



## Cinematography and Editing as Instruments of Social Conscience in *Concrete Bread* (2025): A Technical Analysis

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### Abstract

**Background:** Although Nigerian documentary films have increasingly addressed issues of social justice, gender inequality, and labour exploitation, existing studies have focused predominantly on their thematic and narrative content, with limited attention to how technical film elements, particularly cinematography and editing function as communicative tools for social advocacy. Consequently, little is known about how these cinematic techniques construct social conscience and shape audience engagement with marginalized communities. This gap necessitated an examination of the technical dimensions of socially conscious documentary filmmaking.

**Objective:** This study examined the cinematic language of social conscience in the Nigerian documentary *Concrete Bread* (2025), focusing on how cinematography and editing are employed to advocate for women engaged in physically demanding labour in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

**Method:** The study adopted a qualitative research design using content analysis of the documentary *Concrete Bread* (2025). The film was purposively selected because of its thematic relevance to gender, labour, and social justice, as well as its rich application of cinematographic and editing techniques. The analysis focused on camera composition, shot types, editing patterns, sound design, and narrative structure.

**Results:** The findings reveal that the documentary effectively integrates close-up, medium, and long shots with continuity, parallel, and rhythmic editing, complemented by B-roll footage, ambient sound, music, and voice-over narration to foreground the physical, emotional, and socio-economic realities of women labourers. These cinematic techniques evoke empathy, expose structural inequalities between the working class and privileged groups, and reinforce the documentary's advocacy message. Guided by Social Responsibility Theory, the study demonstrates that cinematography and editing function not merely as aesthetic devices but as persuasive instruments for promoting social awareness and public engagement.

**Conclusion:** The study concludes that documentary cinema, when supported by deliberate cinematographic and editing choices, serves as a powerful medium for social advocacy, public enlightenment, and social transformation. Technical film elements significantly influence how audiences perceive, interpret, and respond to issues of gender inequality and labour exploitation.

**Unique Contribution:** This study contributes to film and media scholarship by shifting attention from thematic analysis to the technical dimensions of documentary filmmaking. It demonstrates how cinematography and editing operate as strategic communicative tools for constructing social conscience



while documenting the lived experiences of women engaged in strenuous manual labour in Ebonyi State—an area that has received limited scholarly attention.

**Key Recommendation:** Future studies should examine audience reception and the social impact of advocacy documentaries such as *Concrete Bread* to determine how cinematographic and editing techniques influence viewers' perceptions, attitudes, and behavioural intentions toward social justice issues.

**Keywords:** Documentary film, cinematography, editing, social conscience, women labourers, social advocacy, Abakaliki, Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

Over the years, cinema has long served as a mirror through which society perceives and critiques itself; beyond entertainment, film can function as a powerful medium for raising moral consciousness, and addressing social injustices; thus, the conceptual framework of social conscience. In Ebonyi State, South -East of Nigeria, a particular engagement which needs critical attention is apparently neglected by filmmakers; especially with the current realities of the digital media age. With the advancement of, and greater accessibility to technology, film as a channel of advocacy ought to have been on high patronage by practitioners, but arguably, reverse is the case in Ebonyi State, South East of Nigeria, where women who engage in unjust and inhumane hard labour, to make ends meet, are left to their fate. As at the month of January 2026, an intensive search on the internet reveals that there is a scarcity of documentary films capturing these women who carry out daunting manual tasks at construction sites, as only two documentaries surface: *Concrete Bread* (2025), and *Women of Salt* (2024). Yet, the strenuous job is observed to be executed by an avalanche of women in different estates/housing construction locations in the state, after they are picked from waiting points which are again spread at different junctions within the state, such as House of Assembly Junction by Nkaliki-Hausa Quarters Road, and Abakaliki Township Stadium Junction, to mention a few. Moreso, from the theoretical angle, research publications on the topic of Abakaliki women and hard labour appear to be unavailable, especially through a search engine like Google Scholar. This gap in literature is discussed further in this paper, in the section titled, “Research Gap”. Also, none of the found literature has addressed women and hard labour concerns from the perspective cinematography and editing techniques in the audio-visual media. It is this problem that necessitates this research which seeks to reiterate the advocacy power of the documentary film, especially in a region that has stories which when told effectively, can be pivotal to broader human liberation.

