Hivos
people unlimited

Excelling in Tandem: Past, Present, Future

New Ways of Working for Creatives in the COVID-19 Context

A Research for Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe

Excelling in Tandem: Past, Present, Future

New Ways of Working for Creatives in the COVID-19 Context

A Research for Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe

Contents

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, we would to thank all the creatives that participated in the research. We thank them for putting energy and time in telling us how you have managed to cope in the unprecedented times of COVID-19.

In particular, we would like to thank creatives that have benefited from the Hivos Resource Of Open Minds (ROOM) project in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Their hard work brought the ROOM project to life, unveiling new forms of creativity that are pushing the envelope.

We would like to extend our gratitude and appreciation to Edgar Langeveldt whose guidance, support and encouragement has been invaluable throughout this study.

We hope the recommendations in this report will contribute to shaping new ways of working for creatives in the three countries, and possibly elsewhere.

Special thanks go to Masimba Biriwasha who took the lead in writing the report. We are grateful to all of those with whom we had the pleasure to engage with during the execution of this project.

Finally, we would like to encourage creatives in the region to thoroughly study the contents of this report, and make an effort to incorporate some of the recommendations into their creative practice.
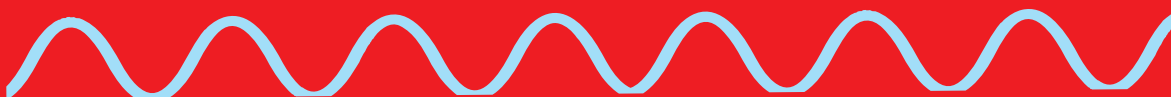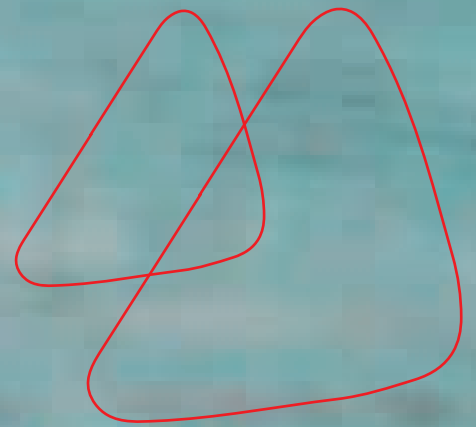
Creativity is a key skill behind complex problem-solving and critical thinking.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO),

Whenever the names look like
being forgotten and the memories
overwhelmed by the events of time,
the preservation of cultural traditions
assume a new, more vital importanc.

Credo Mutwa,
Indaba, My Children

Executive Summary

For more than a millennium, masquerade, metalwork, sculpture, rock painting, pottery, architecture, fiber art, music, woodcarving, film, poetry and dance among others have been important creative forms across Africa. Creativity has long played a key role in providing both an aesthetic and a critical eye on African societies.

Creatives' ability to produce works with liberatory potential has been long noted. Throughout the continent, creatives have always exhibited a desire to remake themselves and their world.

According to UNESCO, human creativity is the source of cultural and creative industries goods and services. It is also a key skill behind complex problem-solving and critical thinking and shares the common links of culture, trade and intellectual property rights, particularly copyright.

The UNESCO 's Framework for Cultural Statistics defines cultural and creative industries as:
Those sectors of organized activity that have as their main objective the production or reproduction, the promotion, distribution or commercialization of goods, services and activities of content derived from cultural, artistic or heritage origins.

This approach places the emphasis on goods, services and activities of a cultural/ artistic and or heritage nature, whose origin lies in human creativity, whether past or present.

The definition is not limited to only the output of human creativity and industrial reproduction but includes other activities that contribute to the creation and distribution of cultural and creative products.

Throughout human history, creativity has been well recognized as a spark that unlocks longstanding challenges, creating new forms that reshape human imagination and being.

In undertaking the study on new ways of working for creatives in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe, we took a broad definition of creative ways of working blurring the imaginary boundaries that box creativity into compartments. At its core, creativity is the use of imagination or original ideas to create something - its inventiveness. Creativity involves stepping outside the day-to-day to devise novel solutions, art forms, ideas or content.

In fact, analysts have identified creativity as a key tool in propelling Africa's future trajectory.

Creativity is 'the oil of the 21st century' (Ross, 2008). Creativity and culture are nowadays intensely hailed by global development institutions as 'a wonderstuff' (Ross, 2008)— the magical passkey to Africa's sustainable development— poised to propel inclusive growth, cultural diversity and job creation especially for young people, peripheral communities and women.

'Agenda 2063', the African Union's strategic framework for the continent's development optimistically bets on the creative industries to engender future Pan-African 'self-awareness, well-being and prosperity'.

So, if creativity has such a key role to play in pushing the envelope forward in society, it necessarily means that any damage to the creative sector will drastically undercut our culture, well-being, quality of life and future potential. Against this background, the creative economy is one of the sectors that was hit hard by the COVID-19 crisis due to new legislation, regulations, restrictions and requirements.

