

CREATIVE INDUSTRIES: BARRIERS AND LESSONS FROM ENTREPRENEURIAL CASE STUDIES IN AFRICA 2024–2026

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Abstract

The creative industries in Africa have gained policy prominence in the post-COVID period. While existing literature has mapped Africa's Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) trends from 2015 to 2022, analysis of specific developments between 2024 and 2026 remains limited. This paper builds on a recent study by Fagbile (2025) on Africa's cultural and creative industries by examining barriers and innovation strategies among Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) entrepreneurs and their economic outcomes. A document analysis of secondary sources from 2024 to 2026 reveals how three previously studied case studies of successful entrepreneurs - Funke Akindele, a Nigerian film producer; Nkosinathi Innocent Sizwe Maphumulo, the South African musician behind Black Coffee; and Irene Sanga, a Tanzanian theatre artist responded to developments in the creative space. The cases were chosen for sustained commercial activity and available data. The study found that creative entrepreneurs overcome piracy, financing, and regulatory gaps, including market access barriers, by leveraging digital platforms, vertical integration, and partnerships. Job creation and income generation are evident, but poverty reduction depends on sector structure and the policy environment. Despite post-COVID recovery and digital acceleration, structural barriers persist, including intellectual property enforcement and access to finance. The study contributes to Sustainable Development Goal Eight by clarifying creative industries' role in decent work and economic growth in Africa.

Keywords: Africa, Cultural industry, Creative entrepreneurs, Orange economy, Policy shifts.

Introduction

The cultural and creative industries, also known as the Orange Economy, have expanded rapidly in Africa, employing over eight million people and contributing \$12billion to continental GDP as of 2025 (UNCTAD 2024; African Union, 2025). Digital platforms have also accelerated the global reach of African film, music, and theatre. The entertainment industry has spread worldwide, yet the creative and cultural industries still account for less than 2% of Africa's GDP, indicating vast untapped potential (UNESCO, 2025). Since 2015, Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) have been recognised as contributors to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 1 – No Poverty (Gerlitz and Prause, 2021). Empirical evidence indicates that CCIs employed over 304 million young people in Africa in 2025, with youth aged 15 and 17 being disproportionately represented (Mastercard Foundation, 2026). Notably, Nigeria's film industry alone generated N2.8 billion in 2024 and provided jobs for 1 million individuals (Dan-Awoh, 2025). Additionally, Africa's music exports increased by 15.2% in 2025, reaching \$120 million, fueled by Afrobeat, Amapiano, and Nollywood (Shumba, 2026). However, the literature from 2015 to 2025 identifies three main critiques: The first is distributional, where benefits favour urban, educated, connected entrepreneurs while informal creators face precarity; second is cultural commodification, which can dilute cultural uniqueness or exploit artists, raising concerns about narrative control; and third is scale, with micro-enterprises dominating, limiting overall poverty alleviation despite individual successes (Signey, 2025). These debates imply that CCIs are essential but insufficient for profound structural change without supporting industrial and social policies.

Literature Review

Barriers that impede the growth of cultural and creative industries in Africa have been established by scholars in existing literature. Aside from corruption in government bureaucracy arising from grants and loans programmes, Fagbile notes:

One of these is piracy and intellectual property theft. There is also the inaccessibility to funding opportunities. The dearth of access to financial resources hampers talented youths who are willing to participate in the creative industry. A lot of creative industry practitioners are also yearning for the government to provide enabling structures and regulations to enhance the sustainability of the industry 'rather than dolling out money in the form of loans and grants which breeds corruption in the bureaucracy'. There is the problem of limited channels for the distribution of creative works. Africa is rich in creativity and culture but has not benefitted much from it (Fagbile, 2025, P.89).

