



**SCOPING THE  
CREATIVE  
ECONOMY IN  
EAST AFRICA**

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[www.britishcouncil.org](http://www.britishcouncil.org)

**Author//**

Tom Fleming Creative Consultancy  
[www.tfconsultancy.co.uk](http://www.tfconsultancy.co.uk)

British Council's Project Assistant// Moraa Gitaa

**Editor//**

Tanya Andrews

**Designer//**

Robyn Cook

**Photo credits//**

**Cover page:** Future Music Live at the Alexander Theatre. Photograph by Khotso Ronald Tsaagaane for Live SA and I am Peace Photography

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# Introduction

This short document answers two main questions:

- **What is happening in the creative economy, audio visual and technology sectors in Kenya, uganda, ethiopia and tanzania?**
- **Who are the key players/ organisations?**

“The creative economy is not a single superhighway, however, but a multitude of different local trajectories. Many of these pathways are to be found at the subnational level –in cities and regions. Notwithstanding the importance of national-scale policy interventions, it is clear that the next frontier of knowledge generation rests on understanding interactions, specificities and policies at local levels, and how the creative economy might be practically promoted in communities, cities and regions...” (UN Creative Economy Report 2013). As we emerge from the global

financial crisis – slowly for some, rapidly for others - we are entering a new, exciting period for the creative economy. All indicators point to growth in the creative industries, and we are getting much better at understanding and therefore valuing the wider impacts of a strong creative industries sector underpinned and infused by excellence and distinctiveness across the arts and cultural sectors. It is clear that for many countries, the ‘creative economy’ will play a central role in delivering the next phase of growth, increasing prosperity (indeed, it is also an outcome of increased prosperity), and enabling a greater diversity of cultural expressions to reach new audiences and markets and thus for people to make a living from their creativity.

It is also clear that the new creative economy looks very different to the pre-crisis creative economy of

2008. Old certainties, such as the dominance of the ‘Global North’ in GDP, GVA, innovation and excellence across the creative economy, no longer stand. A combination of digitisation, growing markets (mobilised by an expanding ‘middle class’) and spirited public policy, have disrupted historic patterns of creative production and consumption to the extent that the creative economy of the ‘Global South’ is accelerating at an often startling rate.

But more than this, certain regions and nations – for example across Asia, parts of South America and Sub-Saharan Africa – are generating market-leading creative content on a global scale; shifting the location of value-creation and mobilising new trends, aesthetics and movements which are influencing consumers in ‘the North’ as much as ‘the South’.

In East Africa, we see this in the rapid development of digital content industries in Kenya, in the confidence and distinctiveness of Ethiopian fashion and design, and in the growing assertiveness of film created in but reaching beyond the region. Plus of course we also see the development of the value-adding role of a productive creative economy – on tourism, technology sectors, and as a mobiliser of confidence and attractor of investment.

But most significantly, we are seeing the development of local geographies of creative production, which in turn are driving what the United Nations calls ‘local development pathways’.

We are seeing real change in the strategic and indeed cultural contexts for the development of the creative economy across the world. New digitally enabled business models which converge different sectors and practices through the

development of new creative content, services or experiences, are flying out of countries at a rate few would have predicted just a few years ago. A combination of confidence, skills, know-how, and an increasingly enabling policy, investment and regulatory environment, mean that notions of ‘innovation’ or ‘good practice’ are as much a characteristic of parts of Africa as they are in Europe and North America.

As part of this, there is increasing understanding of and commitment to the role and value of historic cultural identities and influences in delivering innovation and growth to the contemporary creative economy. In other words, policy-makers in some parts of Africa (and other global regions) are starting to connect investment in heritage, arts and culture to investment in the commercial creative industries, recognising their mutual inter-

dependence and accepting that long-term productivity and growth in the global creative economy means making the most of your cultural distinctiveness, and articulating that through new types of culturally specific and excellent creative content and services.

Perhaps then we are entering a new creative age where previous assumptions are redundant. Certainly, we can no longer talk of the dominance of the Global North in quite the same way; and we must absolutely change the style and content of relationships between countries which were historically ascendant in the creative economy and those which today are emerging as serious competitors and, more excitingly, as collaborators.



