FAIR PAY FOR ARTISTS

Addressing Structural Inequality in Africa's Creative Economy

Authors

Tolu Ogunleye (Drtonez)

Ngbodi Edward

Institution

Scholarly Art – Art, Cultural Policy and Research Initiative

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Executive Summary

The Fair Pay for Artists Campaign, conducted by Scholarly Art, examined the economic realities facing artists and cultural practitioners across Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, and other emerging African creative markets. While Africa's creative industries show strong growth potential, many artists face precarious economic conditions characterized by unstable income, low compensation, and limited access to social protection.

During the campaign's qualitative research phase, including focus group discussions and structured interviews, 95% of participating Nigerian artists reported never receiving direct earnings from their creative work. Many respondents also highlighted pay-to-perform or pay-to-exhibit systems, low royalty payouts, and weak intellectual property protection as major barriers to economic sustainability.

This policy paper presents evidence-informed recommendations, including fair compensation frameworks, strengthened intellectual property enforcement, and support mechanisms for sustainable livelihoods. An evaluation framework is provided to ensure measurable policy impact across African creative sectors.

Abstract

Artists and cultural practitioners are essential contributors to Africa's cultural identity, economic activity, and global influence. Yet, artistic labour is often undervalued and undercompensated. Despite the creative sector's informal vitality, the absence of coordinated policy frameworks and institutional support has contributed to pervasive economic insecurity among artists (ILO report on African cultural and creative economy).

This policy paper summarizes findings from the Fair Pay for Artists Campaign, which employed qualitative methods (focus groups, interviews, stakeholder consultations) to assess economic dynamics in the creative sector. The results reveal systemic inequities, including low direct earnings, exploitative industry practices, and inadequate protections. Policy recommendations are offered to enhance compensation standards, transparency in royalties, and institutional support mechanisms.

Campaign Background

Africa's creative industries, including music, film, performing arts, literature, and digital media have expanded rapidly in recent decades. However, informal and precarious work arrangements dominate the cultural economy, with many creative workers experiencing inconsistent income, limited labour protections, and uneven access to formal markets (ILO-UNESCO joint findings on creative economy informality).

Although global institutions recognize the creative sector's potential as a driver of employment, innovation, and cultural diplomacy, policy attention in many African countries remains limited. This campaign was launched to identify structural barriers limiting artist livelihoods and to propose actionable policy reforms.

Campaign Methodology

The campaign adopted a multi-phase qualitative research approach:

1. Focus Group Discussions: Engaged artists and creative practitioners across multiple disciplines.

2. Structured Interviews: Consulted cultural stakeholders, event organizers, and policymakers.

3. Stakeholder Workshops: Facilitated cross-sector dialogue on systemic challenges.

4. Literature Review: Analyzed existing reports on creative economies and decent work frameworks.

This combination of primary research and secondary evidence ensured a grounded and comprehensive analysis.

Campaign Timeline

Phase	Activities	Duration
Phase 1	Preliminary research & literature review	Month 1

Phase 2 Stakeholder consultations Month 2

Phase 3 Focus group discussions with creatives Month 3

Phase 4 Data analysis & policy formulation Month 4

Phase 5 Drafting recommendations & impact metrics Month 5

Phase 6 Validation & dissemination Month 6

Key Findings

Limited Direct Earnings

During the campaign, 95% of Nigerian artist participants reported never receiving direct earnings from their artistic projects. Many artists rely on secondary income streams outside creative sectors to sustain their work.

Exploitative Participation Practices

Artists reported being required to pay fees for performance access, exhibitions, or distribution, often without a fair revenue share.

Low Digital Royalties

Creative works distributed via digital platforms often generate minimal royalty income for creators, disproportionately disadvantaging African artists in global distribution systems.

Weak Intellectual Property Protection

Although legal frameworks exist, enforcement of intellectual property protections remains inconsistent, undermining artists' ability to earn from their work.

Unequal Bargaining Power

Artists often engage with larger market actors (platforms, promoters) without sufficient bargaining power, limiting equitable revenue sharing and contract protections.

Policy Recommendations

Establish Minimum Compensation Standards

Governments and cultural institutions should set baseline compensation standards for creative work to ensure fair pay for contributions to cultural and economic activities.

Regulate Exploitative Participation Practices

Policies should discourage pay-to-perform or pay-to-exhibit systems that place disproportionate financial burdens on artists.

Strengthen Intellectual Property Enforcement

Strengthen enforcement mechanisms and update IP laws to protect artist rights in physical and digital markets.

Promote Transparent Digital Royalty Systems

Encourage digital platforms to adopt transparent and accountable royalty distribution models that enable creators to benefit fairly from consumption of their work.

Support Collective Representation and Unionization

Artist unions and associations can play a major role in advocating for equitable revenue sharing, labour protections, and collective bargaining rights — approaches supported by broader decent work frameworks for creative sectors (ILO decent work policies).

Develop Social Protection Programs

Governments should design tailored social protection schemes, including pensions, health insurance, and income support, recognizing the non-standard employment patterns in creative work.

Policy Implications for Nigeria and Emerging African Markets

Nigeria: Integrate formal creative economy policies into national development plans to unlock investment and job creation.

Ghana: Enhance legal frameworks to promote equitable revenue opportunities for artists.

South Africa: Expand support for royalty frameworks and worker representation in creative sectors.

Regional cooperation can foster best practice exchange and harmonized policy alignment across African creative economies.

Policy Impact Metrics & Evaluation Framework

Policy Area	Metric	Target	Review Frequency
Fair Compensation	% of artists receiving direct payments	80% within 3 years	Annual
Participation Regulation	Reduction in events requiring artist fees	70% by year 3	Bi-annual
Digital Royalties	Growth in average artist royalties	50% increase in 3 years	Quarterly
IP Protection	# of resolved copyright cases	90% resolution rate	Annual
Collective Representation	% of artists in unions/associations	60% in 2 years	Annual
Social Protection	% of artists enrolled in safety net programs	50% within 3 years	Annual

This metrics framework aligns with impact-oriented policy design, allowing monitoring and accountability.

Implementation Framework

- Establish multi-stakeholder task forces to oversee policy roll-out.
- Launch dedicated funding and grant programs for creatives.
- Build monitoring systems to track royalties, payments, and IP enforcement.
- Conduct periodic evaluations to refine policy interventions.
- Facilitate regional policy platforms for knowledge sharing and coordination.

Conclusion

The Fair Pay for Artists Campaign highlights persistent structural inequities in Africa's creative economy, including unstable income, exploitative practices, and limited protections. By implementing the recommended policy frameworks and evaluation systems, African governments and stakeholders can build fair, sustainable, and economically inclusive creative sectors across the continent.

Scholarly Art advocates evidence-based policy reform that recognizes artists not only as cultural contributors but as central to economic and social development in Africa.

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