Recent scholarship identifies five systemic barriers to innovation in African CCIs: policy and regulation gaps, limited access to finance, weak intellectual property and copyright enforcement, infrastructure deficits and skills and education mismatches:

1. **Policy and Regulation Gaps:** There is an absence of comprehensive industry guidelines mutually agreed upon by governments, the private sector and artistic community. No clear regulation for incentives; the film and cultural policies need to be revised and updated to meet contemporary global standards.
2. **Limited Access to Finance:** Credit for CCIs accounts for less than 3% of total SME lending in most African countries, according to Kruijff and Sotiriou (2025). Thus, venture capital is mainly directed towards fintech, which affects funding of creative ventures, forcing reliance on personal savings, diaspora remittances, and donor funding.
3. **Intellectual Property Challenges:** piracy rates for film and music in key markets surpass 60%, and copyright enforcement remains uneven (UNCTAD 2024). This reduces incentives for investment.

4. **Infrastructure Deficits:** Unreliable electricity, high data costs, and limited cinema and music venues constrain production and distribution, though mobile penetration and streaming platforms have partially mitigated access barriers since 2020 (PwC, 2024)
5. **Skills and Education Mismatches:** Universities primarily produce arts graduates, yet their curricula often lack modules in entrepreneurship, digital marketing, and IP management (Lazzaro, 2021; Fagbile, 2025; UNESCO, 2025). While informal apprenticeships help address these gaps, they are not scalable.

However, from 2015 to 2026, new enablers have emerged. Digital platforms such as YouTube, Spotify, Netflix, and Boomplay continue to provide global distribution channels, enabling direct monetisation (PwC, 2024). Additionally, policy recognition has grown: by 2025, 148 African countries had adopted national CCI policies, compared to just 12 in 2015 (UNESCO, 2025), although implementation remains slow; Africa's median age of 19 offers a sizeable labour force and consumer market for CCI development (Konan, 2025). Despite increased research, two key gaps persist. While macro-level or policy-focused studies are common, micro-level analysis of entrepreneurs overcoming barriers is limited (Hausmann & Heinze, 2016). Moreover, literature often treats Africa as homogeneous, overlooking significant differences between sectors like Nigeria's Nollywood, South Africa's music industry, and Tanzania's theatre scene. This study fills this gap through comparative case analysis of entrepreneurs across various sectors and countries, building on Fagbile's (2025) study on the three select successful African creators, focusing on barriers and constraints amidst innovation and development.

Theoretical Framework

The study draws on Cultural Entrepreneurship theory by Klammer (2011) and Scott (2012), as well as the Resource-based view (Barney, 1991), to analyse innovation in Africa's CCIs. Cultural Entrepreneurship theory posits that entrepreneurs in creative sectors must convert symbolic cultural capital into economic value while navigating artistic authenticity and market logic. The resource-based view suggests that sustained advantage stems from valuable, rare, and inimitable resources. The paper conceptualises African entrepreneurs as operating under resource constraints yet leveraging cultural resources (local narratives, social networks, digital platforms) to innovate. Therefore, the framework asks: 1. What resources do entrepreneurs mobilise? 2. What barriers constrain access to resources? 3. What innovation strategies transform cultural capital into economic outcomes? These questions provide a platform for thematic analysis of the case studies as well as institutional, infrastructural and financial data.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative multiple-case approach, analysing secondary documents to explore innovation within African creative industries. It focuses on three previously discussed cases: Funke Akindele (Film, Nigeria), Sizwe Maphumulo (Music, South Africa), and Irene Sanga (Theatre, Tanzania). Selection criteria included documented commercial success, ongoing operation from 2024 to 2026, publicly accessible information, and a base in Sub-Saharan Africa. This method ensures sectoral variety while remaining feasible for secondary data analysis. Data sources included websites, reputable news outlets, industry reports, published interviews, and award records from 2015 to 2026; no primary data collection occurred. Sources were triangulated to substantiate claims. Thematic analysis used coding based on literature, focusing on entrepreneurial motivations, institutional and financial obstacles, innovation strategies (digital, business models, networks), and economic and developmental results. Cross-case comparison revealed common patterns and differences. However, the results are illustrative and not universally applicable to all African CCI entrepreneurs.

Case Studies

The study builds on previous case studies of entrepreneurs examined by Fagbile (2025), because they serve as inspiration. They include Funke Akindele (Film), Nkosiinathi Innocent Sizwe Maphumulo (Music) and Irene Sanga (Theatre). These creative entrepreneurs reflect success stories and highlight that African creatives can, through entrepreneurship, create self-reliance, be self-employed, empower, and uplift themselves out of poverty. Through these initiatives, creative entrepreneurs will contribute to economic growth. The creativity and innovation these creative entrepreneurs bring to the table can further be harnessed to bring about positive change through evolving businesses that create wealth and self-sustenance.