The capacity to be inventive and creative was severely disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. All planning and projections literally disappeared into thin air. Creatives were forced to cancel shows, events, presentations, exhibitions etc. in the face of COVID-19 government issued restrictions. There was very little that many creatives could do except undergo everything that was happening with shock and surprise.

Indeed, COVID-19 has engendered a completely new vocabulary, and divergent reactions and adaptations to the pandemic have germinated brand new conversations.

One of the key findings of the case study is that while COVID-19 has changed a lot in the way of life in the three countries, it has served to highlight longstanding inequalities and inequities. COVID-19 has served to amplify the disintegrations and fault lines in our societies, showing a lack of preparedness for calamities of such a nature on the part of governments and individual citizens in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Creatives in the three countries live largely from hand to mouth and face

In itself, COVID-19 provides fertile ground Suffice to say that with no safety nets in place, creatives were forced into situations where they were not able to put food on the table.

a lot of resistance to pursue their chosen careers especially at family level. It's important to mention here that female creatives face huge hurdles to establish themselves.

However, it is important for creatives not be swallowed in the gospel of the so-called new normal but apply themselves critically to question the "new" state of our times. In itself, COVID-19 provides fertile ground Suffice to say that with no safety nets in place, creatives were forced into situations where they were not able to put food on the table. With sources of livelihood closed down, some creatives opted to engage in alternative activities such as sewing, market gardening, gold panning, collaborating with foreign producers among others. A lot more of the creatives' old ways of working were so disrupted that the only way

out is to re-envision and reimagine new ways of working that will enable them to survive in the emerging times.

On the other hand, COVID-19 has been an accelerator for digital adoption by some creatives in

the focus countries. New ways of working have organically emerged as creatives sought ways to survive at the height of the crisis.

Unfortunately, the platforms that creatives in the three focus countries have adopted are largely Silicon Valley driven. The platforms which include Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Etsy among others are US-based and out of touch with contextual realities in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe such as high data costs and poor connectivity. Creatives have not always been attuned to the specifics of the various platforms that they have failed to reap any significant reward.

The truth is that despite the assumption that creatives in the region have gone online and invested a great deal of effort, there has not been a lot of pay-off. In reality, just a few

creatives have been able to generate meaningful remuneration online. This is not surprising because online access continues to be limited in the three countries.

A significant part of the regional population has therefore been left out of the digital adoption and acceleration that has been spurred by COVID-19. To make matters worse, the online platforms that creatives have relied on are not designed to respond to contextual realities. The attempt to present creatives on the internet have been exclusionary to say the least, exposing a glaring digital divide, particularly between rural and urban areas.

While globally going online has been the motto, it is important to state that mobile internet access penetration rate for the continent is just 24%.

In the three focus countries, there has also been a lack of significant investment in innovation and creativity to ensure the sustainability of the creative enterprises. Another challenge is the increasing corporatization and commoditization of the creative sector in the region where the private sector and donor institutions predominantly fund creatives. Creatives often find themselves between a rock and hard place as they have to choose between standing up for

In the three focus countries, there has also been a lack of significant investment in innovation and creativity to ensure the sustainability of the creative enterprises

Having said this, in the new way of working, creatives need to find ways to be self-reliant so that the nature and content of their work does not play second fiddle to politics of the stomach.

Working in isolation despite the presence of creative labs in the three countries remains a challenge. However, we identified a few examples of cross-country collaborations that need to be nurtured in the new way of working.

Finally, there is a case for creatives to engage in a deep-seated reflection on the past in order to shape the new way of working. The call to decolonize cultural production is not a new phenomenon in intellectual circles in Africa but it has been made more urgent by the COVID-19 crisis which has forced everyone across the world to look for solutions that are local and closer to home. Southern Africa's past is littered with gems of heritage that need to be preserved, promoted and revived. These gems can provide a foothold for creatives to regenerate new cosmopolitan, creative forms that are unique with greater local and global appeal.

This research study makes a strong argument that for the three countries to play a role in the world's fourth industrial revolution, creativity and innovation is central. Creatives need to engage in an ongoing processes of experimentation, rethinking of their ability to express themselves critically and responding to emerging problems such as COVID-19 and other future crisis, ethically and creatively, adding value to society through critical reflection while being able to sustain themselves.

The world's fourth industrial revolution, creativity and innovation is central.

Rationale of the Research

Hivos Southern Africa Hub's ROOM project works with creative critical online content creators in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The goal of the project is to enable these critical content makers to become more independent, sustainable and reach wider audiences with their online content while challenging repressive norms of the societies in which they operate. It is anticipated that critical online content creators will create new contemporary narratives that have the potential to shift existing hegemonic narratives.

Hivos Southern Africa Hub engaged a consultant to undertake an investigation to identify how creatives can adopt new ways of working that will make them flourish in spite of ongoing challenges such as the outbreak of COVID-19.

