

The Gambia's Silent Soundtrack, A Twenty-Year Failure to Pay Musicians.

For 21 years, an Act of Parliament has mandated the collection of royalties for musicians. The Collecting Society of The Gambia (CSG), established by law in 2004, exists to ensure that artists receive payment for the use of their work. Yet the system remains dysfunctional, leaving the nation's most prominent musical voices without compensation.

The music of artists such as Lalo Kaba, Jaliba Kuyateh, ST, Sona Jobarteh, Attack, Jizzle, and etc permeates daily life, heard in commercial spaces, public venues, and across airwaves. While the law requires royalty payments for this public usage, the mechanism for collection has never operated effectively. A piece of music, purchased once for private listening, generates no revenue for its creator when played repeatedly in business settings.

As Registrar General, Mr Abdoulie Colley, noted, "Once a debt is always a debt." The financial obligation owed to The Gambia's creative community continues to accumulate.

The 2004 legislation promised royalty collection. It envisioned formal employment within the creative sector, the development of a national music archive, a contribution to the gross domestic product, and tax revenue for the state. Above all, it aimed to provide artistic professionals with sustainable livelihoods, offering a legitimate alternative to *irregular migration*.

These ambitions have failed to materialise. The CSG lacks the operational capacity to track usage, collect fees, or distribute payments. This institutional collapse has driven several leading Gambian musicians to register with the Collecting Society in Senegal, seeking protection from a foreign entity that their own nation denies them.

The World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) has extended an offer to assist the Gambian government through the Intellectual Property Office at the Ministry of Justice under the registrar general. The agency proposes a significant donation of technical systems and operational support to establish a functional IP office and a collecting society. This intervention, valued at over one million dollars, remains unaccepted as the bill is still at the National Assembly.

Current efforts by advocates focus on mobilising the Copyright Office the IP office at MOJ. The objective remains the practical enforcement of existing law, including the proposed administrative transfer of copyright matters to the Ministry of Justice and a bill is also at the National Assembly to give mandate to the Ministry of Justice.

Critical questions now demand answers:

- Why has the 2004 Copyright Act never been fully implemented?
- Which entities profit from the uncompensated use of Gambian musical works?
- What does the migration of artists to Senegalese collectives signify for national cultural sovereignty?
- When will the National Assembly pass the bill for Musicians?

This issue transcends unpaid royalties. It represents the breach of a social and economic contract with an entire sector. Each day without a functioning collection system constitutes a loss for artists, a missed opportunity for economic development, and a depreciation of the nation's cultural capital.

The debt persists. Settlement is overdue.