Africa's Soft Power

Can Africa's creativity transform the continent?

A summary of a nine-country survey
September 2022
About this report

Africa is a diverse and complex continent, consisting of 54 countries, 5 regions and about 2 000 languages. This report explores youth attitudes to the importance of creativity and innovation to boosting their own income and that of the continent. It is based on a survey of 4 500 people, aged 18–35, in nine African countries: Egypt, Morocco, Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa and Zimbabwe. These nine countries act as proxy for the continent and provide evidence of a wide range of attitudes to the issues raised. The research was funded by Africa No Filter and Facebook in partnership with the African Union and AUDA-NEPAD.

About Africa No Filter

Africa No Filter is a donor collaborative that is working to shift stereotypical and harmful narratives within and about Africa. Through research, grant-making, community building and advocacy, our objective is to build the field of narrative change-makers by supporting storytellers, investing in media platforms and driving disruption campaigns. The donor collaborative is funded by:

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It's impossible to have social justice without art being centred in that society

—Darren Walker, Ford Foundation
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Art is uniquely positioned to move people — it’s inspiring, inciting new questions and provoking curiosity or outrage. The creative sector can change the social contract with society, and it has the power to shift narratives about Africa through visual art, music, performance, or literature. Creativity triggers emotions and is at the core of changing ideas, beliefs and perceptions. Nowhere is this more needed than in Africa, where stereotypical narratives perpetuate underdevelopment and under-investment.

In developed nations, creativity is a key indicator of wealth, class and success. Driven by the digital and visual world in which we live, the creative sector is increasingly driving economic diversification. Although Africa is estimated to contribute less than 1% to the global creative economy, it generates about US$4.2 billion in revenue. While it only employs about half a million people across Africa, most of whom are youth and women, the sector’s growth rate outpaces other industries on the continent.

These successes prompted us to explore how African youth perceive creativity on the continent. The nine-country survey was conducted in Egypt, Morocco, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

We found that respondents in these countries believed the creative sector was important, but 72% of respondents did not believe they could make a living within the sector. Having said that, 67% of respondents said they watched local or African films.

According to our respondents, developing infrastructure to enable youth to participate in the sector was important.
KEY INSIGHTS

1 Arts and culture are important:
   In all nine countries where youth were polled, more than 85% of respondents believed that arts and culture were an important part of their society.

2 Creatives are influential and admired:
   An average of 82% of all respondents respected and admired creatives in their country.

3 Young Africans did not believe it was possible to make a good living in the creative sector:
   Only 4% of respondents worked in the creative sector. Only 13% believed the creative sector was lucrative; 39% believed there were too many barriers to success and 21% said there was no money to be made in the sector.

4 Business and entrepreneurship are the most lucrative sectors:
   Most respondents (48%) believed that entrepreneurs and businesspeople have the most earning capacity, followed by professional sports people (23%). Nearly half of all respondents (48%) believed a traditional career in sport was seen to be more lucrative than a career in the creative industry: 23% of the respondents felt they would make more money from football or basketball compared to 13% who opted for music and film. Of respondents from Cote D’Ivoire, 45% believed sport was more lucrative, and South Africans (22%) and Kenyans (19%) perceived social media influencers as earning more than creatives.

5 Proving that Africa is a market for creative content, young Africans are consuming African films equally as much as US or international content:
   Most respondents watched films every week, whether local/African films (67%) or US/international films (66%). Among respondents who had watched between one and seven films, slightly more respondents had watched local or African films (57%) than international or US films (53%).

6 African writers are not writing for African audiences … and worryingly, many African youths are not reading for pleasure:
   Hardly any respondents had read a book in the month before the interview; 75% had not read any international authors, and 71% had not read any African authors. This indicates that African authors are not attracting an African youth audience.

7 Film is the most appreciated creative platform:
   Of all the creative art forms, respondents were most likely to have watched films, whether local/African (57%) or international (53%).