For clarity, this study examines the cinematic language of social conscience in the Nigerian documentary, *Concrete Bread* (2025), focusing on how cinematography and editing are employed to advocate for women engaged in physically demanding labour in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, South-East of Nigeria.

To guide the paper, three research objectives, and corresponding questions have been carefully mapped out.



The objectives are:

- i. To examine the cinematographic and editing techniques employed in *Concrete Bread* (2025) in advocating for women engaged in physically demanding labour.
- ii. To analyse the distinctive cinematic language, within the context of the Nigerian film industry, in *Concrete Bread* (2025).
- iii. To explore how *Concrete Bread* (2025) addresses the limited audio-visual representation of the harsh labour conditions experienced by women in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Cinematic Language and Social Conscience

Cinematic language refers to the system of visual and auditory signs through which films communicate meaning. Rather than relying solely on dialogue, filmmakers employ elements such as camera framing, lighting, editing, colour, sound, and mise-en-scène to construct narratives and evoke emotional responses. Jumabekov et al. (2025) describe cinematic language as a dynamic grammar in which every shot, transition, sound effect, and editing decision functions as part of a symbolic system that audiences decode to derive meaning.

Within African film scholarship, cinematic language is closely associated with postcolonial identity, cultural representation, and indigenous storytelling. Uwah and Bature-Uzor (2023) argue that African cinema has developed a distinctive cinematic language by combining traditional storytelling conventions with contemporary digital aesthetics. According to the authors, this hybrid approach enables African filmmakers to engage political, cultural, and commercial realities while maintaining a uniquely African identity.

Supporting this perspective, Okwuowulu (2025), in *Reimagining Storytelling: Nollywood's Digital Revolution against Hollywood Structures*, explains that the Nigerian film industry has increasingly embraced digital technologies and global streaming platforms, including Netflix, Showmax, YouTube, and Facebook, as channels for film distribution. He argues that these platforms have encouraged Nollywood filmmakers to adopt international production standards and narrative conventions to meet global distribution requirements. Consequently, many Nigerian productions now incorporate Hollywood-inspired cinematic techniques, including genre conventions, directing styles, production design, cinematography, sound design, editing, colour grading, and lighting.

For example, Showmax Original productions such as *Crime and Justice Lagos*, *Diché*, and *Wura* employ Western crime-procedural structures characterized by forensic investigation sequences, stylised montage, and suspense-driven editing patterns. While these productions demonstrate the growing influence of Hollywood filmmaking practices, they simultaneously retain indigenous



cultural narratives and local storytelling traditions, resulting in a hybrid cinematic language that reflects Nigeria's postcolonial identity.

Onwuliri and Oshionebo (2023) examine the contribution of the iRepresent International Documentary Film Festival to the development of documentary culture in Nigeria. They argue that the festival provides an important platform through which filmmakers, scholars, and audiences engage in critical discussions on contemporary social issues. By facilitating dialogue and public reflection, the festival promotes a socially conscious documentary culture capable of stimulating civic engagement and social advocacy.

The present researcher agrees with this position, particularly regarding the structural limitations affecting documentary filmmaking in Nigeria. While the festival has become an important exhibition platform, its existence also underscores the absence of dedicated documentary exhibition spaces within Nigeria's mainstream cinema industry, thereby limiting the visibility and commercial circulation of documentary films.

Similarly, Onwuliri and Oshionebo (2024) analyse the documentaries *Nightfall in Lagos* by James Amuta and *Bariga Boy* by Femi Odugbemi. They contend that documentary films extend beyond factual reporting by stimulating public discourse on democracy, governance, and social justice. According to the authors, documentaries function as instruments of social conscience because they encourage civic participation, challenge oppressive power structures, and contribute to social transformation.

