

IDENTIFYING THE DNA OF AFRICAN CREATIVITY



Chapter from Africa 2025: Prospects and Challenges
Handbook by the HSE University Center for African Studies
Edited by Andrey Maslov

Authors:

Xenia Guseva, Researcher, HSE University Center for African Studies.

Vsevolod Sviridov, Deputy Director, HSE University Center for African Studies.

Edited by Andrey Maslov, Director, HSE University Center for African Studies.

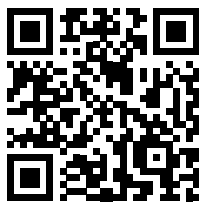
Reviewed by Bernard Ntahondi, Film Curator and Cultural Heritage Manager, Dar es Salaam Centre for Architectural Heritage.

The chapter **Identifying the DNA of African creativity** highlights the development of the continent's creative industries. It presents unique market volume assessments across several countries in an industry that employs 2 million people in Africa. Amid a growing need for self-representation in telling African stories, cultural narratives created by Africans themselves are gaining popularity. The chapter illustrates the significance of cultural sovereignty and the role digitalisation plays in achieving it, encompassing both historical heritage and modern creative forms such as music, film, and fashion. The chapter serves as an integral part of the handbook *Africa 2025: Prospects and Challenges* prepared by the HSE University Center for African Studies.

Africa 2025: Prospects and Challenges is to serve as a handbook on Africa's development, challenges and prospects. Its target audience is government officials, businessmen, scholars and experts. The handbook aims to provide alternative positive vision on some issues that Africa faces, among them being the fight for food and energy sovereignty, debt crisis, digital transformation, rapid urbanisation and population growth.

The book was prepared by the team of experts and scholars coordinated by HSE University Center for African Studies (Moscow, Russia).

Digital version
of the Handbook
is available here:



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Identifying the DNA of African creativity

Ignored potential of the creative economy

Discourse on African cultures frequently begins with references to traditional dances, masks and rituals passed down through generations. While these elements are integral to the continent's rich heritage, less attention is given to the growing urban art scenes, such as the Afrobeat revolution or the thriving contemporary galleries in cities like Johannesburg. Even fewer consider the economic implications of Africa's creative industries or their potential for economic diversification and growth. Discussions about Africa's development frequently centre around industries and commodities; yet, the continent's post-industrial potential, particularly through creative industries, remains overlooked.

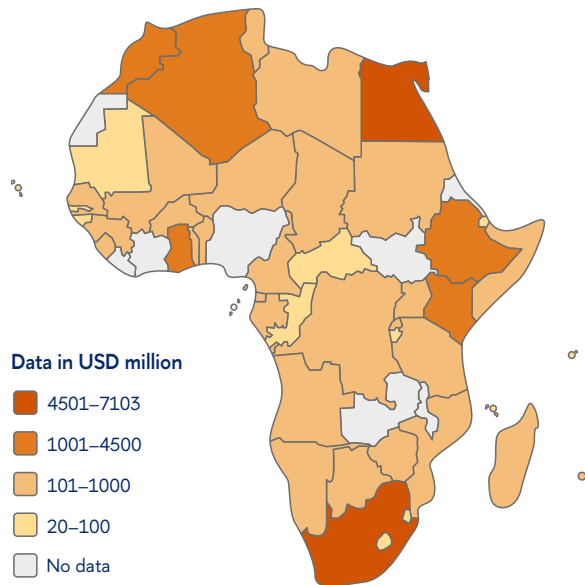
Digitalisation and creative industries in Africa do not just provide more than 2 million jobs¹ (5% of global cultural and creative industries jobs) but can also foster economic sovereignty by creating local wealth from African narratives, arts and ideas.

Economic independence goes hand in hand with cultural sovereignty, enabling African nations to control how their stories are told and distributed globally

As African cities continue to evolve, this intersection of creativity, digital transformation and urbanisation has the potential to position the continent as a major player in the global post-industrial economy.

In most countries for which data is available, there has been a steady growth in the contribution of creative industries to GDP over the past 10 years. The development of technology, increased investment

Estimation of cultural goods and services household consumption market size in Africa, 2022



The estimate of the market for cultural goods and services is based on household per capita expenditure data, assuming a 2% share of expenditure is dedicated to cultural goods and services.

Source: prepared by the HSE University Center for African Studies based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and World Bank data.

and growing international interest in African culture are driving this growth. South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, and Morocco are the leaders in developing the creative economy on the continent,

showing significant growth and influence in various sectors, including music, film and digital media.

Creative industries in Africa face many of the same challenges that plague other sectors of the economies. Issues such as a lack of infrastructure, funding, institutional capacities, and regulations all hinder growth. Moreover, the level of education in creative fields remains low, further limiting the

¹ UNCTAD. Creative Industry 4.0: Towards a New Globalized Creative Economy. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Geneva, 2022.

ability of the African nations to compete on a global scale. However, one of the most pressing concerns that is important to highlight is the severe **data deficit**.

Lack of reliable, comprehensive data makes it difficult to assess the true scale of Africa's creative industries and prevents the development of well-informed strategies for sustainable growth

The absence of consistent data hinders governments and investors from making decisions that could boost the creative economy, the challenge not limited to the creative sector but affecting multiple industries across the continent.

Africa encompasses many of the most promising and rapidly growing markets globally, in terms of its both population and economic

Assessing household demand for creative goods and services plays a critical role in understanding the broadest impact of the creative economy. Families and households, as key participants in this sector, not only consume cultural products and services but also influence their production and distribution. This demand spans a range of activities, including cultural consumption – such as attending performances, visiting museums and engaging in recreational activities – and the use of leisure services.

Households are active agents in the creative economy, contributing to both its financial sustainability and the cultural dynamism that drives growth. Their expenditures on creative goods and services fuel market demand, which in turn shapes the supply and diversity of these offerings. In many countries, the increasing consumer spending and the growing accessibility of digital platforms for cultural content have expanded the avenues for cultural engagement. For example, Uganda increased consumer spending to USD 32 billion equivalent in 2022 from USD 21 billion in 2012². Moreover, households often indirectly support the creative economy by investing in related goods, such as technological devices for streaming or attending digital concerts, or by contributing to the informal sectors of creative production through craft and local art consumption.

The role of households in both the consumption and production of creative goods also brings attention to the way cultural activities are embedded in everyday life. Household spending patterns reflect broader societal trends, such as urbanisation, rising literacy rates and increasing awareness of the value of local traditions. Thus, the demand for creative goods and services does not just sustain the cultural sector but also fosters innovation, diversity, and community identity. In recent years, household spending on cultural events and services in BRICS countries has ranged between 2.7% and 6% of total household consumption³. In 2017, Brazil allocated about 2% of the total household expenditure to this category, while China spent 2.3%, and Russia allocated around 2.6%. South Africa spent approximately 1.95%, and India, with a lower figure, allocated 0.67%⁴.

Many African nations lack detailed data on household spending in cultural sector. This is primarily due to underdeveloped statistical systems, limited infrastructure for collecting and processing such data, and economic conditions that prioritise essential needs over cultural consumption.

2 World Bank. Private Consumption in Uganda. URL: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.CON.PRVT.CD?locations=UG>

3 Pocerat. BRICS Joint Statistical Publication 2023. URL: <https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/BRICS%20Joint%20Statistical%20Publication-2023.pdf>

4 Mungase, Sachin, and Satyanarayan Kothe. Analysing Consumption Patterns and Food Demand in BRICS Countries: A Differential Approach to Demand Theory and Policy Analysis. MPRA Paper No. 121431, University of Munich, 12 July 2024. URL: <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/121431/>

potential. At the same time, the continent is a massive importer of cultural content. On platforms like Netflix, for example, despite the growing African audience, only one out of the top 10 films is African made, while the rest are dominated by Indian, Chinese, and French productions. The increasing competition for African markets is evidenced by the strategic investments made by dominant international stakeholders. Netflix's entry into Africa, mirroring its earlier move in South Korea⁵, is just one example. The presence of African films in prestigious events, such as Senegalese cinema at the Oscars⁶ and a Tanzanian author receiving the Nobel Prize in Literature⁷, signals a rising recognition of African talent. Even Disney has joined the wave with its animated cyberpunk series *Iwaju*⁸, set in Lagos, while tech giants like Google are making significant investments in African markets.



Senegalese romantic drama film *Banel e Adama* by Senegalese screenwriter Ramata-Toulaye Sy, 2023



Animated science fiction miniseries *Iwaju* produced by Walt Disney Animation Studios, written by Olufikayo Adeola and Halima Hudson, 2024

By investing in its creative industries, African states can control their cultural narrative, ensuring that African stories and values are told by Africans

These investments are shaping cultural narratives and influencing the values of Africa's youth. The question arises: what will the next generation African generation believe in? Will they see their own beauty and potential reflected in global media, or will they be drawn to the ideas developed outside of Africa? It is crucial for Africa to foster a sense of pride in local creativity, ensuring that young people see the value in staying and building within their own communities, rather than seeking opportunities abroad. Cultural sovereignty is essential in this context.

This fosters a generation that not only consumes content but also creates it, driving local innovation and allowing Africa to rise as a global cultural leader.

The creative industries, which encompass music, film, fashion, art and design, are rapidly developing on the African continent, becoming an important driver of economic growth and social transformation. Today, as the global economy increasingly shifts toward innovation and creativity, Africa is showing significant potential in this area, gradually positioning itself among the global leaders in the creative economy.

