

THE ROLE OF AFRICAN ARTS AND CULTURES IN EMERGING SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONFIGURATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Sustainability and sustainable development has always been the ultimate desire of every nation's developmental goal, As many developed nations of the world worry over the management of their technological achievements and its advancement, alongside their very volatile economic situations, many African nations still battle with social, political, economic and religious issues. Sustainability in the economy of these African nations are today, being repositioned towards the new emerging social and economic configurations that recognizes the important role arts and culture play in, not only growing but sustaining their economic development. African arts and cultures, which have always formed an integral part of her development, should no longer be relegated to the background, as they have very significant role to play within the new social and economic order. The paper presents African art and culture as a new and dynamic frontier for a sustainable social, economic and political development. It gives an insight on how the understanding, appreciation and integration of African different arts and cultural practices into the emerging new African economy can help promote peace and security, transform global understanding of Africans, as well as create a stable society within the African continent.

Keywords: Sustainability, Sustainable development, African Arts, tradition, Culture, Development and Economy.

INTRODUCTION

This present era has witnessed a significant turning point in the trend of affairs in the world economy, marked by unpredictable economic shifts and globalization. Therefore, it did not come as a shock when Jim O'Neill, in his 2001 publication *Building Better Global Economic BRICs* predicted that the four emerging countries (later five, with South Africa's formal inclusion in 2010) whose respective initials make up the acronym will play significant roles in reshaping world economy. The BRICS countries, namely, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, are primarily distinguished by factors such as their large, rapidly advancing economies and their significant influence on regional and global affairs, their G-20 membership status and their combined impressive scale in population, nominal GDP and foreign reserves. However, based on current observations, the absent of a well articulated sustainable economic development and other forms of socio-cultural and political sustainability plans has resulted to the obvious decline in the economies of the BRICS nations, alongside their counterparts, the MINT (Malaysia, Indonesia, Nigeria and Turkey), it is now obvious that the initial parameters used in determining the successful economic demographics have evolved.

O'Neill believes that the global economy finds itself at something of a divide. It is not so much one that runs between industrialized countries and the developing world so much as between the global rich and poor. He speaks of the headlines made by the pope and by New York's new mayor with their speeches focusing on income inequality and growing societal splits. He believes that we could be in the early stages of a redistribution of wealth, one which places less emphasis on capital and more on climbing incomes among the lower classes, propelled by taxes or minimum wage laws. (Erich Follath and Martin Hesse 2014)

And, he adds, "we as investors" clearly have to take such developments into account, but also as human beings.

Many scholars believe that it is now creativity and innovations that are determining factors that propel emerging economies and sustainable development. It is a fact that organizations and even economic regions that embrace creativity generate significantly sustained higher revenue and provide greater stability into the future (Kwanashie, M. et al. 2009). The 2013 Creativity Report reveals that "the creative economy is one of the most rapidly growing sectors of the world economy. It is highly transformative in terms of income generation, job creation and export earnings. But that is not all. The creative economy also generates non-monetary value that contributes significantly to achieving people-centered, inclusive and sustainable development," (Thirty-two Creative Economies in Action, 2013). Also disclosed in the report is the awareness that the primary constituents of the creative economy are the cultural and creative industries. Furthermore, the report notes that the key drivers of these industries, which are specifically human creativity and innovation, have actually become the true wealth of nations in the 21st century, that

Unlocking the potential of the creative economy therefore involves promoting the overall creativity of societies, affirming the distinctive identity of the places where it flourishes and clusters, improving the quality of life where it exists, enhancing local image and prestige. Investing in the creative sector as a driver of social development contributes to an improved quality of life, well-being of communities, individual self-esteem, dialogue₁₀₁ and cohesion. (Thirty-two Creative Economies in Action, 2013).

It will be challenging to appropriately discuss the role played by art and culture in emerging social and economic configurations without examining their relevance in boosting the economic and social conditions of any country. Once upon a time, they were considered a thing of luxury that trail prosperity. Nowadays there appears to be a paradigm shift towards economic sustainability and sustainable development in all aspects of the socio-political, cultural, and economic growth. These are today, perceived as the conditions of prosperity. In the last few years, the culture and creative industries have been delineated as fadders for economic growth, and both terms have been utilized separately and sometimes interchangeably. For instance, countries with rich and competitive cultural and creative industries were virtually immune to the devastating global economic crisis that caused a 12% decline in global trade in 2008 in stark comparison to countries where the reverse is the case. The UNCTAD analysis paint a more vivid picture when it states that: “world exports of creative goods and services continued to grow, reaching \$592 billion in 2008—more than double their 2002 level, indicating an annual growth rate of 14% over six consecutive years” (UNCTAD 2010, xxiii).