S/N	Theme	Funke Akindele Film	Nkosiinathi Innocent Sizwe Maphumulo	Irene Sanga Theatre
1	Sector and Country	Film and TV, Nigeria	Music, South Africa	Theatre, Tanzania
2	Key Barrier Faced	Piracy, limited cinema infrastructure	Global market access, visa/booking barriers	Donour dependency, low domestic patronage
3	Core Innovation Strategy	Vertical integration: production company, digital distribution; YouTube monetisation	Global collaborations, tech integration, and label ownership	Donour-funded radio drama, NGO partnerships, community theatre for development
4	Economic/Development Outcome	N2.5bn box office 2025; job creation for over 100 cast and crew; Jennifer Foundation on skills training	First African to win a Grammy for Dance; global tours; Soulistic music label signs African artists	Trained over 200 youths via Parapada; UNICEF/Peace Corps-funded projects; sustained career for over 15 years.
5	Resource Leveraged	Cultural Capital (Yoruba Comedy)	International networks, digital platforms	Development sector funding

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Select African CCI Entrepreneurs

Source: Fieldwork 2026

Opportunities for Creators in the Creative Industries

The CCIs have featured more in the projection of businesses and skills that will be relevant in the future, according to the World Economic Forum, as it rose from the 10th position back in 2015 to the number three position in 2020 (Lazzaro, 2021). This shows the enormous potential of Africa using the creative and cultural industries to drive social change, community development, engender wealth creation, and economic growth. The opportunities available to the creative and cultural industries that Africa can leverage to reduce unemployment and poverty, based on its enormous population and rich cultural heritage, have been buttressed by the UN 2008 report on the creative

industry, stating that empirical evidence shows that the creative industries are among the most dynamic emerging sectors in the world trade. It also indicated that the interface among creativity, culture, economies, and technology, as expressed in the ability to create and circulate intellectual capital, has the potential to generate income, jobs, and export earnings while at the same time contributing to social inclusion, cultural diversity, and human development.

To achieve this potential, creative industry practitioners must strategically identify and build relationships with established practitioners and stakeholders within the industry. There are always opportunities for collaboration, which will help to navigate the limitations of funding, equipment, and infrastructure. Creatives in Africa now have more access to digital technology than in the last decade. This digital technology is now being used to gain access to new markets. Creative entrepreneurs must improve their digital skills to negotiate distribution and create more access to their cultural offerings on global platforms to generate awareness and make good returns on their efforts and talents. The youth and undergraduates can also be involved in skills and vocational skills acquisition through internships and mentoring.

Results

Thematic Analysis of Entrepreneurship Cases

Nkosinathi Maphumulo/Black Coffee: Global Networks and Genre Innovation in South African Electronic Music

Nkosinathi Maphumulo, performing as Black Coffee, emerged from Durban's Jazz scene to become South Africa's most internationally recognised music producer. Born in 1976, he studied jazz at Durban University of Technology before founding Soulistic Music in 2005. Maphumulo identified a gap in global dance music for African-rooted, soulful house that preserved cultural specificity while meeting international production standards (World Bank, 2025). His career trajectory parallels the 2015-2026 streaming boom that enabled African artists to bypass traditional gatekeepers.



Plate 1: Nkosinathi Innocent Sizwe Maphumulo (BlackCoffee) **Source:** MGT Promotions

Barriers Encountered

Three constraints shaped his strategy. First, before 2015, African artists faced visa restrictions, limited booking networks, and genre bias in European and United States festivals (UNCTAD, 2024). Second, South African banks rarely financed music ventures, and local label advances were insufficient to meet global production standards. Third, load-shedding and studio costs in South Africa increased production overheads compared to Berlin- or London-based peers.