Beyond documentary filmmaking, scholars have also examined how fictional narratives advance social consciousness. Onyejelem (2024), drawing on Social Representation Theory, investigates child rights advocacy in Nigerian feature films and finds that cinematic portrayals of child labour, abuse, and neglect expose societal failures while encouraging policy reform. Likewise, Amaefule (2024) explores linguistic strategies employed in Nigerian films to expose injustice against widows in South-Eastern Nigeria. Her study demonstrates how dialogue and characterization provide marginalized women with agency, enabling filmmakers to challenge oppressive cultural practices and advocate social justice. Collectively, these studies illustrate that social conscience in Nigerian cinema extends beyond documentary practice into feature filmmaking through carefully constructed narrative and technical choices.

### **Theoretical Review: Social Responsibility Theory**

The Social Responsibility Theory of the media posits that while media institutions should enjoy editorial freedom, they also have an obligation to serve society by disseminating truthful, balanced, accurate, and socially relevant information. The theory maintains that media practitioners must exercise their professional freedom responsibly and remain accountable to the public interest.



Within the Nigerian media environment, where corruption, inequality, and social exclusion remain persistent challenges, the principles of Social Responsibility Theory are particularly relevant. Sanusi et al. (2023) examined the extent to which social responsibility sustains editorial independence in Nigerian journalism. Their findings indicate that ownership interests, political interference, and financial pressures frequently undermine the ability of media organizations to fulfil their public obligations. They conclude that meaningful media accountability requires institutional reforms alongside strong professional ethics.

Similarly, Oyinloye et al. (2024) investigated a privately owned Nigerian radio station and found that private ownership does not necessarily hinder the fulfilment of social responsibility obligations. Rather, the station demonstrated commitment to public education, community engagement, and ethical journalism despite commercial pressures.

These studies demonstrate that Social Responsibility Theory functions both as a normative framework and as a practical guide for media practice. Media institutions continually negotiate the competing demands of commercial viability, political influence, and ethical responsibility while striving to serve the public interest.

The theory is equally applicable to socially conscious filmmaking. Documentary filmmakers possess not only artistic freedom but also ethical responsibilities regarding the representation of social realities. Within *Concrete Bread*, Social Responsibility Theory provides an appropriate framework for examining how cinematography and editing communicate social realities, foster empathy, and ethically represent the lived experiences of women engaged in strenuous manual labour. The theory therefore facilitates an assessment of whether the documentary's technical choices contribute to truthful, balanced, and socially responsible storytelling.

## **Research Gap**

A review of existing literature reveals two significant gaps. First, there is a substantial empirical gap regarding the documentation of women engaged in strenuous manual labour in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State. Although numerous studies have examined women's participation in Nigeria's construction industry and informal economy, very few have specifically documented the experiences of women working as manual labourers at construction sites in Abakaliki. Existing studies have primarily concentrated on labour conditions, workplace discrimination, gender inequality, occupational hazards, and socio-economic challenges (Adenuga & Oderinde, 2017; Okeke et al., 2020; Ogbu et al., 2021; Saka et al., 2022; Abubakar & Jibrin, 2023; Adah et al., 2025). Likewise, Egwu (2019) examined women's political participation in Ebonyi State rather than their labour experiences.

The only readily accessible publication directly addressing this subject is Nabob Ogbonna's (2016) *Daily Trust* feature titled *Abakaliki: Where Women Engage in Hard Labour to Earn a Living*, which provides a journalistic account rather than an empirical or audiovisual



investigation. Consequently, the lived realities of these women remain inadequately documented in both academic scholarship and documentary filmmaking.