Oftentimes, with the advent of technology and innovation, when combined with culture contribute immensely to the holistic integration of culture, technology and economics. Basically what creativity does is that it aids in the amalgamation of culture, economics and technology. Over the years, creative industries, even though the concept itself is a recent development, have grown exponentially to the extent that they now account for the employment of millions all over the world, about six million jobs to be more precise (Kunzmann, 2007).

It is an undisputed fact that they are not only a thriving business but also among the growing sectors of the economy of many nations. In other words, a successful or thriving art and cultural sector is relevant in ensuring the attraction and sustenance of a talented labor force, alongside inducing an enabling environment that encourages innovation.

Creativity exists in many African traditional societies that have not really been explored. There have been in fact various instances in the histories of these societies where there was a resultant upturn in their respective economies in relation to other parts of the world whenever their creative potentials were harnessed and utilized. This prevalent deplorable state of development notwithstanding, the testament of their cultural goods that have been purchased in prestigious areas around the world proves that there were moments when they exhibited high levels of creativity. African arts and craft, music, films, textile, architectural designs have been noted for their high quality, exceptional craftsmanship and intriguing concepts, features that would make them competitive items of trade.

It is worthy of note that these skills were influenced largely by an afro-centric worldview rooted in African religious and socio-cultural values that was basically bereft of any foreign influence. In agreement, a report at the International Symposium on Cultural Diplomacy in Africa, tagged “Strategies to confront the Challenges of the 21st Century: Does Africa have what is required”, held in Berlin reads: “Western civilizations and culture began to creep into Africa when foreigners,’—mainly Europeans— quest were aimed at imposing imperial ideologies and pilfering African resources.” (ISCDA, 2011). Furthermore, there was a steep decline over the years in the effective employment of these skills, due to issues like long periods of marginalization, especially intensified during this dispensation of globalization. Consequently, the creativity that was indigenous to the African traditional communities were downplayed and most times regarded as inferior or primitive. Gradually a mind-set was both intrinsically and extrinsically cultivated in local people, through the introduction of modernization that lauded foreign cultures as superior to that of Africa. That notwithstanding, the creative and cultural potential that abounds in the continent cannot be undermined, and are not entirely extinct as most would believe. Rather they

are evolving, as creative expressions from different parts of the continent, albeit stemming from cultural voice are projected in a contemporary manner. This evident in the art movements that have been springing up in countries that have broken free from the shackles of colonialism, which all display similar patterns of advocating for their socio-cultural identity to be celebrated in their art as well as given its rightful place in contemporary art.

This paper examines the significant role African arts and culture play in a nation's social and economic development. Adopting a qualitative research design, it provides a critical review on selected African creative and cultural industries and the approach they employ in achieving this. Other aspects is also discussed; like how these industries play influential roles in addressing issues like peace and security. The study also examines some selected contributions of notable Africans artist, as well as those in Diaspora, highlighting on how their works instigate stability and growth in economies within Africa.

Contextual Review of Implied and Related Terms: Creative Economy, Creative and Cultural Industries

It is necessary at this point to delineate certain important terminologies that are either related or implied in the course of addressing the subject matter of the study. This is to ensure clarity as whenever they are applied in the paper. The term 'cultural Industry', applies to those economic activities that produce tangible or intangible artistic and creative products and which can be exploited to generate wealth through exploitation of cultural assets. In order words, they are those goods and services that specifically integrate creation, production as well as commercialization of intangible and cultural content. These products have one very important feature, which is that they encourage culture by projecting and sustaining cultural diversity and enhance democracy in enhancing culture.

Specifically, creative industries include advertising, architecture, crafts, design, audiovisual media such as film, television, video and broadcasting, live and recorded music, performing arts, dance, cultural heritage, visual arts, publishing and cultural tourism. Also, their engagements span across traditional artistic activities to electronic media and communications, and into a growing range of business and associated services. The ability to adequately manage, as well as market creative intellectual property is a significant factor and requirement.