# Key Sector Trends and Considerations for the Creative Economy

Some key global development themes for the creative economy include:

1. The crossover between digital technology and social entrepreneurship and the emergence of new digitally enabled business models
2. The connection between digital technology and arts and cultural organisations
3. The continued significance of crafts and traditional practice for sustainability and innovation
4. Women and minorities as key participants in the creative economy
5. The need to connect agendas in arts, creativity and education
6. The convergence of the creative industries with sectors such as tourism, cuisine and services
7. The role of major cities as aggregators and hubs; plus the role of smaller cities and rural areas as key to sustainable development
8. Markets – nurturing loyal customers domestically and internationally
9. Skills and capacity – the fundamental development blocks for a creative economy
10. The challenge of bureaucracy, corruption and IP infringement



# Seizing the digital opportunity

East Africa today represents huge opportunities in terms of the creative economy, for several reasons.

**firstly**, East Africa has undergone and is still undergoing a major digital revolution. From the near ubiquity of mobile phones, to M-Pesa and the mobile money revolution, through to the impending digital switch-over of television it is impossible to ignore the impact of digitisation.

**secondly**, each of the East African countries referred to in this study are set on a path to become middle income countries over the next 20 or so years. While the eradication of poverty is still the number one priority in each country, there is growing realisation that the creative and cultural aspirations and needs of citizens (beyond the essentials of food, shelter, healthcare) cannot wait for ever to be met.

**thirdly**, East Africa is now one of the world's creative and entrepreneurial hot-spots when it comes to utilising new technology and new platforms with much to share with Western and other countries.

**fourthly**, this ingenuity and innovation is often linked to solutions which tackle the big issues facing East Africa –Transport, housing, the environment, education, health, employment, citizenship, better government, tackling corruption and much more.

**fifthly**, in many ways digital connectivity and infrastructure is a direct replacement for the physical infrastructure that the region lacks (and will not get for years). While it took 115 years of conventional banking to provide just over a 1,000 bank branches and 1,500 ATMs in Kenya, within 5 years of the launch

of M-Pesa there were over 30,000 M-Pesa were operating in the country.

“It’s now far easier to send money from person to person in Kenya than it is in the United States. In fact, one out of every two people in the world who send money over a mobile phone is Kenyan. Mobile Money is the rare case in which an African country is the global market leader and an exporter of innovation.”

Money Real Quick: Kenya’s Disruptive Money Innovation by Tonny K. Omwansa and Nicholas P. Sullivan.

While there is considerable variation in sophistication, opportunity, potential for working and potential partners between each country, the excitement that the region has for anyone engaged with the creative economy is hard to over-represent. The endless adverts for mobile phones and the fact that mobile phone operators are now among the biggest companies in East Africa

are one sign of this. The success of the Premier league in Football is another, with live feeds of matches drawing huge audiences to any available set.

### **Key attributes of the digital revolution**

With such a youthful demographic, it is unsurprising that the creative economy of East Africa is biased towards start-ups and relatively young companies. There are some exceptions - principally book publishing (though that is changing with e-publishing), and it varies by country, but the key sectors for the region (Film, TV, Radio, Music, Digital Media) tend to be made up of small, relatively fragile businesses often straddling the ‘for profit’ and ‘not for profit’ sectors.

Many of the trends that are driving the creative economy globally are key here.

These include: the continued fragmentation of audiences and traditional industrial structures; the continuing march of disruptive digitisation undermining traditional business models while driving new opportunity and lower cost to entry; ever more disintermediation (the ‘death of the middle man’); and the decline of traditional media channels. However there are five trends which while not unique to East Africa (or Africa) are absolutely key:

1. **Mobile Telecoms** – With Africa now having over 761 million phones, the fastest technology take up in history will continue to have its extraordinary effect. In many ways replacing non-existent or impossible to achieve infrastructure, the impact of phones is far more wide reaching than in the West. It has had and is having huge impacts on areas such as finance and banking, information dissemination, social networking and more. With manufacturers like Techno from China selling \$150 models, the rise of smart phones (currently less than 10%) will accelerate and take this into new areas.
2. **#Africa Rising** - Growing self-confidence and the realisation that digital technology allows for self-expression and (potentially) reaching new markets means that many feel this is the time for East African creativity to finally become recognised within and without, and that now is the time to challenge the established ‘mental maps’ that the rest of the world has of the region.
3. **Systemic social needs driving innovation** – While the East African economy has been characterised by impressive growth rates and relative stability,

there is no escaping endemic and chronic poverty, poor and patchy public services (especially in health and education), and the lack of infrastructure (from roads to performance spaces). However as myriad projects demonstrate, this is providing the most fertile breeding ground in the world for digital innovation driven by genuine human need.

infrastructure. The result is that firms and individuals which survive in the creative economy are by definition resourceful, innovative and flexible – the key to success anywhere globally.