Second, an important theoretical and methodological gap exists within film and media scholarship. Although studies have examined documentary films as instruments of social advocacy (Onwuliri & Oshionebo, 2023, 2024), little scholarly attention has been devoted to analysing how cinematography and editing function as technical instruments for constructing social conscience. Existing research predominantly focuses on thematic representation, narrative content, and advocacy outcomes, with limited examination of the visual grammar and editing techniques through which documentaries communicate meaning and influence audiences.

To further verify this gap, a systematic search of digital platforms using keywords such as "*Abakaliki women in hard labour*" and related terms was conducted across YouTube, Facebook, Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Google Scholar, and Nigerian online news platforms. Apart from *Concrete Bread* (2025), *Women of Salt* (2024), and the *Daily Trust* report by Ogbonna (2016), no documentary films, short films, or audiovisual reports depicting the daily experiences of women engaged in construction labour in Abakaliki were identified.

This scarcity reveals a significant gap in both scholarly literature and audiovisual documentation. Accordingly, the present study addresses these twin gaps by providing a technical analysis of how cinematography and editing are employed in *Concrete Bread* (2025) to construct social conscience while documenting the largely overlooked experiences of women engaged in strenuous manual labour in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State. This study therefore contributes simultaneously to documentary film scholarship and to the documentation of marginalized labour experiences in Nigeria.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research employs a qualitative methodology, where in the design is a case-study design of *Concrete Bread* 2025. The choice of qualitative analysis is rooted in the interpretive nature of the research, which attempts to underpin how cinematic techniques, particular in cinematography and editing communicate social conscience, moral, and media responsibility *Concrete Bread* is a recently produced documentary film that captures the strenuous daily activities, carried out by women in Ebonyi State, South-East of Nigeria. It is produced by the post-graduate (Master's students) of Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike Ikwo, Ebonyi State, Nigeria, in partial fulfilment of the course, *Advanced TV/Film Production Techniques* with course code, MAC 722, taught and supervised by Dr. Charles Okwuowulu DGN, a renowned scholar and filmmaker. The film selection is anchored on its thematic relevance to social consciousness, labour and gendered experiences, as well as its cinematic richness in portraying the physical and emotional strain of women engaged in hard labour. In other words, the rationale for selection is on the fact that the film through systemic audio-visual techniques demonstrates that human labour can be medically detrimental to their health, especially as it has to do with the female body

structure/physique. The documentation becomes a very crucial task for liberating these women from their horrific struggle.

Data for this research was derived primarily from the visual and narrative elements of *Concrete Bread*. Thus, the researcher who is the cinematographer and editor of the case study will conduct a close reading/reportage of the technical processes of the film, paying attention to cinematography (camera movement, lighting, composition, colour, and framing) and editing (transitions, rhythm, pacing, and sequencing), documenting their contribution to meaning construction and moral awareness. Secondary data will be obtained from relevant books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and possibly, online audiovisual archives that discuss cinematic language, social conscience in film, and documentary aesthetics, providing theoretical grounding and comparative insights to support the technical analysis in this study.

## TECHNICAL ANALYSIS

### Summary of *Concrete Bread*

*Concrete Bread* (2025) is an expository documentary film that vividly captures the harsh realities confronting women in Abakaliki, Nigeria; women who, driven by economic necessity and social constraints, engage in arduous manual labour to sustain their families. The film sheds light on their daily struggle for survival, painting a sobering picture of the intersection between gender, poverty, and labour in a developing socio-economic context. Through observational footage and an omniscient narrative voice, the filmmakers take the audience on an intimate journey following the primary subject, a widow and mother, as she transitions from the construction site; where she toils, lifting stones and mixing concrete; to her modest home, where her children eagerly await her return. This narrative structure creates a poignant juxtaposition between the harshness of her work environment and the tenderness of her domestic space, emphasizing both her physical endurance and emotional strength. Adding a crucial dimension to the narrative, a medical expert is featured to provide a professional perspective on the health implications associated with such strenuous and prolonged physical activity. The expert highlights conditions such as chronic back pain, respiratory complications, and reproductive health risks; medical realities that underline the broader human cost of economic marginalisation.