Both terms make reference to jobs, people and industries of a certain type, and these sometimes include the sectors of visual, performing, and literary arts. Another way of describing this is noticeable in the "entertainment-based" sub-sectors such as music, film, television and the performing arts, and "arts and design-based" sub-sectors such as design, craft and the visual arts. There are areas, which could be identified with the applied fields like architecture, graphic design, and marketing, which are also all inclusive. The terminology integrates culture and the economy, and portrays the interrelationships among fields of planning, economic development, and arts and culture. Furthermore, other ways in which these connections are manifested are diverse and significant to nation building. For instance Arts, culture and creativity can upgrade the quality of a community's competitive edge. Arts, creativity and culture play an exceptional role in the aspect of projecting, defining, and communicating a community's sense of identity. It can increase the tourism potential of a community as well as amalgamate its visions with that of the business leaders. Indeed, there are diverse studies that have affirmed the significance of creative industries based on their potential and dynamism throughout this decade (HKU 2010, KEA 2011, Power and Niesen 2010).

The distinction between creative industries and cultural industries is somewhat complex, especially when certain factors are considered. These are tethered to controversies surrounding definitions associated with the terms “creative” and “cultural”. For instance, can a work of art be creative and cultural at the same time? In other words, is it possible for something deemed as cultural to also be described as creative and vice versa? Towse (2003, p. 170) provides an insightful perspective when he describes the cultural industries as those that “mass-produce goods and services with sufficient artistic content to be considered creatively and culturally significant. The essential features are industrial-scale production combined with cultural content”. In a sense this point of view tends to resolve the issue, especially when one embraces a generic modernized perception of the concept of creativity and culture, which tends to be more liberal and loose.

The BRICS, MINTS and Emerging Economies: The African Experience

Right from the moment when renowned economist Jim O'Neill first coined the word BRIC, the world has been maintaining a keen interest in the development of the BRICS countries and how they intend to justify their potentials as powerhouses for the world's economy. But it did not take too long when he proclaimed new emerging economic giants, the MINT countries, which consist of Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria and Turkey and a whole new flame erupted.

The MINT countries share about the same features with the BRICS, with only few differences. One of them is that they both have good demographics in the sense that in coming years there would be a noticeable increase in the number of persons eligible to work in relation to those who are not. This is a very significant factor in the sense that many developed countries have challenges in that regard, including two of the BRICS countries, China and Russia. There are speculations and indications that if the MINT countries are able to resolve the challenges haunting the development of each of their economies, they could compete favourably with China's double-digit rates between 2003 and 2008 (“The Mint Countries: Next Economic Giants”, 2014).

The MINT countries also have similarities in the aspect of strategic geographic positions that would benefit them if or when there are shifts in world trade patterns. Mexico, for instance is a neighbour to both the United States and Latin America. Indonesia is not only located in the heart of South-East Asia, it also has deep connections with China. Turkey's position makes it easier to relate to the West and East based on proximity. Nigeria's advantage is prospective, and is going to be more evident when issues disrupting it like conflicts between African countries reduce and is replaced with more interests in trading with themselves.

Again, in 2008, the economic pundits at the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) invented another term CIVETS, an acronym representing what they thought were the new emerging world market countries that would play leading roles economies in the forthcoming decades. The countries are, according to the order they represent in the acronym; Colombia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, Turkey and South Africa.

The basic challenge that each of these African nations have is that they have either not invested much in their respective creative economies or organised it well enough for it to yield maximum results. The developed countries like the United States that have done this have been reaping the dividends of their investments. A good example of this is the Oscars event,

and based on the calculations of revenues and expenses it is believed to generate about \$130 million for the city of Los Angeles and its local economy alone (Akyol, 2013). This is just one aspect of its creative economy that the United States is investing in.

However, there have been instances where African nations have collaborated in initiating cultural like the World Festival of Black Arts or World Festival of Negro Arts, which initially attracted thousands of visitors from around the world when the first two held in 1966 and 1977 at Dakar and Lagos respectively. The intent of the initiation of the festivals was that they were Pan-African celebrations, and offered a variety of creative activities ranging from performances like dance and theatre to debate. Unfortunately, this festival, which was dubbed to be the largest event held by Africa, has not lived up to the expectations it once celebrated in recent years. The last two events, which took place in 2009 and 2010 respectively did not receive as much publicity and accolades like the previous two. However, other major festivals have been sprouting in different parts of the continent, some of which have attracted global appraisal and patronage. Some of them will be reviewed in the paper.

