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BEYOND THE BEAT

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Music for Social Change

“In October 2020, music played a significant role in how Nigerians communicated their frustrations towards the now-disbanded Nigerian Police Force Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS),”

A Rallying Cry

Music cuts across geographic boundaries, languages, and demographics. It influences a broad group of people than any other cultural product and has helped unite generations of activists. Some music have become anthems that promote positive societal change, carrying messages of peace and equality.¹ This piece will provide insight into how Afrobeat songs disseminate powerful themes on corruption, injustice, etc., to bring about social change. It will dissect the role of music in citizen engagement and mobilization as well as an avenue for communication.



Rhythms of Social Change

The state of a society is a driving force that influences music. Over the pulsating sounds of Afrobeats, several artists have used their music to mirror the happenings of a country, using lyrics to demand government accountability and mobilization of citizens to demand positive change.

In October 2020, music played a significant role in how Nigerians communicated their frustrations towards the now-disbanded Nigerian Police Force Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), created to curb the rampant criminal activities in Lagos in the early 90s.² However, after numerous instances (some fatal) of abuse of power, Nigerians took to the streets to protest the continuing injustice. The #EndSARS movement was more than standing against police brutality; it was an umbrella term that covered corruption, poverty, unemployment, and more. Songs such as *Nigeria Jaga Jaga* by Eedris Abudlkareem, *Mr President* by African China, and *E Be Like Say* by TuFace, were chanted by protesters, reflecting the state of Nigeria and the emotions of a generation.

1. Parys, B., (2018). 12 Songs that Became Anthems of Available at: <https://www.berklee.edu/news/berklee-now/twelve-songs-became-anthems-cultural-change>

2. Malumfashi, S., 2020. Nigeria's SARS: A brief history of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/10/22/sars-a-brief-history-of-a-rogue-unit>

“Our music talks about HIV, women’s rights, recovering from a disaster, xenophobia, and much more. It’s not just great music; we’re saying something.”

Sounds of Africa



*Miriam Makeba
Youssou N'Dour
Oliver Mtukudzi
Sigauque Project
Angélique Kidjo
Fela Kuti*

Pan-Africanism promotes the unity of the black race and the unification of Africans at home and in the Diaspora.³ The Organization of African Unity (OAU) was formed to promote this ideology, and intellectuals such as Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere advocated for the movement.⁴ Music has contributed to the renewal of Pan-Africanism in the 21st century.⁵ Famous Nigerian artist Burna Boy advocates Pan-Africanism and incorporates change messages in his lyrics. His award-winning album *Twice as Tall* garnered 78.2 million streams in the first week of its release featuring songs like *Monster You Made* and *Another Story* that tackle colonialism and exploitation of the African continent.⁶ *Monsters You Made*, with over 12 million views on YouTube, contains the following lyrics:

*Because the teacher dem teaching
What the white man dem teaching
Dem European teachings in my African school
So f*ck dem classes in school.*⁷

The lyrics tell a story and educate, especially the youth, about Nigeria’s colonial past, social issues and events.

With the collaboration of various African artistes, people experience new sounds, languages, and stories of other African countries. In 2011, Senegalese rapper Didier Awadi released a collaboration album titled *Presidents of Africa* to encourage African unity, using archived recordings of Burkina Faso’s Thomas Sankara and Congo’s Patrice Lumumba. Sigauque Project band from Mozambique combines different indigenous African sounds to promote unification. Lead singer Danny Walter stated, “Our music talks about HIV, women’s rights, recovering from a disaster, xenophobia, and much more. It’s not just great music; we’re saying something.”

3. Malisa, M., & Nhengeze, P. (2018). Pan-Africanism: A quest for liberation and the pursuit of a united Africa. *Genealogy*, 2(3), 28.

4. Mathews, K. (1977). The Organization of African Unity. *India Quarterly*, 33(3), 308-324.

5. Magadla, S., 2019. Fela in Versace: how popular culture is driving 21st century pan-Africanism. Available at: <https://mg.co.za/article/2019-05-25-00-fela-in-versace-how-popular-culture-is-driving-21st-century-pan-africanism>

6. Bambidele, M. (2020). Burna Boy Leads Army Of Militants In “Monsters You Made” Video. *The Guardian Nigeria News*. Available at : <https://guardian.ng/life/music/burna-boy-leads-army-of-militants-in-monsters-you-made-video/#:~:text=This%20is%20Burna%20Boy's%20highest,apple%20music%20in%2048%20countries>