The increasing value of African contemporary artists on the global market highlights the importance of creative education and investment in the continent's cultural institutions. Many leading African artists, such as Amoako Bofo and Ben Enwonwu, have benefitted from formal art education in institutions across Africa. In recent years, the market for African contemporary art has seen exponential growth. According to the Art Basel 2023 report, African contemporary artists achieved record sales in auction houses, with more than 2,700 works sold — almost double the number sold before COVID-19. The total value of these works reached USD 63 million in 2022, up from USD 47 million in 2021. The 2023 Contemporary Art Market Report includes nine African artists in the top 500 selling contemporary artists globally. This marks a significant achievement for African artists, whose presence in major auction houses has grown steadily, reflecting increasing market demand and global recognition.

5 Analyzing Digital Communication Trends. URL: <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/download/20718/4392>

6 Africanews. Senegalese Migrant's Journey Inspires Oscar-Nominated Film. URL: <https://www.africanews.com/2024/02/18/senegalese-migrants-journey-inspires-oscar-nominated-film/>

7 The New York Times. Nobel Prize in Literature Awarded to Abdulrazak Gurnah. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/07/books/nobel-prize-literature-abdulrazak-gurnah.html>

8 Disney+. *Iwaju* Show on Disney+. URL: <https://ondisneyplus.disney.com/show/iwaju>



Nigerian historical drama film *Lisabi: The Uprising* directed by Niyi Akinmolayan, produced by Adebimpe Oyeade and Victoria Akujobi, and written by Yinka Olaoye and Niyi Akinmolayan, 2024

Africa stands out with its music industry where genres like Afrobeat and Urban Groove have gained worldwide recognition, thereby boosting cultural exports and promoting tourism.

However, evaluating the real contribution of these industries to the economy presents several challenges. Traditional statistical methods often overlook the unique characteristics of creative sectors, such as intellectual property and cultural assets, which results in their role being underestimated.

The creative industries are often mistakenly associated only with the humanitarian sphere, ignoring their economic potential

The intertwining of culture and politics is a powerful phenomenon, especially in regions where art and expression shape public discourse. Across Africa, cultural actors have often used their platforms to address social and political issues. Opinion leaders like Nigerian musician Fela Kuti⁹, whose Afrobeat criticised corruption and military rule, or South African playwright Athol Fugard¹⁰, who highlighted the injustices of apartheid, illustrate how cultural production and political activism are closely connected. In these cases, the line between an artist and a political actor often blurs, as cultural figures mobilise a society and contribute to shaping national political debates.

A recent example of this is Bobi Wine, a Ugandan musician turned politician. Bobi Wine, born Robert Kyagulanyi, first gained popularity through his socially oriented narrative, which speculates with issues such as poverty, corruption and daily life of lower-income communities. His rise from a musician to an opposition leader and his 2021 presidential run against Yoweri Museveni¹¹ leveraged his fame for challenging Uganda's long-standing political system. His story has gained international attention, leading to the 2022 documentary *Bobi Wine: The People's President*, produced by Disney and Hulu¹². The film earned USD 30,263 in the domestic box office and an additional USD 14,305 internationally, bringing its worldwide box office total to USD 44,568¹³. Despite such a moderate performance, the documentary won two awards. At the Cinema for Peace Awards on 19 February 2024, it was named Political Film of the Year¹⁴, and at the IDA Documentary Awards on 12 December 2023, it won the title of Best Feature Documentary¹⁵. The involvement of Disney and Hulu in telling Bobi Wine's story reflects how major global media platforms contribute to shaping political discourse. By spotlighting an opposition figure through global media, the documentary becomes a part of the broader narrative about politics in Africa. This illustrates how the media can influence political conversations on both a local and global scale. The impact of these cultural products goes beyond entertainment contributing to the shaping of public perceptions and political awareness.

- 9 Labinjoh, Justin. Fela Anikulapo-Kuti: Protest Music and Social Processes in Nigeria. *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1982, pp. 119–134. JSTOR, URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2783979>. Accessed 13 Oct. 2024.
- 10 Simango, John. The Paradox of Freedom and Fear in Athol Fugard's *My Children! My Africa!* *Imbizo*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2023, 16 pages. URL: <https://doi.org/10.25159/2663-6565/12367>
- 11 BBC. Nigerians React to Global Events in Pidgin. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/pidgin/world-55656720>
- 12 National Geographic. *Bobi Wine: The People's President*. URL: <https://films.nationalgeographic.com/bobi-wine-the-peoples-president>
- 13 Box Office Mojo. *Bobi Wine: The People's President* Box Office Performance. URL: <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt21376900/>
- 14 Deadline. Hillary Clinton, Sharon Stone Support "Navalny" at Cinema for Peace. URL: <https://deadline.com/2024/02/hillary-clinton-sharon-stone-cinema-for-peace-navalny-october-7-1235831358/>
- 15 Variety. IDA Documentary Awards 2023: "Bobi Wine: The People's President" Wins Big. URL: <https://variety.com/2023/film/news/ida-documentary-awards-winners-bobi-wine-the-peoples-president-1235831567/>