The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has posed great challenges to the worldwide economy and people's daily lives and will have far-reaching consequences beyond the spread of the disease. In light of this, it is important to take note of the following:

"The creative economy is one of the sectors most at risk from the COVID-19 crisis. Any lasting damage to the creative sector will drastically undercut our culture, well-being, and quality of life. At the same time, the crisis is also a strong driver of creativity and innovation.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact of how creatives now work, the ROOM project and its partners in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe has to undertake its activities in different, innovative and safer formats. In this period of physical distancing, creatives have had to depend on technology more than ever before. This dependence has also exposed the digital divide and inequalities in the region.

With this in mind, the ROOM project undertook a research on New Ways of Working for Creatives (NWoWC) in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe to reimagine critical content production within the context of ongoing challenges brought into reality by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key Objectives

The overall objectives of the research consultancy on NWoWC in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe are as follows:

1. To explore the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on content creators, hubs and makers in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

In itself, COVID-19 provides fertile ground for creatives to begin creating new forms of content that reflect these emerging realities.
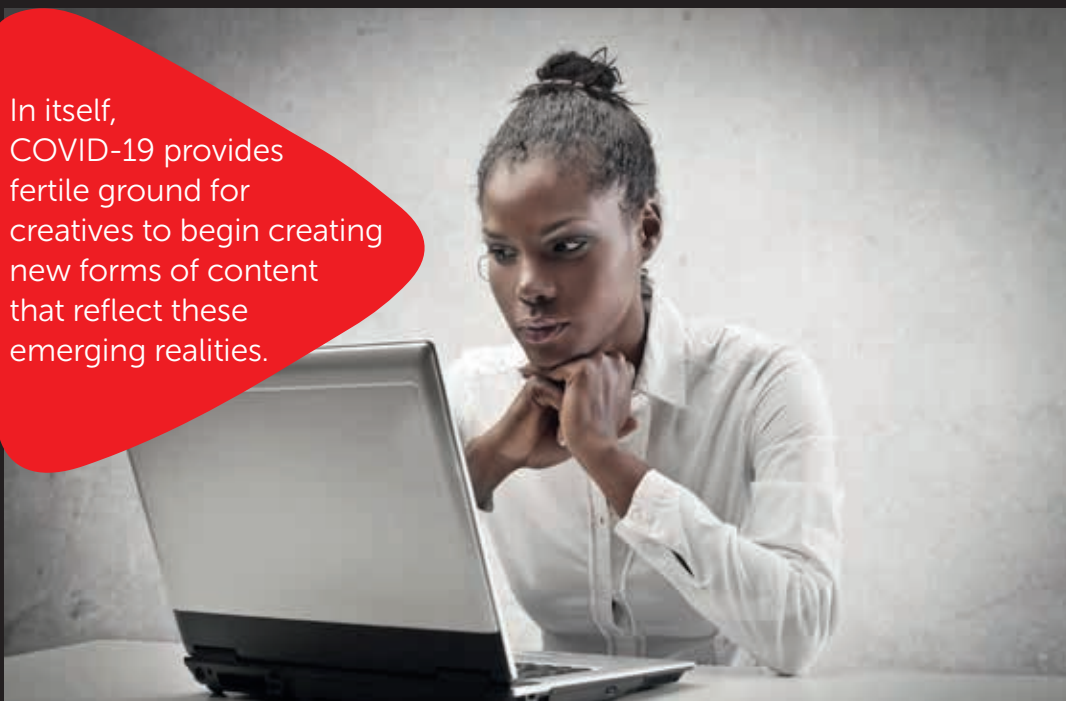
2. To provide a contextual analysis of emerging trends and challenges for creatives due to the COVID-19 pandemic

3. To proffer possible solutions and frameworks to NWoWC

4. To examine broad linkages between past, present and future of critical content creation in the Southern African region.

Context

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the inherent challenges of the creative sector in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Creative work is often poorly paid, insecure, and it requires a great deal of investment to create and sustain a creative career.

Women are also highly underrepresented and face multiple challenges in trying to break into the creative sector, which inhibits their ability to fulfil their creative potential. If the struggle is not real enough for creatives (who often rely on primary, secondary and even further levels of income generation), those that have been most hard hit are the part time workers and other support staff. COVID-19 has all but eliminated their sources of income.

Funding for creative projects in the countries is almost non-existent, and when it come through, it usually comes with strings attached. As a result, creatives often find themselves having to compromise their editorial independence so that they can put food on the table.

There is increasing donorization and corporatization of the creative sector, which ultimately stifles the emergence of a more organic and endogenously driven creative sector.

Sadly, many creatives in the three focus countries aspire toward dominant cultures such as Western, South African or Nigerian influences, while ignoring the rich cultural heritages that they are endowed with.

The sudden outbreak of COVID-19 left many creatives in the cold, with old ways of working subdued by government public health restrictions. Finding themselves in such a difficult place, some creatives have opted out and searched for new ways to sustain themselves while others began exploring new methods, mainly utilizing technology to reach out to audiences.