8 Respondents were not spending much money on creative outputs:
   Although respondents believed that arts and culture (85%) was an important part of society, few were spending to support the sector. In the creative sector, 78% said they either spent nothing or “very little” on arts and culture pastimes.
NOTES ON THE FINDINGS

Regarding creativity, “cultural and creative industries (CCIs) are increasingly popular throughout the African continent, where they serve as a guiding discourse for policy”\(^6\). However, the sector is often overlooked because it does not totally resemble the cultural models of Western countries. On one hand, pressure is being created to formalise, legalise, expand, and make fair African cultural industries, but there is also a need to better understand how culture is being practised on the ground. On the other hand, in the creative sector, “new digital technologies provide... unprecedented opportunities for innovation and growth”\(^7\). A study in Cape Town found that new companies were springing up at the nexus between technological and creative innovation, and these have “demographically diverse employees and owners”\(^8\), revealing a skills diversity across different sectors of the population.

Given that 37% of youths surveyed in our study felt that the creative industries do not provide a sustainable living, it would be important to explore how and why cultural activities continue to be practised and increasingly draw international attention. Further research would need to explore, if “unprecedented opportunity” is being created, why do so many respondents in this study remain sceptical (as shown in Figure 4)? This presents an opportunity to extend the current study to explore how those who do make a living in the creative sector (as depicted in Figure 7) understand the models of cultural production in Africa, and how the pressure to formalise the sector impacts on their opportunities to earn an income.

The youth in this survey perceived their countries as supportive of creativity (72%). The study found that the youth respondents had a positive attitude, overall, towards creativity, although many did not see it as a viable profession.

While other studies have given attention to the necessity for education, our study highlights that education alone is not enough: the infrastructure for creativity needs further development. Therefore, a key focus of those wanting to support the creative industry should be on infrastructural support, funding and capacity building.
INTRODUCTION

Africa No Filter believes that the creative sector is fundamental in rewriting the African narrative to shift harmful stereotypes about the continent. Therefore, we researched the narratives young Africans have about the importance and relevance of creativity in their lives and in the development of the continent. We commissioned GeoPoll to poll youth in nine African countries – Egypt, Morocco, Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa and Zimbabwe – to represent four geographical regions in Africa (East, West, Southern and North Africa), to unpack the prevailing narratives about creativity.

The polls were conducted in April 2021 (see Figure 1). Our intention is to extend this study to other countries at a later stage. This research forms part of ANF’s mission to research, analyse and understand the impact of harmful and stereotypical narratives within and about Africa.

The research explored the diversity and complexity of the continent. It examined the extent to which young African people sought to make livelihoods through creativity and how they thought creativity was important to the continent.
Random sampling was used to interview 4,500 young people in the nine countries in the four regions. We reached 500 respondents aged 18-35 in each country depicted in Figure 1.

Questions, designed by GeoPoll and Africa No Filter, were conducted in English, French and Arabic. Call centre operators in each country were trained to contact respondents using an automatic dialling system and conduct interviews via mobile phone. Those contacted could opt in or out of the interviews; those who opted in received airtime credits. Call centre operators continued to conduct interviews until the desired number of respondents was achieved.

Due to trends in mobile ownership, most of the respondents were urban (varying between countries, from 99% in Côte d’Ivoire to 74% in Egypt) and/or had higher educational achievement, but rural and/or less educated youth were not screened out. The number of respondents who had achieved secondary education or higher was above 95% in most countries, except for Egypt (79%) and Morocco (68%). There were about equal numbers of men and women respondents across all countries, except for Côte d’Ivoire, where respondents were about two-thirds men and one-third women.

We acknowledge the limitations of this study because it was limited to nine African countries. We cannot claim that the report is comprehensive. Further, the study was slightly biased towards Anglophone African countries, except for two French-speaking countries (Côte d’Ivoire and Morocco) and one Arabic country (Egypt). The demographic is also skewed towards urban youth, as the survey was conducted by cell phone, and therefore all respondents were cell phone owners.