The case of Uganda shows that the dependence on foreign media platforms creates unacceptable risks of domestic political destabilisation. That is why any youth-oriented content should be hosted on regulated platforms free from foreign disruptive influences

Creative industries are closely tied to urban environments as cities have traditionally served as centres of innovation and cultural activity. These urban areas concentrate human capital, access to education, infrastructure, and technology, making them platforms for the growth of creative clusters. In cities like Lagos, Nairobi, and Johannesburg, powerful creative hubs have already emerged, influencing not only the local economy but also the international market.



Street art by Dbongz and Senzart911.
Johannesburg, South Africa, 2019.
Photo by Cale Waddacor

With global exports of creative industries of USD 524 billion in 2020¹⁶ Africa is well positioned to capitalise on this expanding market. The creative services sector, including advertising, market research and digital design, is also experiencing rapid growth. As African governments and international investors continue to support digital infrastructure and creative innovation, the continent's creative industries can play transforming role.

Definition and measurement of creative economy in Africa

Creative industries are based on creative potential and the pursuit of unique cultural products. In international practice they include art, literature, music, cinema, theatre, television, design, advertising, video games, and digital media. The primary driving force of creative industries are intangible values – ideas, innovations, and cultural expression.

In international practice the measurement of creative industries is based on concepts developed by organisations like UNESCO, UNCTAD, and the World Bank. They design methodologies to assess the contribution of these industries to GDPs, employment, and exports. The assessments are based on the data related to employment, revenues from cultural products and their impact on adjacent sectors such as tourism and education.

A crucial aspect of evaluating creative industries is the legal framework that defines their status and establishes support measures at the state level. The UK, for instance, was one of the first in the 1990s to introduce legislative standards to support these sectors, as well as South Korea with its K-pop phenomenon and other creative industries that contribute significantly to the country's economy. Developing creative industries has proven to be highly beneficial for countries like South Korea¹⁷, and this model deserves considering. Several African countries have already introduced government programmes to support creative industries and have enshrined them at the legislative level.

Botswana's recent focus on developing its creative industries comes as the country grapples with high unemployment and seeks to diversify its economy which has traditionally relied on mining.

¹⁶ UNCTAD. Creative Economy Outlook 2022. URL: <https://unctad.org/publication/creative-economy-outlook-2022>

¹⁷ South Korea's transformation from an exporter of cars and electronics to a global cultural powerhouse shows how creative industries can drive economic growth. In 2021, South Korea's cultural exports – led by K-pop bands like BTS and global hits like "Squid Game" – generated USD 12.4 billion in export revenue, more than double the USD 4.7 billion earned from consumer electronics. These industries are not resource-dependent; instead, they thrive on human talent and innovation, which are assets that all countries possess. The creative sectors in South Korea also employ over 600,000 people, contributing to sustainable job creation, particularly for younger generations. Furthermore, these industries have bolstered South Korea's global image, attracting tourism, foreign investment, and significantly enhancing the country's soft power. South Korea's success demonstrates how developing nations can leverage their creative industries to diversify their economies and foster both economic growth and cultural influence globally

Recognising the potential of the creative and cultural sectors, the government supported initiatives such as the **13th Annual National Arts Festival**¹⁸, showcasing traditional arts while highlighting their economic potential. As noted by Tumiso Rakgare, Minister of Youth, Gender, Sport, and Culture, Botswana sees creative industries as a dynamic way to promote entrepreneurship, investment, and innovation. The festival, which attracted more than 14,000 artists this year, showcased traditional arts, such as Sebirwa dance, while emphasising the sector's potential to contribute to economic diversification.



13th Annual National Arts Festival
in Botswana, 2024

Larger economies as South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya are able to invest in the long-term development of their creative sectors. These nations have the financial capacity to think long-term and invest in building creative industries that contribute to national growth, whereas smaller economies are still focused on more immediate needs like healthcare and infrastructure. However, there is a divide in how African nations view the role of creative industries which is not determined by the scale of an economy. For many, the focus is on preserving pre-colonial identity and culture, reflecting the broader Afrocentric philosophy. This emphasis on the past ties into cultural reclamation efforts and the need to preserve heritage.

Countries like South Africa are recognising this need, allocating separate budgets for their heritage promotion and preservation and the arts and culture promotion and development. According to its 2024/25 budget¹⁹, significant

funds have been allocated to both sectors. For heritage promotion and preservation, the government allocated USD 142 million. In contrast, for arts and culture promotion and development, which is aimed at modern creative industries, the allocation is USD 84 million. These allocations underscore a dual policy commitment to heritage preservation and the advancement of modern creative industries. By 2026/27 the budget for heritage preservation is expected to rise to USD 153 million while the funding for arts and culture development is projected to increase to USD 74 million.

Through the government's Mzansi Golden Economy subprogramme, which was launched in 2011²⁰ as a part of combatting unemployment²¹, South African government places a special emphasis on the development of art, cinema, music, and crafts. The programme in 2024 funds 15 projects to enable market access, 9 provincial community arts development programmes, 25 national and provincial flagships, and 65 creative industry projects. In 2024 USD 63 million²² is allocated to the subprogramme. The funds are used to create 60,390 job opportunities in the cultural and creative sector. Of this allocation, USD 3.65 million is earmarked for placing 1,020 artists in schools over the next three years. The amount awarded is capped at USD 26,316 per grant per beneficiary. By 2019, in a three-year period, the **Festivals and Events Grant Programme** under MGE had supported 153 events across the country creating averagely **1,423 permanent jobs**²³ per annum in the cultural sector.



Contemporary dance festival,
funded by Mzansi Golden Economy

18 Xinhua. China's Cultural Development in 2024. URL: <https://english.news.cn/20240715/f136cd2a897d462ab9d1ab18f5959924/c.html>

19 National Treasury (South Africa). National Budget 2024. URL: <https://www.treasury.gov.za/documents/National%20Budget/2024/ene/FullENE.pdf>

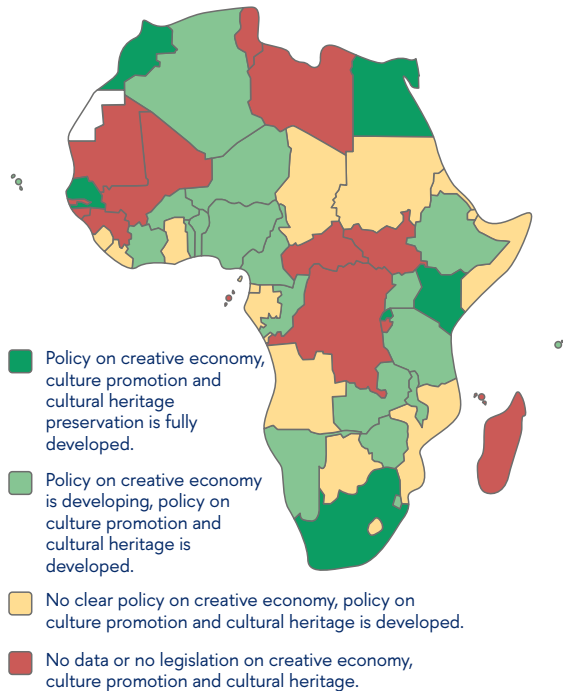
20 Swart, K., Bob, U., Nkambule, S., & Gumede, A. (2018). Economic Impacts of the Touring Ventures Sub-category of the Mzansi Golden Economy Programme in South Africa. *EuroEconomica*, vol. 1(37), pp. 90–103. URL: <https://ujcontent.uj.ac.za/esploro/outputs/journalArticle/Economic-impacts-of-the-touring-ventures/9910307607691#file-0>

21 Department of Sport, Arts and Culture (South Africa). Mzansi Golden Economy Guidelines. URL: <https://www.dsac.gov.za/Mzansi%20Golden%20Economy%20Guidelines>

22 National Treasury (South Africa). South Africa National Budget 2024.

23 Bob, Urmilla, Kamilla Swart, Rivoni Gounden, Amanda Gumede, and Sizwe Nkambule. (2019). Socio-Economic Impacts of Festivals and Events: A Case Study of the Mzansi Golden Economy Programme in South Africa. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, vol. 27, pp. 1236-1250. DOI: 10.30892/gtg.27410-429

Legislation and cultural policies in Africa, 2024



Source: prepared by the HSE University Center for African Studies.

Many African nations either lack formal policies or have only begun to address the creative sector.

A common trend across the continent is the focus on cultural heritage preservation often overshadowing modern creative industries

While some countries prioritise traditional arts and cultures conservation their policies do not yet fully address the potential of emerging digital and contemporary creative sectors.

A key challenge facing the creative industries in developing economies is the sector's informality. For instance, in countries like Zimbabwe, a significant portion of creative industry activity takes place in the informal sector²⁴. The ILO-UNESCO report notes

that **93%** of creative professionals are freelancers with only **7%** being salaried employees in registered enterprises. Similarly, in the music and film industry, many artists and producers operate outside formal structures, rendering their contributions invisible.