Creating content for online consumption is neither a guarantee for attracting audience online nor generating revenue. At the best, it is now mandatory for creatives to establish a web landing page, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Zoom conferencing, TikTok, and search pages to research, download, upload, develop material, prepare presentations and stay in contact with potentials audiences.

The Digital space is now dominated by ubiquitous memes, hashtag challenges and other transient "here today, gone tomorrow" fads.

Digital data can indeed be turned into fabric and fashion, food, music, art exhibit or laughter but all this comes at a cost. At the worst, it is exclusionary. Millions of people across the Southern African region are left out the reach of internet. The platforms that creatives utilize are foreign driven and do not address contextual realities that would facilitate greater access to content especially by the majority rural-based population.

The creativeness of these millions of people is not only going to waste but the existing models of creative projects appears oblivious of the existence of millions of people.

New ways of working in the three countries need to take into account these existential realities so that new solutions to incorporate the millions of rural people's talents and potential to provide an audience to creatives' productions.

What COVID-19 has shown – more than anything else –that if we do not take care of our local environment and proactively work to reshape it, we risk extinction. To state it bluntly, local is the be all and end all of human existence, it is what give us the right to being before we can put on wings to interact with other worlds. Local has taken on a new meaning that will continue to maximize in the post-COVID-19 world. Put simply, creatives have a challenge to exploit that which is within their locality in order to build new visions of creativity.

Going Local Is Key

By going local, we mean going through a wholesome experience of local traditions, cultures, practices and histories because therein lie gems of heritage that creatives can re-appropriate, remix, refresh, redefine and reinvent.

The creative sectors in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe require a new philosophical framework from which to shape a new germination that does not solely survive on the mercy of a foreign buyer, collector or audience. The more sustainable audience for creatives exists locally and tapping

into this goldmine is the mission which creatives should adopt in the new way of working.

While technology has been lauded for bringing creatives in the region onto the internet, this state of affairs is raising more questions than answers. There is a case for creatives and technologists to collaborate and establish locally driven platforms that are informed by local realities. In such a scenario, creatives would be able to control such platforms, including how payments are made. Zimbabwe is a good example. Due to international sanctions, many creatives are not always able to claim their remuneration, no matter how many likes, shares, hits or downloads.

Collaboration
as a Key Pointer

Collaboration among creatives remains a huge problem. Creatives in the region need to rid themselves of the concept of lone genius. Rather, it is through collaboration that unexpected insights and approaches can be born. Incidentally, internet tools make collaboration easier than ever: Slack, Teams, Google Hangouts, WebEx, Basecamp etc. the list is constantly growing.

> Social media sites, including Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, expand our social networks and bring us together in groups that include millions. More than ever before, we need to understand how to harness these tools to promote creative collaboration.

Collaboration
as a Key Pointer

Thus, we can use social media and related apps to bring us together in ways that build our deeply human need to work productively with others. It is important to reemphasize that many of these platforms mentioned above are not designed with the regional context in mind so a deliberate approach to build locally relevant software and applications is a major requirement.

Creatives in favor of foreign, passing fads often shun our locally lived realities. They need to have a solid foundation from which to build. Creatives need to appreciate their histories, culture and traditions and use it as a base from which to define the new trajectory and ways of working. There is an apparent shunning of local language and systems of thinking in the production of creative works that also needs to be confronted and refashioned.

Until creatives in the region begin to value themselves and the rich heritage that they have they will continue to put in so much work that brings nothing to the table. Looking to local folklore, proverbs, artefacts and songs and reinventing things in the new world can give creatives a solid footing.

There is a need of a synthesis of local and external knowledge, or traditional and western-based knowledge in order to fuel a spirit of invention and innovation in the creative sector.
The universal attributes of local knowledge systems remain unrecognized and the onus is on creatives to invigorate this process.

Innovation and Local Knowledge

The marginalization of indigenous cultures during the last two centuries has essentially been due to oppressive political and economic processes rather than their alleged dysfunction, inherent inadequacy or irrelevance. Creatives in the three countries lack an understanding of the nature of indigenous traditions in applied fields such as agriculture, health, food, nutrition, veterinary care, the performing arts, architecture, metallurgy and also in theoretical fields like mathematics, linguistics, astronomy and logic. Indigenous traditions continue to be alive, are evolving, changing and adapting, as does life itself, and provide a rich goldmine for reframing critical online content.

There is a need to change the fixed dominant paradigms and create new, self-affirming ones. Without a doubt, such an amalgamation could lead to major creative improvements and changes. Regional creatives must continue questioning intellectual and philosophical roots in mainstream western cultures. The destructive process of traditional methods of knowledge which began with colonization needs to be revisited and reinterpreted in the new way of working for creatives - and this requires innovation.

Innovation is what will enable unlocking opportunity in the post COVID-19 era, and our hopes for a creative future – as individuals and societies – lie in finding creative solutions to age old problems. The environment is volatile, unpredictable, chaotic and ambiguous and the only way out is singular: rethink.