Innovation Strategies

Maphumilo deployed network innovation and genre hybridity. He leveraged the 2004 Red Bull Music Academy to access international collaborators, later producing with Drake, Usher, and David Guetta. By retaining ownership via Soulistic Music, he captured publishing and master's revenue rather than work-for-hire fees. His 2021 Grammy-winning *Subconsciously* and its 2025 follow-up, *Subconsciously II*, blended Afro-house with orchestral elements, creating a distinct, inimitable sound. Since 2022, he has used livestreamed sets and NFT releases to monetise directly, reducing dependence on touring during COVID disruptions. His 2026 Hi Ibiza residency marks the first by a sub-Saharan African DJ, institutionalising African electronic music in global club culture. This converts cultural capital (South African rhythms) into export earnings while maintaining creative control.

Economic and Development Outcomes

Maphumulo's career demonstrates export-led CCI growth. He was Forbes's richest African musician in 2022 and 2025, with estimated earnings exceeding \$60 million from touring, publishing, and endorsements. (ForbesAfrica 2025). Soulistic Music has signed over 15 African artists since 2020, providing international distribution and advances. His 2018 *Music Is King* concert at Moses Mabhida Stadium employed over 400 local crew and vendors. However, consistent with the distributional critique (African Union 2025), benefits concentrate among already-skilled professionals. His model shows how digital platforms and ownership of IP enable African creators to capture global value, aligning with SDG 8 targets on productive employment, though direct poverty alleviation effects remain limited to the creative labour market.

Funke Akindele: Vertical Integration and Digital Adaptation in Nigerian Film—Background and Motivation

Funke Akindele transitioned from television actor to producer-director with the founding of Scene One Film Production. Operating in Nigeria's Nollywood industry, the second-largest film industry globally by volume (PwC 2024), Akindele identified a market gap for high-quality, comedy-driven narratives centred on relatable female protagonists. Her *Jenifa* franchise, launched in 2015, targets Nigeria's youth demographic and diaspora audiences. Unlike earlier Nollywood models reliant on DVD sales, Akindele's career coincides with Nigeria's digital transition and cinema expansion post 2015



Plate 2: Funke Akindele (a.k.a. Jennifa)

Source: YouTube

Barriers encountered

Three structural constraints shaped Akindele's strategy. First, Nollywood and the entertainment industry generally lose an estimated ₦150 billion of potential revenue to illegal distribution (Akanni, 2025), undermining returns on production investment. Second, formal film financing remains scarce because banks classify film as high risk thus forcing reliance on personal funds and presales (World Bank, 2025). Third is the poor distribution infrastructure. Nigeria had fewer than 200 cinema screens in 2015, limiting theatrical revenue despite a population of over 220 million people.

Innovation strategies

Akindele responded through vertical integration and digital adaptation. She internalised production, distribution, and marketing under Scene One, reducing dependency on external marketers who dominated Nollywood's DVD era. To counter piracy, she prioritised cinema-first releases with compressed windows, leveraging the 2016 – 2024 expansion of Nigerian cinemas (PwC, 2024). Simultaneously, she monetised YouTube and Netflix licensing creating ancillary revenue streams. Her 2025 *Behind the Scenes* used targeted social media campaigns and influencer partnerships, generating ₦2.5 billion at the Nigerian box office by February 2026 – the highest-grossing Nigerian film to date. This digital-physical hybrid model converts cultural capital (Yoruba language comedy, female-centric narratives) into economic value while bypassing piracy-prone channels.

Economic and Development Outcomes

Akindele's enterprises demonstrate measurable economic impact. Each major production employs between 100 and 150 cast and crew, with *Behind the Scenes* creating 120 direct jobs. Scene One has trained over 300 youth through the Jennifa Foundation since 2018, providing vocational skills in acting, scripting, and digital marketing. While these outcomes contribute to SDG 8, impact remains concentrated in Lagos and among skilled workers.

Broader poverty reduction effects are constrained by Nollywood's informal labour structure and limited profit-sharing with below-the-line workers (AU, 2025). Nonetheless, Akindele's model illustrates how digital adaptation and vertical integration can mitigate piracy and infrastructure barriers in resource-constrained CCIs.