A persistent structural challenge lies in the inadequate systems for data collection and monitoring. In most African countries, there are no agencies or programmes to monitor and analyse the creative economy on a country-wide or regional level. This results in fragmented and often inaccurate data regarding the sector's contribution to GDP. In South Africa, for example, one of the continent's most developed economies, official data on the creative industries' contribution to the economy only started being collected in 2015 by the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC), Statistics South Africa (Stats SA), and the South African Cultural Observatory (SACO).

This still does not encompass the full spectrum of cultural production. For example, sectors like informal craft industries, fashion and new media are often overlooked because they lack formal structures. The lack of comprehensive data also extends to rural and community-based cultural activities, which are vital to the creative ecosystem but remain difficult to quantify due to their informal nature.



Column of Rhythm II
by Tadesse Mesfin, 2022

South African Cultural Observatory²⁵ (SACO), which leads the effort in gathering this data, tracks contributions from sectors such as **television and film production, live performance, heritage institutions and visual and performing arts**. These areas are included because they have clearer economic outputs and more formalised structures, allowing for easier measurement through box office revenues, festival attendance and ticket sales.

²⁴ UNESCO and ILO. New ILO-UNESCO Report: Despite Its Potential, Zimbabwe's Creative Economy Remains Largely Informal. URL: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/new-ilo-unesco-report-despite-its-potential-zimbabwes-creative-economy-remains-largely-informal-and>

²⁵ South African Cultural Observatory. South Africa's Cultural Economy. Accessed October 5, 2024. URL: <https://www.southafricanculturalobservatory.org.za>

SACO is a national research and statistical initiative launched in 2015 under the auspices of the Department of Sport, Arts, and Culture, which costed USD 3.38 million in the first three years of work²⁶. Its primary aim is to develop a comprehensive cultural information system that captures and analyses data related to South Africa's cultural and creative industries (CCIs).

Cultural and creative industries contributed USD 12 billion to South Africa's GDP in 2020

According to the SACO 2022 study²⁷, the cultural and creative industries contributed USD 12 billion to South Africa's GDP in 2020, accounting for under 3% of the country's total economic output. The largest contributors were design and creative services, valued at USD 3.8 billion, and audiovisual and interactive media, contributing USD 3.7 billion. SACO supports policymaking by providing analysis and data on the economic and social impacts of arts, culture, and heritage sectors. It operates in partnership with Nelson Mandela University, Rhodes University, and the University of KwaZulu-Natal. One of the major outcomes of SACO's work is the establishment of a **cultural information system**, which helps policymakers and industry stakeholders make informed decisions. SACO's efforts have also improved the geographic and sectoral understanding of the creative industries in South Africa, highlighting the concentration of creative economic activity in regions such as Gauteng (46.5% of the sector's economic output) and the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal contributing 14% and 17%, respectively²⁸.

Another key observatory is the **Observatory of Cultural Policies in Africa (OCPA)**²⁹, which was established in 2002. It operates as an independent Pan-African organisation with support from bodies such as UNESCO, the African Union, and others.

Based in Mozambique, OCPA has a mission to monitor cultural trends and national cultural policies across Africa, with the goal of integrating them into broader human development strategies. It focuses on advocacy, information exchange and capacity-building initiatives to support cultural development in the region.

Digitalisation of creativity

Digital transformation has become a cornerstone for the growth and evolution of Africa's creative industries providing opportunities for artists, musicians, and other content creators to reach international markets. The rise in connectivity has been instrumental in empowering African creators to leverage digital platforms to distribute their work, engage with global audiences, and diversify their revenue streams.

As creative hubs expand across African cities, it is crucial to recognise not only cultural content and performances but also the technological innovation and AI-driven solutions that are shaping creative work. These forms of innovation act as cross-sectoral catalysts, influencing industries far beyond the traditional scope of the cultural economy.

One of the most transformative aspects of digitalisation has been the ability for African musicians to bypass traditional industry bottlenecks by using streaming platforms such as Spotify, Apple Music or YouTube. Iconic African musicians like Burna Boy and Wizkid have utilised these platforms to connect with international audiences. Burna Boy's album *Twice as Tall* amassed over 100 million streams on Spotify within just a few months of its release³⁰, while Wizkid's track *Essence* became the first Nigerian song to chart on the Billboard Hot 100³¹ gaining massive traction through digital platforms. Spotify has played a pivotal role in showcasing African musicians

26 Parliamentary Monitoring Group (PMG). Meeting Overview: National Assembly Committee. URL: <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/25421/>

27 South African Cultural Observatory. Snapshot of the Cultural and Creative Industries in South Africa. URL: <https://www.southafricanculturalobservatory.org.za/article/snapshot-of-the-cultural-and-creative-industries-in-south-africa>