Catalysts of decadence in African creative and cultural Industries

One of the factors proffered by pundits that established the ineffective foundation for the poor economic state of many African countries is the impact of colonialism. Colonialism initiated a pattern that progressively and strategically amalgamated Africa into a global capitalist system for the sole purpose of systematically providing the raw materials for western industrial production (Farah, et al, 2011). Furthermore, it subconsciously relegated the average African to a mindset that placed him in a challenging situation where he had to grapple with identity issues, with consequent effects of deculturation. Prof. F.X.Gichuru in a keynote speech at the African Stone Talk 2011 international Sculpture Symposium discussed the impact of deculturalization of the African through colonialism:

This the predicament of a deculturalized Africans/he is not sure of himself, s/he cannot think independently, s/he cannot rule with confidence if s/he is in power, s/he has little or no faith in him/herself, s/he thinks and dreams of the situation of the master, including migrating to the country of the latter. The deculturalized person has no faith in his own country, if in power, he steals from his country to go and hide the loot in the country of the master. This way the deculturalized African cannot sustainably develop. That is the African predicament. (Gichuru, 2011).

Deculturalisation is a syndrome birthed in Africa during slavery, and developed during the colonisation and neocolonisation period. It shackled Africans psychologically, demanding that the African discard his cultural identity, his history and socio-cultural artistic heritage which the West persuaded him to perceive as inferior and primitive and embrace that of the civilized

traditions of the West. The intensity of the downside of this issue can be seen when one compares the thriving and highly competitive economies of Eastern and Asian countries where they have a healthier perception and consciousness of their culture.

Another catalyst of decadence in African creative and cultural industries is the aspect of appropriate funding. The facts speak for themselves. Consider one aspect of the creative economy in one of Africa's most populous country for instance, that is talking about the Nigerian Nollywood movie industry in Nigeria. It is reputed as the largest film producer in the world, producing more movies than Hollywood and Bollywood. Based on the fact that it accounts for a providing about one million job opportunities, it is the biggest employer after agriculture. And with a gross estimate of its total value stipulated at \$500 million per annum, it is placed as the fourth biggest economy sector in Nigeria. Still, despite all this, two movies in Hollywood like Harry Potter and Transformers in 2010 grossed a combine figure of \$700 million in the united States alone. The evident question is what is responsible for this seemingly abysmal margin? For one thing, the most obvious reason is in the difference between quality and quantity. While Nollywood is commended in the aspect of the latter, Hollywood on the other hand is lauded for the quality movies it produces based on the fact that much time and money from both private and government parastatals have been invested in many of their movies. In fact the budget for a single movie can sometimes be compared to a State budget in Nigeria. Therefore, despite its commendable growth and economic impact, the fact remains that Governments of many African states have not yet provided the ideal environment for it to thrive at its fullest potential. Compared to other sectors of the economy, there is a gulf between the budget allocated to culture and areas associated with the creative industry than areas such as technology and the oil and gas sector, for example. This has, to a large extent impacted on the quality of production and even forced some to either outsource or collaborate with more organized private Western bodies related to that area.

Evaluating the Exploits and Prospects of Creative and Cultural Industries in Africa

The African continent is festooned with an impressive array of rich cultural diversity alongside an unbridled creative potency inherent in the citizenry of the nations within it. Each country boasts of creative and cultural arsenals that have impressed tourists and observers from not just the West but other parts of the world over the years. It is important at this point to review the most prominent cultural events in the continent, especially the outstanding ones, organized in selected countries in different parts of Africa, that reflect the rich cultural diversity abundant there. Most of them include film festivals, art fairs and musical celebrations. In order to achieve this, important art and cultural events in Africa will discussed with emphasis on their contributions to the socio-cultural, political and economic aspects of the society. In the area of the arts, there are five outstanding high profile festivals, and they include; the Harare International Festival of the Arts (HIFA) held in Zimbabwe, Dakar's Biennale of African Contemporary Art (Dak'Art) held in Senegal, Bushfire Festival of Swaziland, Bayimba International Festival of the Arts in Uganda, and Lake of Stars Arts Festival of Malawi. Other top notch African cultural events that project the creativity in the continent are Cape Town's International Jazz Festival, South Africa, Sakifo Musik Festival, Reunion Islands, Festival Gnaoua et Musiques du Monde, Morocco, Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF), Zanzibar and Port Harcourt Book Festival, Nigeria.

The Harare International Festival of the Arts (HIFA), Zimbabwe

This festival, which takes place annually between the 29 April – 4 May is six day festival. Its programme is multi-dimensional programme and includes theatre, dance, music, circus, spoken word, visual arts, poetry, crafts and children's workshops. The festival's primary objective is to instigate hope and positivity, and promote cultural integration in Zimbabwe through the arts, which is significant considering the fact that the country has been confronted with socio-economic and political challenges.