Irene Sanga: Donor-Partnerships and Social Enterprise in Tanzanian Theatre Background and Motivation

Irene Sanga, a playwright-director and National Open University of Tanzania graduate, transitioned from performer at Paranpada Theatre Lab to artistic director and social entrepreneur. Operating in Tanzania's undercapitalised theatre sector, Sanga identified opportunities to address social issues while creating employment for youth through theatre. Her work since 2015 spans commercial stage plays and donor-funded radio drama, reflecting Tanzania's dual CCI structure of market and NGO circuits.



Plate 3: Irene Sanga
Source: Instagram

Barriers Encountered

Tanzanian theatre faces acute constraints. First, low disposable income and limited venue infrastructure mean the box office cannot sustain full-time theatre careers (UNESCO 2025). Second, 70% of professional theatre funding 2015–2024 came from NGOs or foreign agencies (World Bank 2025), creating project cycles but not sustainable enterprises. Third, few formal training programs exist in arts management or digital promotion for theatre.

Innovation Strategies

Sanga pursued organisational hybridity, blending commercial and development objectives. She wrote and directed 100 UNICEF-funded radio episodes on child protection, 2018–2020, using mass media to achieve scale where live theatre could not. She monetised scripts for *Kilimani Sesame* and USAID-funded *Wamoja*, reinvesting fees into Paranpada's youth training. Since 2020, she has integrated mobile money ticketing and WhatsApp promotions for urban plays, reducing distribution costs. As of 2026, she continues mentoring 20–30 youth annually at Paranpada in playwriting, directing, and grant writing—skills transfer that builds sector capacity. This model converts donor resources and indigenous narratives into both social outcomes and professional pathways.

Economic and Development Outcomes

Sanga's impact is primarily in capacity building and social development rather than commercial scale. Paranpada has trained over 200 youths since 2015, with alumni employed in film, NGOs, and the education sectors (project reports 2024). Donor projects sheeled created over fifty short-term contracts for actors, technicians, and musicians per production. While she has not achieved the commercial revenue of Akindele or Black Coffee, her model demonstrates how CCIs can contribute to SDG1 and SDG 4 by providing skills and income in contexts wheremarketdemand is weak. The limitation is sustainability: without continued donor funding, project-based employment is episodic (African Union 2025).As of 2026, Sanga is developing a digital archive of Tanzanian plays for educational licensing, signaling a shift toward IP-based revenue.

Discussion

Innovation Mechanism and Development Pathways in African CCIs

Akindele, Maphumulo and Sanga's thematic analysis reveals three distinct but overlapping mechanisms through which African CCI entrepreneurs convert cultural capital into economic value under constraint, 2024–2026. These findings extend cultural entrepreneurship theory (Klamer 2011) and the resource-based view (Barney 1991) to resource-constrained African contexts.

Comparative Innovation Strategies

First, vertical integration counters piracy and weak distribution by internalising value chain activities. Scene One controls production, marketing, and digital monetisation, reducing transaction costs and capturing rents that would otherwise leak to informal distributors.This aligns with the resource-based view: ownership of production assets and audience data constitutesarare, inimitable resource in Nollywood's fragmented market. Second, network leverage overcomes geographic peripherality through strategic alliances. Maphumulo accesses Red Bull Music Academy, international labels, and festival circuits, substituting for domestic infrastructure deficits with social capital. Genre hybridity creates product differentiation defensible against commodification. Third, *organisational hybridity* addresses market thinness by blending donor resources with cultural production. NGOs provide working capital and distribution, while theatre training builds human capital. This model exemplifies how cultural entrepreneurs navigate dual institutional logics of art and development (Scott 2012).

Across cases, digital platforms are a necessary but insufficient enabler. YouTube and Netflix licensing enabled Akindele's ancillary revenue, Spotify/Apple Music underpinned Black Coffee's exports, and WhatsApp/mobile money reduced Sanga's transaction costs. Yet digital access did not eliminate structural barriers: Intellectual Property enforcement, financing, regulating policies and infrastructure remain binding constraints (UNCTAD 2024). Innovation happens despite the institutional environment, not because of it, as research on entrepreneurship in institutional voids shows (World Bank, 2025).