Critical online content creators have to assess what impact their efforts are having and where this occurs in the cloud: small, closed digital communities and special interest groups, or mass audiences. Faced with such a scenario, it is critical to know target audiences by demographics, psychographics and channels. This challenge can be simplified by self-examination:

- What business are we really in?

- What new opportunities does disruption open?

- What capabilities do we need to realize these new opportunities?

This research makes an argument that creatives in the three countries need to first discover their rootedness while adopting and adapting to ever changing technologies, and fickle, unpredictable trends.

The more sustainable audience for creatives exists locally and tapping into this goldmine is the mission which creatives should adopt in the new way of working.

Methodology
of the Research

The consultant employed a triangulated methodology in executing the NWoWC study. Triangulation means using more than one method to collect data on the same topic.

This is a way of assuring the validity of research through the use of a variety of methods to collect data on the same topic, which involves different types of samples as well as methods of data collection.

However, the purpose of triangulation is not necessarily to cross-validate data but rather to capture different dimensions of the same phenomenon. To contextualize the case study, the researcher conducted key informant interviews with creatives in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe, as well monitored online and offline commentary, analysis, developments, media reports, and web cast presentations related to COVID-19 and the creative sector.

A total of 30 in-person interviews were conducted with creatives in multiple creative spheres in Zimbabwe. A survey utilizing Survey Monkey was conducted with key informants in Malawi and Zambia. The contacts were be provided by Hivos' ROOM project.

In addition, a literature review of the state of creative expression at national, regional and global level was conducted to solidify the evidence base of the research.

In cases where opportunity allowed, the consultant paid visits to some of the creatives' workspaces in Zimbabwe to participate in activities and to observe first-hand the iterations that creatives were putting in place in the face of ongoing challenges presented by COVID-19.

The consultant also conducted informal interviews with creatives in a variety of fields in order to map patterns.

The research was, at its core, informed by a lofty goal and the freedom Every culture needs its own sphere of freedom, incorrectness, difference and diversity.

Creativity is one such sphere. Since the age old days, a spirit of incorrectness and defiance has been the foundation of creativity. Creativity is about risk and imagination. It is key to building stronger, better informed and more engaged communities, and is the foundation of a healthy **democracy.**

In itself, creative work is precarious, involving insecure, unpaid and irregular employment. Study after study also demonstrates that women are severely underrepresented, victimized and discriminated in the creative sector.

A systematic research-based understanding of the cultural, social, economic, historical and technological specificities of African creative industries, in all their elusiveness, peculiarities, definitional

hurdles and ambivalences needs to be undertaken in order to promote the utility of the creative sector as well proof it from future shocks.

Due to the COVID-19 crisis, the creative industry has been confronted with new unprecedented challenges that require new ways of thinking. The pandemic has exposed systemic inequality and added a new layer of challenges facing creatives in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Already, there has been a steady decline of free expression in the public domain and an over-dominance of corporate sponsorships that are determining the nature and content of creative expression.

The corporatization of creativity is occurring within the context of intolerance, fear, and self-censorship. In addition, there has been a long line of attacks on creative expression in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

However, looking back, charting the now and projecting forward, we can map a new philosophical model and framework that can influence multiple creative disciplines.

Changes in today's operating environment — such as increased closure of open space and philanthropic support and technology's impact on audience expectations — have prompted existential crises for many creatives.

Against this background, there is a need to reimagine the modus operandi of creatives — and potentially even their value proposition. There is a need to explore and exercise new ways of thinking for creatives to thrive amid today's challenges. There is a need to proactively identify and address complex challenges, including challenges to creative innovation; and to envision and experiment with new ways of working.

Designing tech that enhances creative work means building with safety and privacy at its core, and anticipating risk as best as possible. The big things to focus on with technology include prioritizing safety, data privacy, creating a plan, agenda, creating cohesive work flows, and creating intentional spaces for human connection and interaction, beyond the chat window.

A cursory examination of Africa's position and potential in the 21st Digital Century reveals clear patterns of the appropriation of indigenous and endogenous intellectual, spiritual, cultural, and artefacts, and a displacement of Africa's creative sensibilities by dominant cultures.

It is noteworthy that the young generation in many parts of Africa have been attracted by dominant cultures and have decided to move away from their cultural background. Though not always openly expressed, traditional

dis-normalized era.

There is a need to invigorate new approaches to creativity supported by endogenous principles and forwarding looking, organic software and technology development. Social practices that have shaped creative expression in African art include traditional ritual, magic, religion, masquerade and dance. Of course, this will require supporting structures that are lacking in the three focus countries of the case study.

While the continent has a deep pool of talent, it lacks the infrastructure and capacity to commercialise its creative talent and reap the vast fortunes that are lying in wait.

Our approach embodies a constructive and critical position, one that searches for possibilities to improve upon them, strengthening the capacity for learning, experimenting and changing is key in the process of enhancing the endogenous approach to influencing new creative forms.

values, knowledge, concepts and practices still play an important role.