In many cases, we sought to draw general conclusions about continent-wide attitudes to creativity and innovation, but we are aware that regions and countries are distinct. Therefore, where relevant, we have shared distinctions between regions and countries.
Because creativity seems to be a marker for advanced economies, it is important to assess how Africa fares in this context. Prevailing stereotypes about Africa often fail to account for the creative successes enjoyed by Africans such as the rise of Afrobeats and Amapiano as global musical genres.

This report unpacks the attitudes and behaviours of respondents towards creativity in Africa. The findings include: (i) whether youth respondents thought governments were doing enough to support the creative sector; (ii) their perceptions about creativity and success; and (iii) their behaviour as an audience for the creative sector. For a full list of the questions asked, please go to the Appendix on page 15.

**PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE CREATIVE SECTOR**

**Country roles in promoting creativity**
The first question in this section of the survey asked respondents whether they felt that their home country encouraged creativity among its citizens. As seen in Figure 2, 72% of the respondents in surveyed countries felt their respective governments and society encouraged creativity. Kenyan (87%) and South African (81%) respondents felt the most encouraged, while only 56% of Nigerian and 61% of Moroccan respondents felt creativity was encouraged. However, the data did not reveal where most of the encouragement was coming from: family and friends, public institutions, or the private sector.

In all nine countries where youth were polled, more than 85% of respondents believed that arts and culture were an important part of their society (see Figure 3). Kenyan (97%) and Nigerian (97%) respondents were most likely to consider arts and culture important, closely followed by respondents from Côte d’Ivoire and Uganda (96%). The exception was Morocco, where 66% of respondents believed that arts and culture were important.
Although most Nigerian respondents felt that arts and culture were of great importance, they did not feel that the sector was well supported. While youth respondents across the continent mainly felt that their governments supported art and culture, the extent to which respondents felt supported was lower than the amount of importance they gave to the sector.

Views on the likelihood of financial success in the creative sector

For the question about the likelihood of achieving financial success in the creative sector, respondents could choose multiple answers; hence the totals do not add up to 100%. Despite the value youth respondents placed on arts and culture, in most of the countries where we conducted interviews, less than half believed that the sector provided many opportunities to make a sustainable living (37% overall. See Figure 4). The most positive youth were in East Africa (42%), with Uganda being the only country where half the respondents (50%) were more positive than negative about the opportunities available. In Kenya, respondents (46%) were also positive, but an equal number of respondents felt there were too many barriers to success.

Across all the countries, an average of 39% of respondents believed there were too many barriers to success, and 21% said there was no money to be made in the sector because people were not interested in the sector, which is similar to Figure 2, where 25% of respondents felt the sector was not supported.

Despite valuing arts and culture, respondents seemed to believe it was not easy for them to enter the sector and make a decent livelihood. Notably, even though respondents in Kenya and South Africa felt that their societies were supportive of the creative sector, they still perceived barriers to entering the sector as being high. This suggests that while societies in these countries are supportive, their support is not adequate in helping to overcome obstacles.
Furthermore, even though some youth respondents felt there were livelihood opportunities in the creative sector, many more (48%) believed that entrepreneurs and businesspeople had the most earning capacity (Figure 5). Only 13% believed the creative sector was lucrative. Of respondents from Cote D’Ivoire, 45% believed sport was more lucrative, and a substantial number of South Africans (22%) and Kenyans (19%) perceived social media influencers as earning more than creatives. Gender differences in this polling question were stark; 29% of men believed sports were lucrative, compared with only 16% of women; and women (15%) were more likely to view social media influencers as having high earning potential, compared with 10% of men.

In all nine countries, an average of 18% of respondents were unemployed, and 36% reported that they were employed, with the highest number of employed respondents being in Nigeria and Uganda (40%). When asked what they do for a living, only 4% (160 respondents) across the continent reported that they were in the creative sector. Given that many of the respondents did not believe the creative sector was lucrative, it is not surprising that so few were engaged in creative endeavours to earn a living.