7. Genius (2020). *Monsters You Made*. <https://genius.com/Burna-boy-monsters-you-made-lyrics>

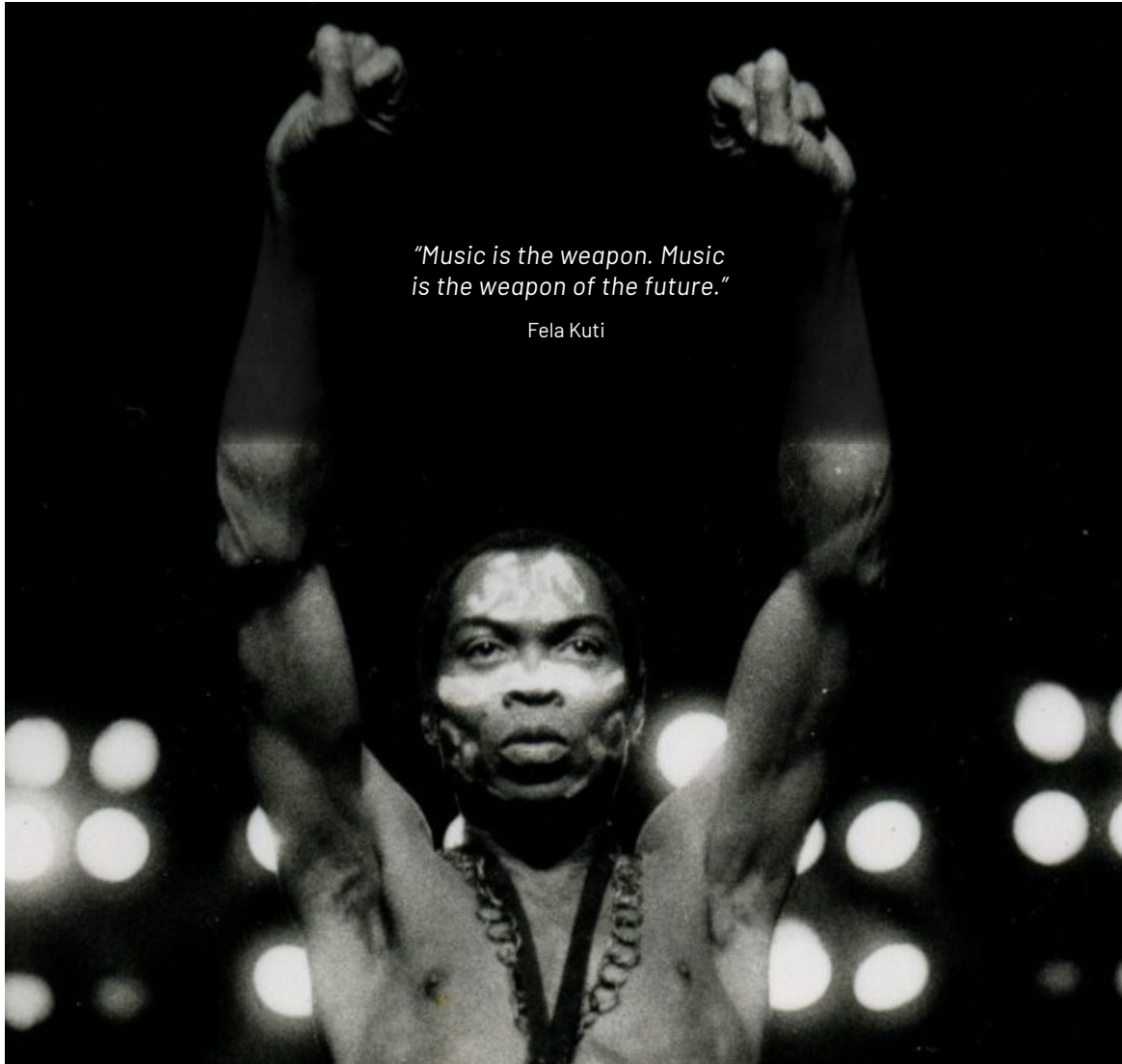
Conclusion

Social and political-conscious music in today's society has united people towards a common goal. Music can become a unifier, wielding the power of positive influence. Human communication is the driving force of existence, and Lou Rawls describes music as the "greatest communication in the world."⁸

Music can invariably become an impactful channel and tool for public enlightenment and citizen engagement, and mobilization. It can be particularly influential for a youth demographic that relies on various genres of music for entertainment. As an art form, it can easily transition to being a rallying cry for the masses.⁹

Credo Experience

Credo Advisory understands the power that music holds in public advocacy and promoting societal change. The firm incorporates music elements in its creative development process for specific communication products based on the message, channel and target audience. We take into cognizance intrinsic details such as beat, pitch, lyrics, language/dialect, etc., when developing public campaign materials. We have produced campaign materials using core music elements to foster behavioural change, including jingles in Nigerian languages on safety measures for COVID-19, animation videos, explainer videos, observance days creatives, etc.



*"Music is the weapon. Music
is the weapon of the future."*

Fela Kuti

8. Da Silva, D. (2021). Music can change the world. Africa Renewal. <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/december-2013/music-can-change-world>

9. Lou Rawls Quotes. (n.d.). Brainy Quote https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/lou_rawls_143901

10. <https://guardian.ng/life/life-features/fela-kuti-ten-most-thoughtful-quotes/>