28 South African Cultural Observatory. South African CCI Mapping Study: Review of Methods. URL: <https://www.southafricanculturalobservatory.org.za/download/comments/1013/6b180037abbebea991d8b1232f8a8ca9/South+Afri+an+Cci+Mapping+Study+Review+Of+Methods>

29 OCPA (Observatory of Cultural Policies in Africa). Official Website. URL: <https://ocpa.irmo.hr/index-en.html>

30 Africanews. Burna Boy: The First African Artist with 100 Million Streams from Three Albums. URL: <https://www.africanews.com/2021/05/13/burna-boy-the-first-african-artist-with-100-million-streams-from-three-albums-chartdata>

31 Essence. Wizkid's "Essence" Reaches Top Ten on Billboard. URL: <https://www.essence.com/entertainment/wizkid-essence-top-ten-billboard/>

with Afrobeats rapidly gaining global traction. One of the standout examples is Rema, a Nigerian artist whose song *Calm Down* featuring Selena Gomez made history by becoming the first African artist-led track to surpass one billion streams on Spotify.

According to Spotify data, *Calm Down* has garnered the most of its streams from the US, India, Mexico, Brazil, and the UK showcasing the song's global appeal³². The official music video has also achieved remarkable success with over 615 million views further demonstrating its ability to resonate with audiences across borders.

In addition, Spotify's 2023 Wrapped data showed that Nigerian music saw a 284%³³ increase in local music consumption. Rema, along with other Afrobeats stars like Asake, continues to dominate the global music charts positioning Afrobeats as one of the most exported genres from Africa. These platforms have not only expanded the reach of African musicians but have also allowed them to directly monetise their work without relying solely on local markets, where copyright systems and licensing structures are often underdeveloped.



Wizkid, photo by Nabil Elderkin

The film and digital media sectors in Africa have also seen a tremendous boost due to digital platforms. Streaming giants like Netflix and Showmax have recognised the untapped potential of African content and invested heavily in local production. This investment is part of a broader trend of digital platforms serving as key drivers of growth in Africa's creative economy by facilitating content distribution and expanding market access. According to PwC³⁴, Africa's entertainment and media industry is projected to grow by 12% annually, outpacing global averages.

A prime example is Boomplay, a Nigeria-based platform that has become a key player in the Africa's music market. With over 75 million active users³⁵, Boomplay provides African musicians with an opportunity to enter the global stage, generating streaming revenue and attracting attention of international producers. The case proves that creative industries thrive even in environments where access to resources is limited, and traditions dominate modern forms of expression.

Telecom partnerships provide better network coverage and improved bandwidth in remote areas. Audiomack, a music streaming and discovery platform signed a licensing agreement with Universal Music Group (UMG) in 2022, enabling access to UMG's catalogue for Audiomack users across 16 African countries, including Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya and Ghana³⁶.

Boomplay is a music streaming platform focusing on African artists. It has become a crucial tool for musicians across the continent. This streaming platform is owned by Transsion Holdings, a Chinese smartphone manufacturer (which also owns TECNO, Infinix and Itel) and NetEase, a major Chinese internet company. This app is pre-installed on millions of smartphones sold by Transsion across the continent. In 2020 African music on the platform grew by 60% underscoring the interest in African culture both on the continent and beyond. Boomplay continues to expand its presence across Africa by forming strategic partnerships with telecom companies, aimed at making its vast music catalogue more accessible to users. By collaborating with telecom providers such as AirtelTigo in Ghana, Boomplay has created affordable subscription models that allow users to access its vast music catalogue through their mobile accounts eliminating the need for credit cards which many people in rural areas lack.

32 Forbes. Rema's "Calm Down" Makes History as First Afrobeats Song to Surpass 1 Billion On-Demand US Streams. URL: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/imeekpo/2024/06/21/remas-calm-down-makes-history-as-first-afrobeats-song-to-surpass-1-billion-on-demand-us-streams/>

33 Spotify. 2024 Loud & Clear Report. URL: <https://loudandclear.byspotify.com>

34 PwC. Africa Entertainment and Media Outlook 2023. URL: <https://www.pwc.com/ng/en/publications/entertainment-and-media-outlook.html>

35 Boomplay Music. Official Website. URL: <https://www.boomplay.com>

36 Universal Music Group. Audiomack Signs Licensing Agreement with Universal Music Group to Expand Global Footprint in Africa. URL: <https://www.universalmusic.com/audiomack-signs-licensing-agreement-with-universal-music-group-to-expand-global-footprint-in-africa/>

This expansion aims to help African artists reach broader audiences and strengthen the streaming ecosystem on the continent. Audiomack has more than 20 million monthly users globally and has played a significant role in boosting the reach of rising African stars such as Omah Lay. MTN's partnership with Audiomack in Nigeria is another example of this model, allowing users in remote regions to stream music with minimal data costs, thereby making their entertainment affordable.