4. **Structural barriers requiring creative solutions** – Almost every ‘hygiene factor’ that the creative economy requires to thrive in the rest of the world is absent. These include an extremely poor IP structures, small middle class, old fashioned higher and school education system, weak advertising markets, absence of effective government policy or strategy, unhelpful tax and financial systems, and the very severe challenge of poor transport

# The East Africa Creative Economy: Strengths, Weaknesses & Opportunities

The following provides a headline SWO(T) (minus the ‘Threats’) for the creative economy of the region. This is followed by a focus on Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania.

adding and personalised goods and services

- Rapid urbanisation – with cities becoming real spikes of

## **overall strengths**

- Cultural distinctiveness, very strong traditions, and real flair across creative sectors including music, crafts, fashion, visual arts, film and – increasingly – digital content industries
- Growing market – with an increasingly youthful population overall, an expanding middle class, and growing hunger for value-

commerce, talent and creativity

- The pervasiveness of digital technology – innovators in new and emergent technologies, multi-platform and multi-channel activities are now mainstream, and there is a proliferation of straight-to-digital business models across the region
- Innovation and convergence – where collaboration across different sectors, disciplines and technologies is growing
- Rich and varied cultural heritage infused with legacies of creativity, invention and trade in aesthetics
- Boldness and ambition – a sense of an emergent new world order and growing confidence in an African context.

## overall Weaknesses

- Cultural conservatism which can lead to an aversion to risk, experimentation and the influence of different cultures. Also issues of tolerance and inclusion (e.g. gay rights, barriers to women in the workplace etc).
- Low wages, poor working conditions and limited opportunities for too many talented people
- Weak creative education and low levels of entrepreneurialism, management and leadership across the arts and cultural sector; plus low levels of literacy across the wider population
- Replication over innovation – from architecture to technology
- The three barriers of corruption, bureaucracy and censorship. Plus huge infrastructure challenges
- Inconsistent approaches to copyright – from weak rights collecting mechanisms to

draconian enforcement, with few examples of a mature and coherent approach to rights management

## overall opportunities

- To build capacity and confidence across the creative workforce – ignited by creative education and skills provision, mobilised by professional development activities, catalysed by digitally- enabled platforms which showcase and trade creative goods and services
- To nurture domestic and international markets for creative products and services. With even small levels of growth in the market, many jobs will be created and a significant number of talented people will be empowered to build careers in the sector
- To establish a set of high profile clusters and networks of creative

industries activity which enable knowledge to be exchanged and ideas to grow in ways that are led by the creative talent – nationally and regionally

- To position the creative industries as value-adders across the economy in order to lift the quality and innovation potential of other sectors
- To improve the policy and regulatory landscape through capacity-building and guidance.



# ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia has around 80 languages and 200 dialects. The country's cultural infrastructure is relatively well developed for the region: there are 370 members of the Audio-visual association, 100 film producers, 1000+ musicians and 700 writers all part of various networks. The government is also embarking on a cultural industry database project alongside a cultural industry strategy.

Partly as a result of its history, Ethiopia has a very strong sense of its identity and culture, and the government is committed to delivering a programme of support for culture and creativity. This is reflected in the creative economy where the market for home produced product and the consumption of home produced goods is very strong. A good example of this is that Ethiopian airlines have one flight attendant per flight dressed in 'traditional' clothing created by a

leading Ethiopian designer.

However, though a decade of growth of over 8% a year has seen some transformation in the country, this has yet to fully filter through to cultural or creative infrastructure. Economic policies designed to boost the indigenous production of goods – particularly import taxes – hamper the free flow of ideas and transactions the creative economy relies on. The vast majority of the country's employees are employed in 'crafts' but this is largely unskilled agricultural production. 'Skilled' textile making is still largely absent. The government has established a network of living culture centres, but these are largely empty.

## established strengths

- Music – performance and recording, over 400 albums per year produced
- Low budget film making – 200 a

- year made
- Fashion and textiles
- 15.9 million people working in Craft
- Theatre

### **emergeIng strengths**

- Social networking
- ISPs and platforms
- Film Festivals
- TV

### **WeaKnesses**

- No copyright collection societies
- Quality of films – need for improvement and professionalisation of process
- A lack of creative aspiration in some sectors (e.g. film) caused by systemic issues of finance and return
- Tax system – 100% import tax makes many activities prohibitive, including bringing in film equipment and materials for

fashion

- University of Addis – still not started a film school, out of step with developments in creative entrepreneurship
- Lack of distribution infrastructure – e.g. few cinemas
- Lack of finance and support from sponsors
- Lack of specialised training and support.

### **Key examPles of the CreatIve eConomy In ethIoPIa**

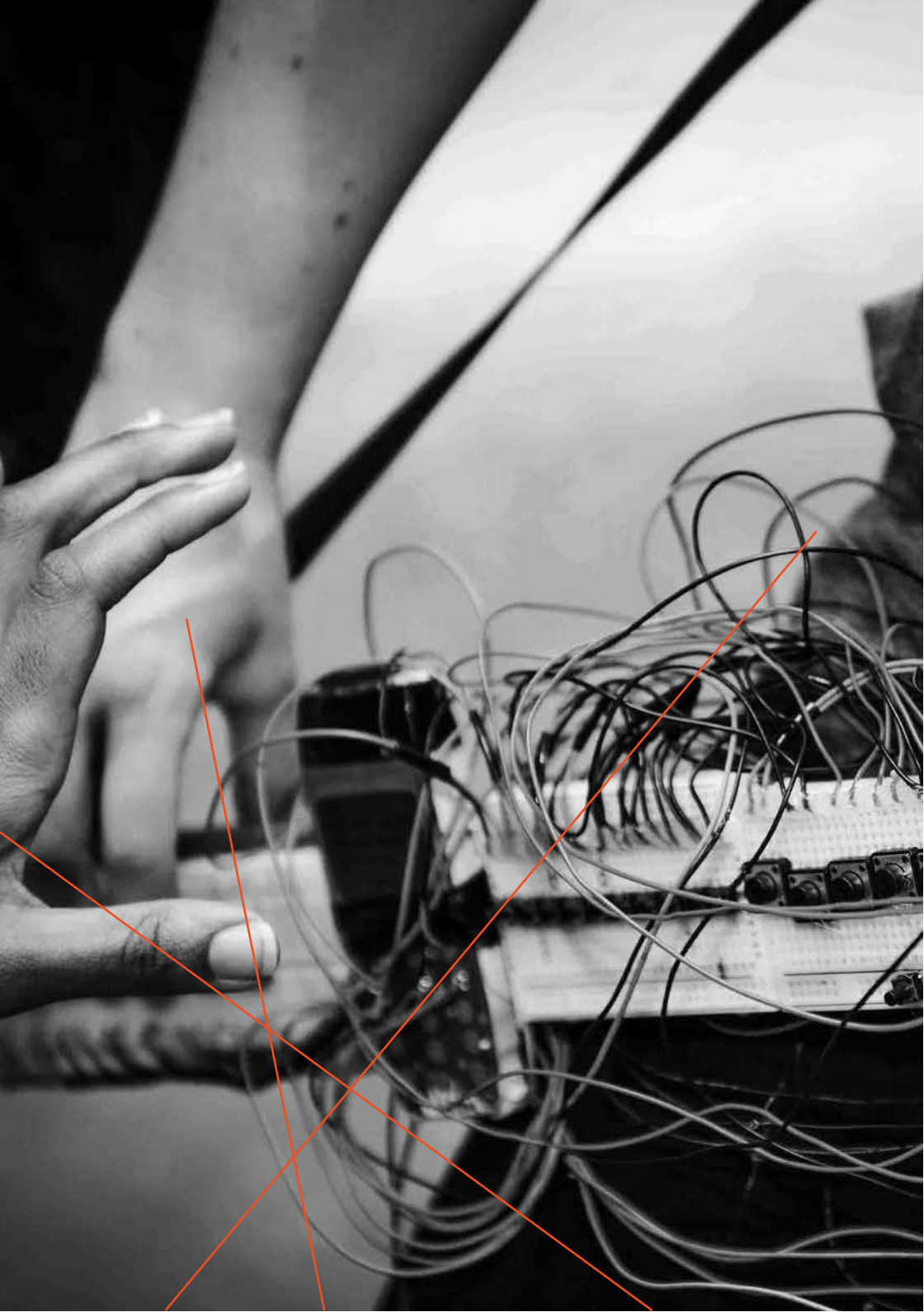
#### **Iceaddis – leading the way for hubs in ethiopia**

An innovation hub, accelerator, incubator, co-working space, iceaddis is housed in six interlocked shipping containers, in the heart of the capital. Similar to other tech hubs in the region, like Nairobi's iHub, or Uganda's Hive Colab, iceaddis grew organically, starting with small events, workshops, and

bar camps (tech-related developer meet-ups).

The goal was to connect bloggers and developers, bringing a hidden tech community together for the first time. Eventually, the community grew; iceaddis secured more funding, moved into its own space, and developed a tiered membership. It now has over 1,000 ‘white’ members, people who may not use the space everyday, but are part of the network. Several times a year, iceaddis selects a few dozen start-ups and puts them through 12 weeks of business plan training. At the end of the programme, several are selected to receive “incubation” at the space, and given resources to grow their ideas. It also embraces the concept of people working together: iceaddis doesn’t just house app developers, designers and other creatives are welcome too.

**documentary film festival** Now in its 7th year, the annual Documentary Film Festival in Addis is increasingly recognised. With over 100 films from home and abroad, backed up by a series of workshops and summer schools, the festival is important both for raising the profile of documentary film making and raising standards in film making in Ethiopia. The festival receives over 400 entries per year and has connections with other leading documentary festivals around the world including the world-renowned Sheffield Documentary Film Festival. Currently the festival is in need of more sponsorship.



# KENYA

Kenya is by far the economic and creative economy hub of East Africa. It is also a hub of continent-wide significance, offering strong competition (and collaboration potential) to South Africa and Nigeria. It has attracted IBM, Google and Microsoft because it has the universities, infrastructure and dynamism that make it a natural leader in the region.

The 60 years of independence celebration find Kenya and Nairobi at a crossroads. The apparent economic strengths mask underlying weaknesses and doubts as to the direction of the government, and real concerns over corruption and competency. If anywhere owns ‘#Africa Rising’ then it is Nairobi where the concept of ‘Silicon Savannah’ does not seem absurdly fanciful. More ‘hygiene factors’ for success in the creative economy are present here than elsewhere

- systems, infrastructure, finance,

legal, educational. The government is avowedly a supporter of the digital delivery of services.

In contrast the complete lack of funding for the National Theatre from the government means it is a shell rather than the production powerhouse it once was. The nervousness of the government to support a sector which ‘may’ be critical is reflected in the nervousness of advertisers who will not support the ‘XYZ show’, the Kenyan version of Spitting Image, for fear of government reprisal.

## established strengths

- Film making - epitomised by the ‘break through’ success of Nairobi Half-life (nearly an Oscar nominee).
- Theatre and performing arts – National Theatre of Kenya established by the British Council in 1930s.

- Music – including DJ-ing and Dance
- Street art, township art and community arts – epitomised by the Godown
- TV /Radio –African wide production companies

### emergIng strengths

- Socially –focussed start-ups
- SMS messaging and targeting
- 23 ICT hubs across the country
- Visual arts
- Fashion – broadening out from the wedding market

### WeaKnesses

- Lack of training and skills in homegrown TV and film makers means quality of product is variable
- Hubs and clusters are under-networked and under-connected internationally
- Gap between ‘Silicon Savannah’

and reality, in terms of finance and ability to get projects off the ground

- Advertising (especially on TV) weak compared to international markets
- Education light-years away from providing creative education for the future
- Almost no funding for live theatre and performance by the government

### some Key examPles of the CreatIve eConomy In Kenya

#### Kenya Cultural Centre - a venue for the future

There is real hope that the Kenya Cultural Centre, under its new Director, can once again play a vital role in the cultural life of Nairobi as a vibrant mixed-arts venue and hub. In particular there is real appetite to develop space for creative businesses and artists to collaborate together as part of an ongoing

creative dialogue. The former home of the British Council in Nairobi, it has not received programming funds, but its new strategic plan will see it become a key part of Nairobi's infrastructure once more and a natural space to deliver co-creation and collaboration, such as its recent 'Body Mapping' exhibition, part of Kenya 50 art festival.

### **buni tv and media – a Platform for africa**

Buni TV and media, producers of the XYZ satirical show, is a not-for-profit organisation developing new platforms for African film makers. Through its popular mobile App, Buni provides a way to watch African content on the move – some buses now show its content on their TVs. Buni has the potential to be the first pan-African online space for African content, along the lines of Netflix in the UK and USA. Buni has been supported by the BBC Media Trust, and its work includes developing the

skills and knowledge of African film and TV makers.

### **brCK – an african solution to Internet Connectivity**

Developed by Ushahidi, the BRCK is a box-like device which enables people to access the internet through multiple means – vital in Kenya where access is unreliable. The BRCK allows you to connect via mobile sim cards or Wi-fi and carries its own power which can be charged off anything from solar panels to a car battery. Based on the principle that if it works in Africa it will work anywhere, the BRCK is a great example of how Africa's challenges – developing a reliable and rugged way of staying connected – can be of real benefit and application in other parts of the world. BRCK is currently part funded through Kickstarter and is currently looking for further rounds of funding. It could be one of the key products to emerge from Nairobi.

## **asilia – Connecting london and nairobi**

Asilia are an exemplary young digital design company who seamlessly connect London and Nairobi. Being based in both cities, their interest extends beyond simply designing websites; they have a real interest in producing tools which empower, including launching Black White Simple – a platform and means for artists to develop websites and online portfolios. By combining design and technical knowledge acquired in London with the needs of Nairobi and Africa they show how digital and technology companies now can operate across continents providing added value for clients and audiences in both.



# TANZANIA

Tanzania is betting much of its future on oil, gas and minerals, believing that natural resources will lift it out of poverty. Yet there is recognition that however successful this proves to be, it will not provide the vast number of jobs currently needed. Every year 1.2 million young people leave some form of higher education but less than 200,000 can get employment in ‘graduate’ jobs. There is an EU-funded programme of 10 creative industry support activities.

The film industry is undoubtedly a strength, but government attempts to strengthen copyright protection by ‘stamping films’ are either seen as heavy handed and done for the purposes of censor, or as a misguided and poor attempt to crack down on copyright infringement. The National Film Board is prominent and seemingly quite powerful; the Copyright Society of Tanzania (COSOTA) and Copyright Society of Zanzibar (COSOZA) exist but need strengthening.

Tanzania’s brand in the creative economy is strong in music and film, with some export (partly due to the fact that Swahili, with over 130 million speakers, and English mean access to pan-African markets), but it is massively underdeveloped with a lack of confidence, expertise and experience in Tanzanian exporters. The craft, design and fashion sectors are also real strengths, with a very distinctive aesthetic and strong connections to tribal communities and identities. But professionalisation, capacity and links to market are all major issues.

## established strengths

- Music and especially performance
  - stretching beyond Bongo music
- Low budget film making – 10 films a week submitted for censorship
- Music festivals
- Zanzibar’s cultural identity and festivals

### emerging strengths

- Socially–focussed start-ups
- SMS messaging and targeting
- 23 ICT hubs across the country
- Visual arts
- Fashion – broadening out from the wedding market

local agencies not sophisticated enough

- Lack of ‘alternative’ radio stations so Bongo is the only sound
- Musical performance can be of poor quality
- Arts Council (Basata) suffering from reputational issues

### Weaknesses

- Lack of proper distribution for films; film-makers routinely ripped off or naive in the way they structure deals.
- Visa costs for any visiting artist is over US\$1,000 making artistic collaboration difficult
- Government support for entrepreneurialism and young people is tiny and inadequate
- Education system is not geared up to demands of any sort of knowledge economy
- Political situation is tense
- Foreign advertisers use generic imagery as the local system and

### some Key examples of the Creative eEconomy In Tanzania

#### **africa Inside out – using media to deliver change**

This NGO in Tanzania has established a great track record of using digital media for positive change across Africa. In particular they have focussed on health issues and developing interactive mobile campaigns, including developing a women’s health app. One of the tech companies they work with, Push Mobile, has pioneered the use of SMS technology to keep new mothers informed of how best to

look after their baby. AIO also use theatre, radio, music, TV and film in their work to raise awareness and share information on key issues in Tanzania including drug misuse prevention, family planning, sexual health and youth employment.

### **Kinu–tech hub in tanzania**

Formed in 2011 following a tech ‘Bar Camp’, Kinu has gone from strength to strength. Supported by grants from Google and the Indigo Trust, Kinu, named after the bowl from a pestle and mortar, works with students, young people and technology and start-ups. Running a range of courses and hackathons, Kinu, realising the need to work with young people, has started working with a primary school through a robotics programme. It also runs activity focused on girls and IT.

Kinu hopes to roll out more spaces across Tanzania and is developing relationships with universities and hubs across Africa.

# UGANDA

Uganda's 2040 vision aims for "A Transformed Ugandan Society from a Peasant to a Modern and Prosperous Country within 30 years." Key to this transformation will be investment in infrastructure including the development of ICT infrastructure as a priority, along with oil, gas, water and transport and the desire to transform public services through "collaborative platforms that foster the creation of new ideas by tapping into the creativity and dynamism of innovative individuals and companies." By 2040 it is hoped that 40% of exports will be ICT related.

Between 2004 and 2008 Uganda's exports of cultural goods and services were estimated at \$20 million. In terms of employment, copyright industries employ about 100,000 people countrywide, with 10-12 people employed in every 1,000 in the central region and 0-1 in 1,000 in the northern region, according to a mapping survey commissioned by Uganda National Commission

(UNATCOM) for UNESCO in 2009. For the past three years, the Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda (CCFU) has been lobbying government to support mainstream culture in all development initiatives and specifically to earmark at least 1 per cent of the national budget to cultural development programmes.

## strengths

### ICT is an emerging strength

- ICTs in Uganda have attracted investment projects worth US\$590 Billion (\$350 million USD) in the last six years and generated revenue estimated at US\$1.22 Trillion (\$720 million USD) within the same period
- In the financial year 2006/07, the combined sector contribution to Uganda's GDP was 9% up from 8.2% in the previous year; this represents a 4.2% growth contribution to GDP by the sector for the period 2001-2011.



### **Cultural tourism**

- On the cultural tourism front 'Lonely Planet' guide declared Uganda the best place to visit in 2012.
- MTambula, a voice activated app for phones and winner of the ITU young entrepreneur competition, has received government backing especially to work with vulnerable groups of people in need of public services like health care, education, security, water and transport.
- 32° East is a centre for the creation and exploration of contemporary Ugandan art running well regarded exchanges and education programmes.

### **Weaknesses**

- Lack of government funding, meaning that even well regarded institutions such as the National Museum face an uncertain future
- ICT infrastructure is still

restricted to urban regions – only 18% of Ugandans currently have access to the internet

- The Ugandan Cultural Policy dates back to 2006 and mainly relates to traditional forms of literature, music, dance and not to the Creative Economy
- Culture is not a key part of the 2040 vision – it is not specifically mentioned
- There is very limited cross-over between the tech community and the arts, with arts institutions serving a narrow definition of the sector.

### **Key examples of the Creative Economy In Uganda**

#### **maisha film labs**

Maisha (which means 'life' in Kiswahili) is a non-profit training initiative for emerging East African filmmakers. It provides hands-on training in screenwriting, directing, producing, cinematography, editing,

sound recording, and acting. They operate film training labs in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Rwanda. Maisha was founded in 2004 by acclaimed director Mira Nair (*Monsoon Wedding*, *The Namesake*, *Amelia*). The first Screenwriting lab took place in Kampala in 2005. In the last 7 years, Maisha has provided over 400 scholarships, produced 38 films, and expanded into a year-round curriculum encompassing a variety of skill levels. It has ventured to make film available to the entire East African community through cultural exchanges, partnerships, a monthly film chat, and an annual film festival.

Many alumni now have thriving careers in film and television, both in East Africa and internationally, and others have enrolled in some of the most selective MFA programs in the world, like NYU Tisch-Singapore and Columbia University.

### **hive Colab – uganda’s leading hub**

Hive Colab started in 2010 with a donation of space, furniture, and internet from Appfrica Labs.

Hive Colab is a community owned innovation hub, and a collaborative co-working space for Uganda’s technology community. It is an open space with a focus on young tech entrepreneurs, web and mobile app developers, designers, investors, VCs and donors. Hive Colab runs events and networking sessions. Recently a peer-to-peer platform for start-ups has been created where entrepreneurs raise issues and challenges they have been facing. Hive hosts a range of co-located organisations including ‘thinvoid’ who develop apps for agriculture and ‘matibabu’ who have developed a new test for malaria without the need for blood sampling.

# Why East Africa?

## **It's home to 3 out of 5 Microsoft Innovation grant winners in 2014**

As part of its 4Afrika Initiative, Microsoft has recently announced the 5 startups it is backing with grants and support. The 4Afrika Initiative, which was launched in February 2013, aims to facilitate Microsoft's active engagement in Africa's economic development to improve its global competitiveness.

The startups were selected based on the uniqueness and scalability of their solutions, their business models and the relevance of the key problems they are addressing. The solutions and apps developed by the startups are relevant to consumers and the African market, ranging from agriculture, education and consumer (gaming).

The following startups will receive funding:

- access.mobile LLC (Uganda)

A solution with a key focus in the agriculture and healthcare industries, giving enterprises the ability to collect, analyse and share clear, real-time information about their operations and supply chain activity.

- Africa 118 (Kenya) A mobile directory services solution that helps bridge the information gap both for enterprises and consumers.
- Gamsole (Nigeria) A mobile game production company creating Windows games, with downloads topping over 4 million.
- Kytabu (Kenya) A textbook leasing application for low-cost tablets. Students can save more than 60 percent of their education cost by renting their textbooks on an hourly, weekly, monthly, school term or annual plan.
- Save & Buy (Nigeria) A web and mobile platform that enables Nigerians to save toward the purchase of items



conveniently and securely through e-commerce channels.

General manager for Microsoft  
4Afrika Fernando da Sousa,  
commenting on the awards said that  
“Smart capital combines access to  
finance, technical skills development,  
business mentoring, sharing of global  
best practices and access to markets  
with the infrastructure provided by  
local partners to enable world-class  
companies to emerge from Africa.”

# Nairobi: a hotspot for the creative economy

There are four main factors which make Nairobi a uniquely fertile spot today for the creative economy:

- 1) **It has the most advanced ‘nurturing infrastructure’ in east africa** – including excellent universities, a strong tradition of business investment from overseas, a reasonably supportive financial and legal system, with a growing number of supportive backers for startups.
- 2) **nairobi has always been a hub city** – while technically smaller than Dar Es Salaam, it has long been home to international businesses and traditionally has been outward facing with excellent transport connections. Today it is youthful, and full of vibrancy reflecting the growth of the Kenyan economy.
- 3) **since mpesa’s launch** Nairobi has been seen as a leader in terms of mobile and new technology. It is no surprise that IBM chose Nairobi to open its first research lab in Africa with a particular focus on Africa’s grand challenges. The lab’s research agenda includes the development of cognitive computing technologies that can be applied to address issues in public health, education and agriculture. A number of projects are already underway in the areas of energy, water, transportation, agriculture, healthcare, financial inclusion and human mobility and public safety.
- 4) **hubs and networks**  
From the GoDown (recognised in the recent UNESCO Creative Economy report), through to Pawa 254 and the iHub, Nairobi



has a collection of dynamic collaboration and co-creation spaces, which encourage joint working. Coupled to this the international diaspora and links to other global cities, including London and San Francisco, mean that Nairobi acts as a go-between for East Africa and the rest of the world.

Put these together and Nairobi's digital and creative scene, characterised by a plethora of events, showcases and festivals and also through more informal activity, is among the strongest and most vibrant in Africa.

# Vital Creative Economy Support Priorities

The creative economy in East Africa can be characterised as fragile, fragmented and at an early stage in its development. While there are fundamental and important differences between countries, there are many shared issues which currently hold the sector back. In some ways the ‘barriers’ are the same as those faced in any economic sector in the area - pervasive corruption, bureaucratic and incompetent systems from another age, lack of fundamental infrastructure and systemic poverty.

With its origins in a DFID grant, a commitment to ‘working around’ malfunctioning systems and poor infrastructure to deliver a solution that worked with the grain of how East Africa functions, M-Pesa is a stunning example of how the creative and digital economy

can not only function in East Africa, but how in

doing so it can help tackle bigger societal issues.

There are six main areas that need support if more M-Pesas are to take off and the creative economy is to grow sustainably and inclusively:

1. **Creative education** – From primary school to undergraduate level, education is often patchy and old-fashioned and does not deliver the types of skills and knowledge needed for either the knowledge or creative economy. There is a huge desire for approaches which will foster new skills and a real need for activity which shows new ways of learning at all levels, including at entrepreneurial skills level (which may be too late).
2. **legal and financial position** - The ‘twin heavyweights’ of a legal and financial system that is fit for

the modern creative economy hangs over East Africa. It will be a slow battle but there is a need to continue the fight through demonstrator projects, advocacy and quiet diplomacy.

3. **Culture and the creative economy are seen as separate** – Because of distance and a lack of infrastructure, East Africa has arguably more to gain from strengthening the relationship between the creative industries and culture than the UK, with real potential to grow markets, for monetisation, to extend reach and innovate.
4. **develop traction** – A problem for the creative economy globally is that it is often ‘under the radar’ and thus invisible to governments and the wider economy. This is especially apparent in East Africa where cultural mistrust of the sector (as a non-traditional

business sector and therefore unreliable and untested) run deep. There is a need for large scale projects which can really change opinion and raise the profile.

5. **grow markets** – Because of relatively low income levels and under-developed domestic markets, in order to create viable businesses, creative entrepreneurs largely need to have markets across Africa and internationally. Export of East African creative product is still woefully lacking because quality, knowledge, capacity, and contacts are lacking – which means that growth is stunted and aspiration is often not as high as it should be.