We premise that creatives can use this foundation to have a strong foothold to propel themselves in the new,

Samples of the questions of the surveys:

- Is the language of free expression and human rights correctly understood and capable of delivering critical creative content?

- What has been creativity's role in helping people solve problems for fighting COVID-19?

- In what way do creatives employ online and offline tactics that close the digital divide in the regions?

- What strategies are creatives employing to avert repressions and prosecution by increasingly repressive governments? The critical need for frameworks and conduits for constructive engagement emerged as a concern and a persistent need. Conflict avoidance is more useful than conflict resolution.

- What could existing creative forms be offering people and communities at this specific cultural moment?

- How can creative forms foster open and critical expression utilising new technologies? How can creatives speak truth about power, systems, and institutions utilizing new technology?

- How do creatives create new kinds of physical experiences and environments relevant to audiences – supplemented by powerful digital foundations?

- Is it sustainable for creatives in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe to rely on Silicon Valley driven platforms or there is a case to invest in the development of locally driven tech platforms

- What is the place of community and tradition in the modelling of new ways of working for creatives?

- What is the place of co-creation and collaboration at local and regional level in mapping new ways of working for creatives?

- What is the role of cultural and linguistic diversity in the new forms of art?

Every culture needs its own sphere of freedom, incorrectness, difference and diversity. Creativity is one such sphere. Since the age-old days, a spirit of incorrectness and defiance has been the foundation of creativity. Creativity is about risk and imagination. It is key to building stronger, better-informed and more engaged communities, and is the foundation of a healthy democracy.

In itself, creative work is precarious, involving insecure, unpaid and irregular employment. Study after study also demonstrates that women are severely underrepresented, victimized and discriminated in the creative sector.

A systematic research-based understanding of the cultural, social, economic, historical and technological specificities of African creative industries, in all their elusiveness, peculiarities, definitional hurdles and ambivalences needs to be undertaken in order to promote the utility of the creative sector as well proof it from future shocks.

Due to COVID 19 crisis, the creative industry has been confronted with new unprecedented challenges that require new ways of thinking. The pandemic has exposed systemic inequality in the target countries. In fact, it has added a new layer of challenges facing creatives in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Already, there has been a steady decline of free expression in the public domain and an over-dominance of corporate sponsorships that are determining the nature and content of creative expression.

The corporatization of creativity is occurring within the context of intolerance, fear, and self-censorship. In addition, there has been a long line of attacks on creative expression in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

However, looking back, charting the now and projecting forward, we can map a new philosophical model and framework that can influence multiple creative disciplines.

Changes in today's operating environment — such as increased closure of open space and philanthropic support and technology's impact on audience expectations — have prompted existential crises for many creatives.

Against this background, there is a need to reimagine the modus operandi of creatives — and potentially even their value proposition. There is a need to explore and exercise new ways of thinking for creatives to thrive amid today's challenges. There is a need to proactively identify and address complex challenges, including challenges to creative innovation; and to envision and experiment with new ways of working.

Designing tech that enhances creative work means building with safety and privacy at its core, and anticipating risk as best as possible. The big things to focus on with technology include prioritizing safety, data privacy, creating a plan, agenda, creating cohesive work flows, and creating intentional spaces for human connection and interaction, beyond the chat window.

People are learning to readapt to this moment, so they are trying out new online methods to hold meetings,

create art, hold panels and poetry readings, conferences, teach, learn. As people cannot physically see each other, it is important to create spaces virtually. We are seeing experimentation, a million first drafts, and some of them are yielding interesting things.

A cursory examination of Africa's position and potential in the 21st Digital Century reveals clear patterns of the appropriation of indigenous and endogenous intellectual, spiritual, cultural, and artefacts, and a displacement of Africa's creative sensibilities by dominant cultures.
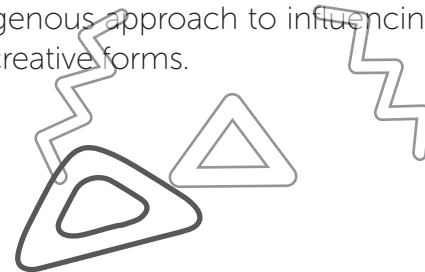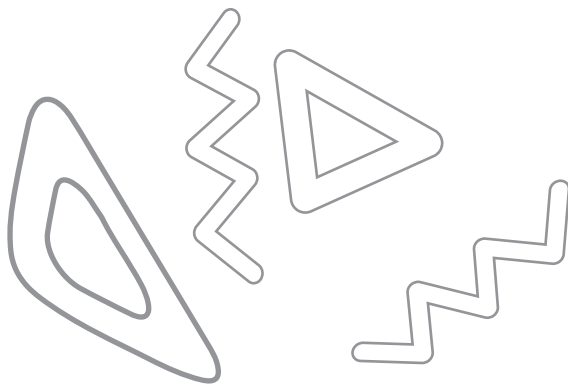
It is noteworthy that the young generation in many parts of Africa has been attracted by dominant cultures and has decided to move away from their cultural background. Though not always openly expressed, traditional values, knowledge, concepts and practices still play an important role. We premise that creatives can use this foundation to have a strong foothold to propel themselves in the new, dis-normalized era.