### Intricacies



*Close*

*up shots during interview*



## **Shot Usage**

The cinematography emphasizes realism and empathy. Close-up shots capture the physical effort, expressions, and determination of the women as they carry, mix, and lay concrete. Medium and wide shots contextualize the labour within the construction site environment, showing interactions with male colleagues, tools, and the site's infrastructure.

## **Lighting**

Natural lighting is used for the exterior scenes to maintain authenticity, while artificial lighting motivated by fluorescent light of an office, as seen in the pictorial illustration above is used for visibility of the interior scenes.

## **Camera Movement**

As seen at the time when the primary subject mixes concrete, the camera movements follow the rhythm of the labour, allowing viewers to feel the intensity and pace of the work. This is also observed in areas where the women move mortar from one location to another, there is a conscious pan movement of the camera.

## **Continuity Editing**

Editing in *Concrete Bread* ensures there is no dull moment throughout the film. Continuity editing guides viewers through the day-to-day work while emphasizing the physical and social dimensions of the labour.

## **Pacing**

Pacing varies according to the intensity of the tasks: slower sequences highlight moments of strenuous effort and fatigue, while faster sequences capture collective activity and site movement. This variation sustains engagement and mirrors the rhythm of construction work, reinforcing both narrative clarity and social framing.

## **Parallel Editing and B-rolls**

The film features interviews with multiple women labourers and a doctor who provides insights on health and safety implications. The editor intercuts these interviews with B-roll footage showing women lifting concrete, mixing materials, and working alongside male colleagues. For the doctor, B-roll pictures and video footages illustrate workplace conditions, illustration of skeletal and muscular structure, as well as vivid visualization of health toll explanations. This integration maintains viewer engagement, provides context, and visually reinforces key points from the interviews. The multiple perspectives also emphasize the collective nature of labour, presenting a holistic view of women's experiences on construction sites.

## **Voice-over Narration**

Voice over narration is strategically placed to accompany the cinematography and B-roll sequences. It provides context, clarifies technical aspects of the work, and highlights the social significance of women's labour. The narration guides audience interpretation while



complementing the visual storytelling, reinforcing both empathy and awareness. The voice over narration in *Concrete Bread* is bold, professional, authoritative, and distinctly persuasive, functioning as a crucial narrative force that advanced the film's advocacy purpose. Its confident tone and deliberate pacing conveyed a sense of urgency and conviction, positioning the narrator as an observer and as a moral guide directing the audience's attention to the realities faced by the women labourers in Abakaliki.

### **Detailed Script**

The script constructs an emotionally charged and socially grounded account of her daily struggles, springboarding or paving way for visual interpretation through cinematography and editing. Below is the first paragraph of the documentary script:

**“Voice-over Script for Documentary on Women Labour in Abakaliki**  
In the bustling land of Abakaliki, a city known for agriculture, mining, and infrastructural development, the story of survival unfolds each day. Here, women rise with the sun, not to the comfort of offices or markets, but to the sites where stones, sand, gravel, amongst other heavy loads determine their daily bread. For these women, labour is not a choice, it is a necessity.

### **Slow Motion and Close-Up Shot**

The use of slow motion and a close up shot at 00:16:58 of the eighteen-minute documentary, where the primary character tears up with her children by her side, is a powerful cinematic technique that deepens the emotional impact of the narrative. This moment slows the viewer's pace of perception and creates an intensified visual emphasis on the character's vulnerability, exhaustion, and silent plea for a better life. By isolating her facial expression and allowing the viewer to linger on her tears, the documentary shifts from expository or observational reporting to an intimate portrayal of human struggle.

### **English Sub-titles**

English subtitles are included for dialogues conducted in Igbo, making the film accessible to audiences who are not Igbos. The text is written in yellow for greater visibility, timed carefully with the visuals to maintain natural pacing. This ensures that viewers can understand the narrative and social issues without missing important visual details, enhancing both accessibility and social responsibility.