Development Outcomes: Beyond the Universal Benefit Assumption

The Cultural and creative industries create jobs and income, contributing to SDG 8. Funke Akindele's films generated over 100 job searches, Maphumulo's label signs African artists, and Sanga trained over 200 youth. However, distribution patterns vary. Commercial models like Akindele and Maphumulo concentrate gains among skilled professionals in urban hubs like Lagos and Johannesburg, with little trickle-down to informal creators. Donor-hybrid models reach marginalised youth but produce episodic, project-based work rather than sustained careers. This supports the distributional critique (De Beukelaer 2015; African Union 2025):

CCIs can bring about innovation and wealth but do not automatically reduce poverty without complementary labour and social protection policies. The cases also challenge the cultural commodification critique. All three entrepreneurs used cultural specificity as a competitive advantage, not aliability. Global success did not require cultural erasure; instead, authenticity became a market asset. This suggests cultural capital, when paired with business innovation, is renewable and exportable, countering resource-curse narratives about African economies (UNESCO 2025).

Theoretical Implications

Two theoretical refinements emerge. First, in African CCIs, institutional entrepreneurship is as crucial as product innovation: entrepreneurs must actively reshape IP regimes, financing norms, and distribution channels. Akindele's cinema-first strategy normalised theatrical release in Nollywood; Maphumulo 's Grammy nomination normalised African electronic music globally. Second, the resource-based view must incorporate network and reputational resources as primary assets for CCI firms, given weak formal institutions. These findings extend cultural entrepreneurship theory beyond European and North American contexts to account for institutional voids and digital leapfrogging.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

This study examined how African CCI entrepreneurs innovate despite structural constraints, using comparative case analysis of three ventures from 2024 to 2026. The study found that entrepreneurs deploy distinct strategies — vertical integration, network leverage, and organisational hybridity — to convert cultural capital into economic value. Digital platforms expand reach but cannot replace enabling policy environments. Transformation potential exists in the cultural and creative industries through innovation and enterprise creation, accentuating Africa's creative future. The paper provides valuable insights to creators, entrepreneurs, and policymakers seeking to foster successful innovative skills, policies, and projects. Developing creative industries in Africa requires investing in and promoting film, music, theatre, and entertainment businesses as alternative economic priorities and a strategy to combat poverty, hunger, and unemployment among the youth. Governments of African countries must do more to support and promote creatives.

The paper makes three contributions. Empirically, it provides micro-level evidence on innovation mechanisms in African CCIs, addressing a gap in macro-focused literature (Hausmann & Heinze, 2016). Theoretically, it refines cultural entrepreneurship for resource-constrained contexts by emphasising institutional entrepreneurship and network resources. Policy-wise, it clarifies that CCI contributions to SDGs 1 and 8 are contingent, not automatic. The paper therefore recommends that Africa must strengthen IP ecosystems.

Recommendations

National and regional creative industries in Africa should acknowledge the potential of creativity in culture as a panacea to enhance their contributions to the economy. They should encourage entrepreneurship-led initiatives and innovation that engender employment and wealth creation. Through policies and initiatives, innovation-led entrepreneurship in the creative industries will alleviate poverty, reduce unemployment, and, by extension, hunger. The governments of African nations must empower creators, especially in the cultural sectors, by providing enabling environments through recognition of values embedded in the creative industries, and creating structures and regulations to provide standard industry practice, thus promoting global best practices. Stakeholders must explore and articulate the scope and

potential of the creative industries, highlighting opportunities they offer in Africa. This will stimulate and encourage creativity in the region. The government must build strong and effective policies to create supportive templates for the culture and creative industries to excel. The study contributes to the importance of innovation and business in the creative industries of Africa, highlighting the opportunities they offer.

The paper recommends that Africa should strengthen IP ecosystems by enforcing digital copyright, establishing collective management organisations, and fast-tracking dispute resolution to reduce piracy losses estimated at 60% (UNCTAD, 2024). Africa must also de-risk creative financing by providing loan guarantees, tax incentives for CCI investment, and dedicated creative industry funds to address the 3% credit gap (World Bank, 2025). It must integrate entrepreneurship into arts education by revising university curricula (Fagbile, 2025) to include IP management, digital marketing, and business planning. Finally, Africa must invest in infrastructure by expanding affordable broadband, community cinemas, and co-working studios to lower production and distribution costs.

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