Those who did make a living in the creative sector were then asked to further categorise their profession. Across the continent, those employed in the creative sector were most likely to be visual artists (30%) or content creators (23%) (see Figure 7). In North Africa, respondents said they were visual artists...
Overall, respondents did not believe in the earning potential of the creative sector, so, despite more than 85% believing that the sector was important (see Figure 3), they had not pursued their own creative work as a means of livelihood.

Youth as an audience in the creative sector

Despite not thinking the creative sector lucrative, and despite most not working in the sector, an average of 82% of all respondents respected and admired creatives in their country (see Figure 8). North and West African respondents (79% each) were marginally less likely to respect and admire creatives in their countries, but at a country level, only 53% of Moroccan respondents respected and admired creatives in their own country.

Given respondents' respect and admiration for local creatives, we analysed their engagement with creatives. We looked at the number of live performances they had attended in the last six months; respondents' weekly consumption of both local and international films; the number of visual artworks they had purchased from local artists; and the number of books by both international and local authors they had read 'for pleasure' in the last month.
Regarding attendance at live performances, an average of 77% of respondents said they had not attended any in the last six months, with North African respondents being the least likely to have attended a live performance (85% had not attended any in the last six months, see Figure 9). However, given that the research took place during the height of Covid-19 lockdowns in many countries, it is not possible to determine whether this level of attendance was normal.

Despite the lockdown efforts, 37% of respondents in Cote D’Ivoire had attended at least one live performance in the last six months, as had 35% of South African respondents. Only 3% of Moroccan respondents and 4% of Egyptian respondents had attended at least one live performance in the last six months. The figures for Morocco are not surprising, given that 27% of Moroccan respondents did not think arts and culture were important to their society.

Regarding their film-watching habits, we sought to establish how many films per week respondents watched that were from their own countries or other African countries (see Figure 10), and by comparison, how many US or international films they watched over the same period (see Figure 11). Most respondents watched films every week, whether local/African (67%) or US/international (66%), but among respondents who had watched from one to seven films, slightly more had watched local/African films (57%) than international/US films (53%). Those who had watched more than eight films had watched slightly more international/US films (13%) than local/African films (10%).
On a regional level, North Africans were the least likely to have watched a film (45%) but were equally as likely to have watched local/African and US/international films (51%). West Africans were marginally more likely to have watched local/African films (70%) compared to international/US films (67%). International/US films received a marginally greater audience in East Africa (78%) and Southern Africa (73%) compared to local/African films. Respondents from Côte d’Ivoire were most likely to have watched a film, whether local/African (86%) or international/US (76%). Given the minor discrepancies, it seems that audiences are as interested in watching local/African films as they are in watching international/US ones.

We also compared the respondents’ reading habits, asking how many books by African and/or international authors they had read for pleasure over the last month. Hardly any respondents had read a book in the last month: 75% had not read any books by international authors, and 71% had not read any books by African authors (see Figures 12 and 13). An average of 11% had read only one book (by international or African authors) and only 1% had read two books; however, those who had read three or more books were more likely to have read books by African authors (16%) than international authors (12%)

On a regional level, North African respondents were least likely to have read a book for pleasure (84% had not read books by international authors and 85% had not read books by African authors); the other regions had similar numbers. East Africans were most likely to have read books by one or more international authors (32%), while West Africans were most likely to have read books by an African author (34%). At country level, Zimbabwean respondents were most likely to have read three or more books by both African authors (27%) and international authors (17%). Egyptian respondents were least likely to have read a book for pleasure: 94% had read neither an African nor an international author.
Most respondents were unlikely to own or have purchased visual art (67%); however, 33% of West African and South African respondents and 32% of East African respondents owned or had purchased art from a local artist (see Figure 14). Ghanaian respondents were most likely to own or have purchased visual art from a local creative (49%), followed by Kenyans (44%).