### **Music**

The editor employs emotional music to underscore the labour, struggle, and resilience of the women. Music cues reflect the intensity of work, moments of reflection, and collective solidarity, guiding viewers' emotional responses and enhancing engagement. It works in harmony with cinematography, editing, interviews, B-roll, narration, and subtitling to create a cohesive and compelling documentary experience.



## DISCUSSION

The study finds that the content of the voice over script in a documentary film, as seen in *Concrete Bread* plays a central role in constructing the film's cinematic language of social conscience. The narration accompanies the visuals and acts as an interpretive framework that guides viewers toward the emotional and moral dimensions of the women's labour experiences. In other words, cinematically, the voice over works in concert with cinematography and editing to create a coherent framing strategy. The narration directs attention to bodily strain, economic desperation, and personal sacrifice, which the cinematography visually amplifies through close ups, medium and wide shots, tracking shots, and lighting. Meanwhile, the editing rhythm ensures that the voice over aligns with emotionally charged visuals and interview cutaways, creating a synchronised communicative effect. The result is a documentary experience where the voice over becomes a framing device that enhances empathy, and strengthens the film's social conscience. The synergy with music, slow motion effect, subtitling, parallel editing, pacing, and continuity editing, demonstrates that in advocacy driven documentary practice, voice over content is not supplementary but essential to the ethical and aesthetic construction of meaning. Close-up shots, medium and wide compositions, and carefully structured camera movements allow the audience to witness both the physical intensity and emotional dimensions of women's labour. Editing choices, including pacing, slow-motion, continuity, and intercutting of interviews with B-roll footage, enhance narrative clarity while foregrounding moral and social issues.

The findings align with Uwah & Bature (2024), and Okwuowulu (2025), who posit that Nollywood filmmakers are having a hybrid filmic identity as they are leveraging western digital techniques to tell local/indigenous stories, just like the filmmakers in *Concrete Bread* utilise cinematic techniques such as parallel and continuity editing, subtitling, and b-rolls, amongst others, to tell local stories of marginalised women in Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

The findings align with Amaefule (2024), who posits that linguistic techniques are key to advocative films for marginalised women, because through the analysed script and voice over narration, there is evidence of empathy appeal in the film. The findings also aligns with Onwuliri & Oshionebo (2024) & Onyejelem (2024), who posit that film offers a potent medium for social conscience, because through the aforementioned techniques, audiences can emotionally draw closer to the victims and feel their pain.

## CONCLUSION

Meticulous consideration of cinematography and editing techniques are key to an advocative audio-visual piece such as *Concrete Bread* (2025), because, as observed in the findings of this study, they are the drivers of the emotional/empathetic attachment to the story.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have been made to guide filmmakers, scholars, and media practitioners in producing socially conscious documentaries in Nigeria.

- i. Further studies should examine audience reception and impact of socially conscious films like *Concrete Bread*. Research exploring how viewers interpret, respond to, and are influenced by the film's cinematography and editing, will provide valuable



- insights into the effectiveness of such techniques in promoting social awareness and advocating for change.
- ii. Filmmakers such as directors and producers should ensure that their cinematographers and editors are learned/technically sound to embark on advocacy projects such as *Concrete Bread*, in order to contribute significantly to emotionally capturing the audience.
  - iii. Continuous trainings and workshops from the government, film guilds, amongst other organisations are encouraged.

### **Ethical Clearance**

While no participants/interviewers were used, the interpretation of the case study is subjective, from the researchers' point of view.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

### **Authors' Contributions**

Odoh and Chinda conceived the idea and designed the study; Adeola, and Chidiebere collated the data; Odoh, and Chinda wrote the initial manuscript. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft, and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

### **Data availability statement.**

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request. A link to the documentary film used as the case study is also available in the filmography of the study.

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