and cultural outcomes when they are deliberately organized through tourism platforms and supported by enabling conditions. The model begins with cultural resources, including indigenous music, festivals, artists, instruments, languages, dance, rituals, and heritage sites. These resources constitute the symbolic foundation of music tourism because they embody memory, identity, creativity, spirituality, and place-based cultural knowledge. Their significance is supported by recent music-tourism scholarship, which shows that music contributes to cultural preservation, tourist motivation, economic development, memorable experience, and digital heritage promotion (Mazlan et al., 2025).

The second component of the model is tourism platforms. Cultural resources become publicly accessible through festivals, concerts, music trails, guided tours, workshops, residencies, heritage visits, and community performances. These platforms convert musical practices into structured encounters between visitors, artists, communities, institutions, and cultural landscapes. The third component is diplomatic mechanisms. Music tourism becomes cultural diplomacy when tourism platforms are connected to exchange programmes, international collaborations, embassy events, cultural missions, university partnerships, artist residencies, and diaspora engagements. This reflects the argument that cultural diplomacy should move beyond image projection toward sustainable relationships, institutional cooperation, and reciprocal cultural engagement (Faucher & Zhu, 2025).

The fourth component is outcomes. When properly managed, music tourism can generate cross-cultural understanding, national image-building, soft power, economic development, cultural preservation, and international partnerships. In Nigeria, these outcomes are particularly important because the country already possesses globally attractive creative resources, but their diplomatic value requires strategic organization and policy support. Tella (2023a) shows that Nigerian creative sectors can enhance national appeal, suggesting that music tourism can strengthen the country's soft-power capacity when linked to branding, mobility, and international collaboration. The final component is enabling conditions: policy support, infrastructure, funding, security, documentation, digital promotion, and community participation. Without these conditions, music tourism may remain entertainment or fragmented cultural display. With strategic planning, ethical representation, and measurable cultural sustainability indicators, it becomes a diplomatic and developmental tool capable of strengthening Nigeria's cultural visibility and cross-cultural engagement (Gaonkar & Sukthankar, 2025).

## DISCUSSION

The central contribution of this article is its argument that Nigeria must move beyond understanding music primarily as entertainment, commercial performance, or celebrity culture. Music should be repositioned as a diplomatic resource capable of shaping international perception, strengthening cultural relations, and deepening cross-cultural engagement. Recent scholarship demonstrates that music in cultural tourism supports cultural preservation, tourist motivation, economic development, memorable experiences, and digital heritage promotion (Mazlan et al., 2025). For Nigeria, this means that festivals, artist collaborations, music heritage sites, and diaspora-oriented performances can become instruments through which the country communicates creativity, diversity, historical depth, and cultural confidence to international publics.

This discussion also shows that underdevelopment does not imply cultural deficiency. Many underdeveloped countries face economic constraints, infrastructural weakness, policy inconsistency, and limited global mobility, but they often possess rich cultural resources that can be mobilized for development and diplomacy. Nigeria's challenge is therefore not the absence of cultural capital, but the weak institutional conversion of cultural capital into diplomatic influence, sustainable tourism, and local economic value. Tella (2023b) similarly shows that Nigeria's creative sectors contribute to national soft power, although their impact depends on strategic organization and institutional support.

Music tourism also offers a pathway for decolonial cultural agency. Rather than allowing Nigeria to be represented mainly through external narratives of crisis, poverty, corruption, or instability, music tourism enables Nigerian communities and artists to tell their own stories, represent their identities, and assert their cultural knowledge within global spaces. Omojola (2025) emphasizes that African music interrogates power and postcolonial experience, making it a critical resource for challenging unequal cultural hierarchies. However, global visibility must not result in cultural dispossession. Nigerian artists, communities, and cultural custodians must retain ownership,

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dignity, fair compensation, and interpretive authority over their cultural expressions. Finally, music tourism can support sustainable development by promoting youth employment, gender inclusion, cultural preservation, creative entrepreneurship, poverty reduction, and international cooperation. This requires cultural sustainability indicators that measure not only tourist arrivals but also community benefit, heritage continuity, and inclusive participation (Gaonkar & Sukthankar, 2025).

## CONCLUSION

Music tourism can become a powerful instrument of cultural diplomacy in underdeveloped countries when it is intentionally planned, ethically managed, and institutionally supported. Nigeria provides a compelling case because of its musical diversity, global popular music visibility, vibrant festivals, and large diaspora community. Music festivals, cultural exchange programmes, and international collaborations should therefore not be treated as isolated cultural events, but as components of a broader national strategy for tourism, creative economy expansion, and cross-cultural engagement. Nigeria's musical wealth is a form of cultural capital capable of strengthening national identity, international relations, and sustainable development.

## Recommendations

1. Government should formulate a national music tourism and cultural diplomacy policy linking culture, tourism, foreign affairs, education, and the creative economy.
2. Tourism agencies should package Nigerian music festivals as international cultural tourism products and promote them through digital platforms, embassies, travel fairs, and diaspora networks.
3. Cultural institutions should document indigenous musical traditions, strengthen archives, support community festivals, and protect intangible cultural heritage.
4. Universities should introduce courses and research programmes on music tourism, cultural diplomacy, festival management, and creative economy studies.
5. Festival organizers should improve planning, branding, security, visitor experience, documentation, community participation, and international partnerships.
6. Artists, producers, and record labels should use international collaborations to promote cultural representation, not only commercial expansion.
7. Local communities should participate actively in planning, controlling, and benefiting from music tourism initiatives connected to their heritage.
8. International partners should support equitable collaborations that respect Nigerian artistic ownership, intellectual property, and cultural dignity.
9. The Nigerian diaspora should be mobilized as cultural ambassadors, investors, festival participants, and promoters of Nigerian music tourism.
10. Policy researchers should conduct empirical studies on the economic, diplomatic, cultural, and community impacts of Nigerian music festivals and international collaborations.

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