More than half of the respondents (57%) spent money on creative pastimes. However, at a regional level, 87% of North African respondents and 80% of East African respondents said they spent nothing or “not much” on creative pastimes. By comparison, West African (30%) respondents said they spent “quite a bit” or “all available money”. Respondents from Côte d’Ivoire were much more likely to spend money in the creative sector than those from other countries, with many spending either “quite a bit” (36%) or “all available money” (14%); this matches the data on live performances (see Figure 9) and on film viewing habits (see Figures 10 and 11), which also showed respondents from Côte d’Ivoire having the highest attendance figures.

![Figure 14: Do you own, or have you purchased any work from a visual artist in your country?](image)

![Figure 15: How much money do you spend on pop music, arts, cultural and creative pastimes in a month?](image)
Overall, despite more than 85% of respondents saying the creative/cultural sector was important, in reality, they were generally not particularly supportive of the creative sector – neither in terms of the amount of content they consumed nor in terms of the amount they spent. Although this might be due to financial factors, it would need to be explored in more depth to understand it fully. It would also be interesting to find out more about how respondents spent their free time if they were not consuming much creative content.
CONCLUSION

The findings in this report suggest a fair amount of contradiction in how respondents navigated their responses to creativity: they believed the creative sector was important to their country and that it needed support, and they knew of creatives doing good things, but many did not invest financially in creative outputs. Many had not attended live performances (77%), read either African authors (71%) or international authors (75%) for pleasure, or purchased visual art from a local creative (67%).

This indicates that the way forward for the creative sector is to drive more consumption of creative outputs locally through various means, which in turn will stimulate demand and ultimately ensure the creative sector is a viable opportunity for many young Africans.
ENDNOTES


8 Snowball, Tarentaal, and Sapsed, 26.

1. Do you believe your country encourages creatives and creativity?
   a. Yes.
   b. No.
   c. I don't know.

2. Do you believe arts and culture are an important part of your community and society?
   a. Yes.
   b. No.
   c. Don't know.

3. What perceptions do you have about opportunities to make a living in the creative space? (Can select multiple)
   a. It is not a decent way to make a living.
   b. There is no money to be made because people are not interested.
   c. Very few people succeed in this sector.
   d. There are too many barriers to success.
   e. There are huge opportunities to make a sustainable living.

4. Which of these professions do you believe is the most lucrative?
   a. Sports, e.g. football, basketball.
   b. Creative, e.g. musician/actor.
   c. Social media influencer.
   d. Entrepreneur/businessperson.
   e. Other.
   f. Don't know.

5. What do you do for a living?
   a. Employed.
   b. Trader/businessperson.
   c. Creative.
   d. Artisan/labourer.
   e. Unemployed.
   f. Other.

6. If you are a creative, how would you categorise yourself?
   a. I am a content creator.
   b. I am a visual artist.
   c. I am a wordsmith.
   d. I am in media.
   e. I am a performance artist.
   f. Don't know.
7. Are there any creatives that you respect and admire in your country?
   a. Yes.
   b. No.
   c. Don't know.

8. How many live performances by African artists have you been to in the last 6 months?
   a. 0.
   b. 1–7.
   c. 8–14.
   d. More than 14.

9. How many local or African films do you watch on average every week?
   a. 0.
   b. 1–7.
   c. 8–14.
   d. More than 14.

10. How many American or international films do you watch on average every week?
    a. 0.
    b. 1–7.
    c. 8–14.
    d. More than 14.

11. How many books by African authors have you read for pleasure in the last month?
    a. 0.
    b. 1.
    c. 2.
    d. 3 or more.

12. How many books by international (non-African) authors have you read for pleasure in the last month?
    a. 0.
    b. 1.
    c. 2.
    d. 3 or more.

13. Do you own or have you purchased any work from a visual artist in your country?
    a. Yes.
    b. No.
    c. Don't know.

14. How much money do you spend on pop music, arts, cultural and creative pastimes in a month?
    a. Nothing.
    b. Not much.
    c. Quite a bit.
    d. All available money on this.
    e. Don't know.