



## ADVOCACY PAPER

### THEME: CULTURAL IDENTITY AND OWNERSHIP: RESHAPING MINDSETS

Sub-theme 2: Harnessing Culture and Heritage for  
Economic Transformation

## 1. BACKGROUND

In recognition of the “significant contribution of Culture to the integration of societies and to the socio-economic development in general and to poverty alleviation through job creation and social inclusion”, the African Union Member States adopted 2021 as the year of “Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa We Want”.

The Year of Arts, Culture and Heritage takes place at a time when African countries are still grappling the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to exact a heavy human, financial and economic toll on the continent. But rather than view these challenges as a stumbling block, the African Union has taken them as an opportunity to adjust the continent’s socio-economic priorities, including the role of cultural workers, towards building stronger and more resilient social, education and health sectors, equality, inclusion, social cohesion and solidarity and African Renaissance.

The time for such action has never been more ripe. In 2008, UNCTAD’s landmark Creative Economy Report found that despite the abundance of creative talents, Africa’s creative potential was highly underutilized. The continent’s share in global trade of creative products represented less than 1 per cent of world exports, reflecting both domestic policy weaknesses and global systemic biases.<sup>1</sup>

More than a decade later, the trend seems to be shifting, as African countries increasingly recognize the potential of the cultural and creative industries, including visual arts, film, music, literature, arts and crafts, fashion, design, and cuisine, to alleviate poverty and create jobs. In particular, “Nollywood”, Nigeria’s US\$600 million film industry producing about 2500 movies annually, has overtaken Hollywood and become the world’s second largest film industry by volume<sup>2</sup> and has become the country’s second largest employer.<sup>3</sup> From film, to music, to fashion and beyond, countries across the continent have shown potential to capitalize on the development benefits of their cultural enterprises, but there is still much to be gained.

Today, the cultural and creative industries generate annual global revenues of US\$2,250 billion and exports of over US\$250 billion.<sup>4</sup> These sectors provide nearly 30 million jobs worldwide and employ more people aged 15–29 than any other sector,

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1 UNCTAD, Creative Economy Report 2008, available at: [https://www.ico-d.org/database/files/library/The\\_Challenge\\_of\\_assessing\\_the\\_creative\\_economy\\_towards\\_informed\\_policy\\_making.pdf](https://www.ico-d.org/database/files/library/The_Challenge_of_assessing_the_creative_economy_towards_informed_policy_making.pdf)

2 UNESCO, “Nigeria’s creative ability: booming Nollywood, music, fashion and much more” (2017), available at: <https://en.unesco.org/creativity/news/nigerias-creative-ability-booming-nollywood-music>

3 UNESCO, Cutting Edge | The creative economy: moving in from the sidelines” (2021), available at: <https://en.unesco.org/news/cutting-edge-creative-economy-moving-sidelines>

4 UNESCO, Investing in Creativity, available at: [https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/info-kit\\_brochure-final-en-web.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/info-kit_brochure-final-en-web.pdf)

representing up to 10% of GDP in some countries.<sup>5</sup> Africa's growth in these sectors can thus play a key role in further fostering creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship as well as promoting job creation, exports potential and socio-economic participation, particularly for women and youth, as well as for building inclusive, responsive and strong institutions that are central to making progress across the Sustainable Development Goals.

## 2. THE WAY FORWARD

Within the framework of the 2021 Africa Dialogue Series, a high-level conversation of academic experts took place and is being broadcast on the OSAA website, among other media, on 11 May 2021, on the theme "Harnessing Culture and Heritage for Economic Transformation". While recognizing the enormous potential of the cultural and creative sector as a driver for economic growth and sustainable development, the panel of experts highlighted several key considerations for the way forward, emphasizing in particular the need to for changes in governance as well as in mindsets:

### Governance:

- Many countries across the continent do not have an explicit cultural policy, however, and those that do often lack the institutions or infrastructure to deliver on policy objectives. Policies are needed at the local, national and continental levels to empower communities to economically benefit from their cultural heritage while also protecting them from exploitation and misappropriation. Inclusive growth of the continent's cultural sector requires a wide range of governmental support, including legal protections, education, promoting cultural fair trade, tailored marketing, intellectual property frameworks and financing. The creation of an enabling and encouraging environment for the continent's cultural industries will be critical in redressing the current cultural trade imbalance in Africa, which sees the continent import far more creative goods than it exports.
- Rather than a top-down approach it is vital that governments shift their approaches to working more at the community level, working hand-in-hand with, and actively listening to, the communities that lie at the heart of cultural and creative production on the continent.
- There is also need for strengthened and targeted government investment in the cultural sector, including in the important area of arts education and the integration of arts in the continent's school curricula, with an

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5 UNESCO, Investing in Creativity, available at: [https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/info-kit\\_brochure-final-en-web.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/info-kit_brochure-final-en-web.pdf)

overall emphasis on education not solely about human *capital* but human *capability*. As the continent strengthens its emphasis of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education as key for economic growth, it is vital to recognize the important role of adding arts education to form STEAM,<sup>6</sup> as arts education promotes innovation, which ultimately drives transformation. There is also need to establish training programmes to revive and sustain traditional knowledge systems, such as traditional architecture and art techniques, as they are disappearing.

- Financing is a significant barrier to development of Africa's cultural sector. As such, there is need to galvanize innovative sources of cultural finance, such as foreign direct cultural investment, to support creative people and businesses on the continent.
- Cooperation amongst African countries will be key to all of these efforts, making continental initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) a vital resource for Africa's cultural sector to grow both within the continent and throughout the global marketplace.

### **Mindsets:**

- Transforming the internal and external view of Africa's cultural heritage will be vital in promoting investment and engagement in the cultural sector. There is need to change mindsets on the continent regarding arts and creativity as an important part of Africa's transformation agenda as well as a worthwhile and viable endeavor for youth to pursue.
- Africa's history, including colonialization, has had an impact on the value placed on the continent's cultural expression, both internally and external. Placing greater value on Africa's cultural identity, expression and ownership will play a central role in Africa's efforts to take the lead in shaping and sharing its own narrative.

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<sup>6</sup> Science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics.