

The creative economy: which way for Africa's future

By [Titus Kaloki](#)

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Many have always wondered what is creativity and how can it be measured. How can one tell creativity from the norm and how can one tell what has been creatively done or not. A respected panel of experts who worked on the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) report, provided their definition of the term.

From their definition, creativity refers to the formulation of new ideas and to the application of these ideas to produce original works of art and cultural products, functional creations, scientific inventions and technological innovations. Also one has to keep in mind that originality involves even reworking old ideas into new ways of implementing them. The term “creative economy” appeared in 2001 in John Howkins' book about the relationship between creativity and economics. However, the term ‘creative economy’ is a subjective concept that is still being shaped.

With this in mind we could discuss the various types of creativity. We have artistic creativity which involves imagination and a capacity to generate original ideas and novel ways of interpreting the world, expressed in text, sound and image. Scientific creativity involves curiosity and a willingness to experiment and make new connections in problem solving. Economic creativity is a dynamic process leading towards innovation in technology, business practices, marketing, etc., and is closely linked to gaining a competitive advantage in the economy.

The creative economy is an evolving concept based on creative assets potentially generating economic growth and development. It can foster income generation, job creation and export earnings while promoting social inclusion, cultural diversity and human development, it embraces economic, cultural and social aspects interacting with technology, intellectual property and tourism objectives, it is a set of knowledge-based economic activities with a development dimension and cross-cutting linkages at macro and micro levels to the overall economy, it is a feasible development option calling for innovative multidisciplinary policy responses and inter-ministerial action at the heart of the creative economy are the creative industries.

The creative industries that comprise the creative economy include: advertising, architecture, art and antiques market, crafts, design, fashion, film and video, music, performing arts, publishing, software, television and radio, and video and computer games. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the creative class represented almost one third of the workforce in the United States of America and the creative sector accounted for nearly half of all wage and salary income in the country, about US\$1.7 trillion, as much as the manufacturing and service sectors combined.

To achieve this kind of success the main drivers of the creative economy; technology, demand and tourism have to be fostered. The convergence of telecommunications and multimedia has enabled creative content to be easily created and distributed to the widest numbers possible. Most people are open to enjoy other cultural products driving demand and

cultural interaction through tourism. In 2004 alone Europe had 417 million tourists while Africa had only 33 million. This disparity is largely because of the creative cities and products found in Europe teeming with museums, art and fashion centres and many more creative goods and services.

What should be done for Africa to achieve the same? Let's borrow a leaf from those economies that have been able to achieve the fathomed success. China saw the establishment of creative districts e.g. the Kowloon creative district measuring over 40 acres and dedicated to inventiveness and production. It has attracted the best of creative minds and companies.

The creative sector due to its cultural connection gets more commitment and skill from its workers as they feel especially attached and achieve the greatest satisfaction. It has enabled the promotion of gender equality as women can be involved in making of crafts and other products empowering them economically. Therefore, the combination of government and civil society efforts greatly foster this sector. To compete globally, our technology should be up to par with the best; not a tall order considering how 'wealthy' most African countries are.

Tolerance for individuality and openness of minds are important for creative innovations and services to achieve economic gains. Without a receptive population selling creativity is difficult. This means education to involve creativity in content and evaluation.

It isn't a gloomy picture for Africa which in 2004 contributed only 1% to the global creative economy, as evidenced by a few initiatives e.g.

Lake Victoria and Nyanza Creative Arts Association (LAVINCA.) Created in 1999, the objective of LAVINCA is to promote and create awareness of Kenyan arts and culture. Its program includes projects that aim to bring poor artists together and offer an opportunity to share ideas and experiences. The association was also created to tackle social issues that affect the youth of Kenya such as dropping out of school and poverty, and it intends to put in place mechanisms that will improve their quality of life. The NGO itself specialises in batik work, visual arts, sculpture (carving) and ornaments.

Therefore, an inter-ministerial approach by African governments is needed to foster this economic vista that is eco-friendly, sustainable, socially and culturally uplifting creating unlimited wealth and job creation. It is important for the small players and individuals to look at creating new ideas, goods and services and to slowly abandon the false security offered by traditional destructive economies that plunder natural resources such as mining, lumbering, etc.

With the right political and social will we are destined for a brighter future.

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