Dakar's Biennale of African Contemporary Art (Dak'Art), Senegal

Described by many as one of the major contemporary art exhibition in Africa, that has played a fundamental role in promoting emerging and established artists from Africa and the African Diaspora in this twenty-first century. The event, which takes place once every two years (hence its designation as a Biennale), showcases different dance performances, concerts and fashion all of which celebrate and depict the different facets of celebrate Africa's diverse, multidimensional creativity. It is also organized alongside another event known as Dak'Art OFF, more loike an extension to cities like Saint Louis and others throughout *Senegal*, giving artists around the country an opportunity to showcase their work.



Fig. 1: One of the numerous abstract paintings exhibited at the Dakar Biennale © Dakar's Biennale of African Contemporary Art

Bushfire Festival of Swaziland

Founded in 2007, Bushfire Festival features an exciting non-stop medley of music, dance, poetry, art, and theatre. The festival also hosts an interactive creative hub, a global food village and a local handcraft market. With a philosophy deeply rooted in social responsibility, the proceeds of the festival are used to support local community development, and the festival calls on the community at large to 'Bring their Fire' and play their part in fostering a participative response for positive

change. This year, over 20,000 people from the region and abroad will once again make their way to Swaziland's magical Ezulwini Valley, and take part in this spectacular event. Early additions to the 2014 programme include Grammy Winners Ladysmith Black Mambazo and Zimbabwe's most internationally successful young band Mokoomba, as well as celebrated Colombian group

Bayimba International Festival of the Arts in Uganda

First launched in 2008, the Bayimba International Festival of the Arts provides a fantastic overview of the finest music, dance, theatre, film and visual arts from both rising and well-known artists. Featuring artists from Uganda, East Africa and beyond, the festival has become a highly popular event in the region, attracting more and more people each year to the friendly, lively city of Kampala. Previous versions of the festival have included popular artists such as local favorite Bebe Cool, the Malian French duo Kouyaté and Neerman, German-born Palestinian percussionist Simona Abdallah and Nigerian/American singer Naira. This energetic three-day festival in the heart of Uganda guarantees a remarkable experience with an optimal selection of local and international music.

Lake of Stars Arts Festival of Malawi.

The Festival of the Lake of Stars is one of the best known and loved African festivals, and every year the festival features dozens of artists from Malawi and the rest of the world. For the past two years, Lake of Stars was moved to the capital city Lilongwe, but this year, the three-day festival will return to the palm-lined, surreal shores of the majestic Lake Malawi. The festival has a strong focus on promoting local artists, so this year it welcomes Malawian artists Skeffa Chimoto and Peter Mawanga. More than just a music event, the festival is packed with creative activity and showcases film and theatre, comedy, crafts and local food, giving international and regional visitors yet another reason to visit this beautiful country, fondly referred to as the 'Warm Heart of Africa'

Conclusion and Recommendation

Sustainability, in all aspect of any nation's economic, social, political and cultural development, and especially within their creative industry initiative, must be clearly defined and placed in high priority to avoid sudden recession. One of the challenges faced by many African countries in harnessing the creative potentials in Africa is that policy makers find it difficult to strategically establish and actualize them in order to foster sustainability in their national growth and development. Although there is an increasing awareness and interest in these areas, it is at a slow pace because of the government's ignorance in the immense potential it has in boosting the economy. Many different Africa nations do not reveal enough enthusiasm in the aspect of the preservation of these indigenous artistic and cultural heritages or effectively provide enough assistance or promotion to enable them contributes effectively to the advancement of the society.

The arts can, no doubt, be integrated into a well sustained economic and community development plans if any of these African governments can encourage traditional and cultural industries, especially, by promoting small and medium scale enterprises associated with them. Other aspects like supporting arts education and promoting arts assets in relation to their impact to cultural tourism can be explored.

The execution of these initiatives can be carried out strategically for it to have a sustainable developmental impact. First of all, each state should not only know the aggregate of their cultural and creative assets, they should also adopt an effective means of monitoring them and analyzing their impact in the economic scale. A meticulous approach should be adopted in the taxonomy of these creative economy assets would suffice in this regard, since the results vary from state to state. All over the globe, especially in recent times, societies with environment's that foster creativity flaunt the most successful economies in the twenty-first century. In fact businesses that adopt creative approaches in their deals, organizations that always look for creative resolutions to their engagements, societies that utilize it in resolving the issues that confront them, always have those unique edges over others that do not. Creativity is not an add-on but an essential ingredient for success. (Chris Smith, Foreword, DCMS 2001, p.3). Finally, creativity has the capability of influencing the advancement and sustainability of a skilled workforce.

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