Digitalisation has enabled the growth of e-commerce platforms in the fashion and art sectors. African fashion designers, who once relied on physical shopfronts and local markets, can now display their work globally through platforms like Instagram, TikTok and Shopify. The ability to sell directly to consumers has significantly increased the visibility of African fashion on the global stage. For example, African designers have been featured at major fashion shows in Paris, London or New York, largely due to their digital presence.

Between 2013 and 2023, African designers have increasingly gained prominence at Paris Fashion Week showcasing their talents and diversifying the global fashion scene. MaXhosa Africa, David Tlale from South Africa and Christie Brown from Ghana have consistently appeared at these events marking a new era for African fashion. In 2022 nine African designers showcased their collections at the Ethical Fashion Initiative's³⁷ official presentation, highlighting the craft and creativity of the continent.

African designers' participation in Paris Fashion Week



Source: prepared by the HSE University Center for African Studies.

The impact of digital platforms goes far beyond financial returns providing African creative professionals with unprecedented opportunities to collaborate and reach international audiences. A notable example is the 2020 collaboration between Nigerian designer Kenneth Ize and French fashion house Karl Lagerfeld³⁸. Although the collection was developed online due to pandemic restrictions with much of the work carried out remotely, Ize chose to present it through an in-person runway show. This decision emphasised the importance of physical fashion presentations highlighting the need for a balance between digital innovations and real-world experiences in the fashion industry.

The future of Africa's creative industries is closely tied to continuous digital transformation

The African Development Bank (AfDB) has projected³⁹ that USD 9 billion will be needed annually through 2030 to close the continent's



Kenyan artists, working with fashion brands, Ethical Fashion Initiative



Fashion brand Hamaji designer Louise Sommerlatte

³⁷ Ethical Fashion Initiative. African Fashion Shines at Paris Fashion Week. URL: <https://ethicalfashioninitiative.org/stories/african-fashion-shines-at-paris-fashion-week>

³⁸ Karl Lagerfeld. Kenneth Ize x Karl Lagerfeld Collection. URL: <https://www.karl.com/us-en/karlxkenneth.html>

³⁹ African Development Bank. Africa Investment Forum: Closing the Technology Gap Promises Significant Gains for Africa's Creative Industries. URL: <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/africa-investment-forum-closing-technology-gap-promises-significant-gains-africas-creative-industries-55797>

digital infrastructure gap. This investment is needed the most for expanding broadband access, data centres and cloud services, all of which are critical for the growth of Africa's creative sectors.

Despite the rising success of Africa's own creative industries African consumers themselves still remain highly loyal to non-African brands

Programmes such as the AfDB's and a Federal Government of Nigeria Investment in Digital and Creative Enterprises⁴⁰ (iDICE) launched in 2021 have already begun addressing some of these challenges. Additionally, the programme is projected to add USD 6.4 billion to Nigeria's economy by 2027. The funding breakdown includes USD 170 million from AfDB, USD 116 million from the French government through Agence Française de Développement and USD 70 million from the Islamic Development Bank. The Nigerian government will contribute USD 45 million, while other institutional and private investors are expected to provide the remaining funding through a DICE Fund⁴¹.

Making creative economy work for Africa

The demand for African creative products has surged, with the primary buyers being the African diaspora and global streaming platforms. Intra-African trade in creative industries is growing, although it remains limited compared to global trade.

A report on brand preferences⁴² highlights that only 14% of the top brands in Africa are of African origin with companies from the US, Europe and Asia dominating the market. This loyalty to foreign brands often overshadows the growth of local industries, including the creative sector.

The surge in demand for African creative content internationally contrasts with the fact that African narratives and cultural products are still largely influenced by external agendas. Western and Asian media, global brands and international platforms continue to shape the African story, a phenomenon that underscores the importance of creative sovereignty. By building and nurturing local brands and industries, Africa can better retain the economic and cultural benefits of its own creative outputs.

Strengthening creative sovereignty ensures that African cultural products not only reach global markets but also serve as a driving force for economic growth within the continent itself.

40 African Development Bank. Nigeria Digital and Creative Industries Project. URL: <https://mapafrica.afdb.org/en/projects/46002-P-NG-K00-009>

41 African Development Bank. African Development Bank and Partners Invest \$618 Million in Nigeria's Digital and Creative Industries. URL: <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/press-releases/african-development-bank-and-partners-invest-618-million-nigerias-digital-and-creative-industries-59766>

42 African Business. African Consumers Remain Loyal to Non-African Brands. URL: <https://african.business/2024/06/dossier/african-consumers-remain-loyal-to-non-african-brands>



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