There is a need to invigorate new approaches to creativity supported by endogenous principles and forwarding looking, organic software

and technology development. Social practices that have shaped creative expression in African art include traditional ritual, magic, religion, masquerade and dance. Of course, this will require supporting structures that are lacking in the three focus countries of the case study.

While the continent has a deep pool of talent, it lacks the infrastructure and capacity to commercialise its creative talent and reap the vast fortunes that are lying in wait.

Our approach embodies a constructive and critical position, one that searches for possibilities to improve upon them, strengthening the capacity for learning, experimenting and changing is key in the process of enhancing the endogenous approach to influencing new creative forms.

The UNESCO's Framework for Cultural Statistics defines cultural and creative industries as:

1

Those sectors of organized activity that have as their main objective the production or reproduction,

2

The promotion, distribution or commercialization of goods, services and activities of content derived from cultural, artistic or heritage origins

A Short History of Creative Expression in Southern Africa

A Case of Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe

The three focus countries of the case study have had a long and common history of critical creative expression that questioned practices of politics and power in the old ages. This critical creative expression also underpinned liberation struggles in the three countries that incidentally have a shared history that predates colonial times. The culture of the region defined here as the totality of a people's way of life encompassing religion, arts, literature, language, traditions and beliefs was historically shaped by British colonialism.

Using Christianity as a weapon, the British colonial system made deliberate efforts to negate African performative cultures and instruments such as the mbira and the drum. The latter were labelled as devilish. The consequence was that indigenous people in the three countries were forced to abandon their ways of life in exchange for British colonial worldviews.

Chikowero, M (2015), states that "... the new African subject was constructed through the inscription of settler psychology, fear, guilt, and an inferiority complex, and the process depended on the deliberate disengagement and alienation – physical but also symbolic."

In brutal terms, there was a concerted effort to disarm and reengineer the African being with long terms effects that are still evident today where modern creatives shun from local creative forms and instruments. In fact, during the colonial period African creativity only received validation in as far as it mimicked that of the dominant colonial culture.

Nonetheless, during the colonial period and with the rise of liberation struggles across the continent, Africans in the Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe engaged in self-fashioning efforts to confront a racially politicized environment.
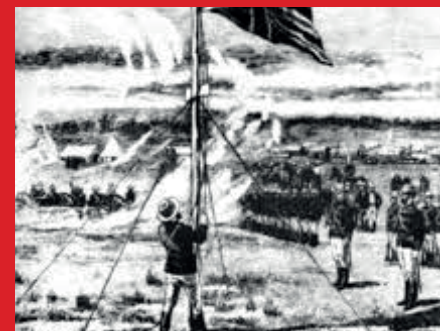
According to Chikowero, M (2015), leading the creative curve, musicians such as Dorothy Masuku discarded the conventional "copyrights" (western covers) ...to tell stories through her own compositions.

This kind of subversive creativity was fired by a defiant pan-African political consciousness. It was defiance in the face of a racist, colonial system.

In the spirit of the late renowned musician, Masuku – creativity in the region has been characterized by defiance. As the liberation wars raged, creatives began unearthing their lost traditional and cultural ways of expression to question the state of affairs. New creative forms were appropriated from other regions of Africa and mixed with regional influence in the process giving birth to new, cosmopolitan creative forms. Despite this long history in critical

"African creativity only received validation in as far as it mimicked that of the dominant colonial culture."

creative expression, there has been an underinvestment in the creative and cultural industries not only in the three countries but the continent as a whole. There has been a serious negation of indigenous epistemologies and an effort to reverse some of the damage that was inflicted during the colonial era.

Yet, as the 2010 UNCTAD report, states: "The growth is a confirmation that the creative industries hold great potential for developing countries that seek to diversify their economies and leapfrog into one of the most dynamic sectors of the world economy."

The importance of creative and cultural industries is not limited to their economic value however, as they are also key bearers of cultural traditions, moral values, worldviews, ideological assumptions and ideas.

For Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe to stake their place in the global arena of ideas and aesthetics, and to increase market share in the world's creative economy, there will need to be greater vision and political will on the part of both government
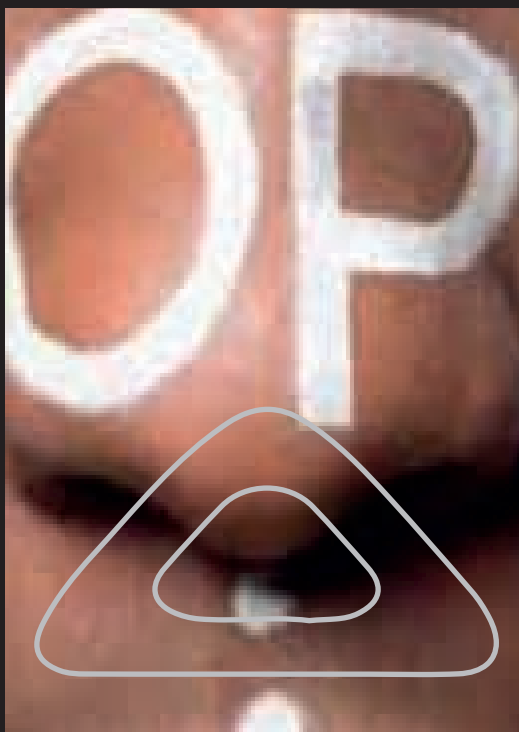
and the private sector to invest in all aspects of the value chain: education, creation, production, distribution and consumption.

The creative and cultural industries sector is characterised by micro and medium enterprises, by risk-taking and passionate creatives. What they most require is access to capital and business expertise.

Framing a New Way of Working for Creatives

Creatives that were interviewed as part of the case study were from multiple disciplines and are engaging in ways of working that radicalize and energize their creativity as resistance and re-existence. They demonstrate creativity of practice that emphasizes their agency as they react to the forces that shape their lives, including but not limited to COVID-19.

Venue-based sectors (such as museums, performing arts, galleries, exhibitions, live music, festivals, cinema, etc.) were the hardest hit by social distancing measures. The abrupt drop in revenues put their financial sustainability at risk and has resulted in reduced wage earnings and lay-offs with repercussions for the value chain of their suppliers, from creative and non-creative sectors alike.
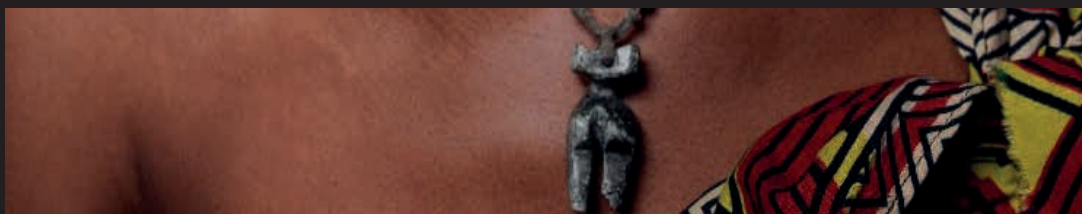
New ways of working that take root in the precedent set by creatives in the past of the region are urgently required. Not throwing out the past

for the sake of shiny new objects, but taking a clear-eyed look at what works, what we can improve, and where there are opportunities for smart, strategic growth.

In the new way of working, creatives have to innovate across the physical and digital realm yet monetization remains a significant challenge. Creatives in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe need to appreciate the digital divide that is so glaring in the three countries, and deliberately put in place measures that counter this divide. In other words, they have to employ both online and offline strategies that will enable not to forget millions of their people – 75+ % rural, under the age of 25 and majority women - that are still not online.

Key Findings of the Research Study

Many creatives we spoke to described experiencing a pressure to somehow maintain an active profile, stay relevant, and find some kind of artistic response to current events – but often with little promise of any tangible reward. Undoubtedly, many creatives have taken opportunities to develop new skills and expand their practice in new ways. However, their capacity to actually earn any money from this, or other jobs, remains fundamentally limited.

## Livelihoods and Wellbeing of Creatives are Under Serious Threat

A key outcome of the case study is that at the heart of the creative industry are people who have lives and livelihoods to look after just like anyone in society. Creatives are not immune to challenges that face the rest of society.

At the heart of the cultural and creative industries are people. Artists and creators who innovate, challenge norms, inspire and entertain. Their works generate new social energy, confidence and engagement that can improve the everyday lives of people. Their innovations and creative expressions drive development processes that can widen people's choices and inspire them to imagine alternative futures. As such, the cultural and creative industries can contribute to the promotion of peace, democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms, gender equality and the rule of law.
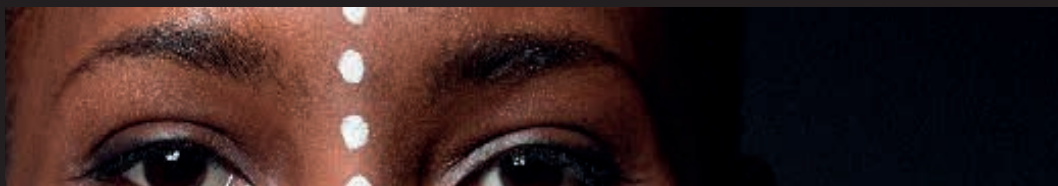
New policy solutions need to be found to address these and other emerging challenges to the status of creatives, to their rights to create without censorship or intimidation. Creatives must be involved at every stage of developing appropriate policies so they have a sense of ownership and accountability

Free Expression and Democracy Limitations in COVID-19 Context

Artistic expression and creativity are the cornerstones of the functioning of democratic societies.

- In the three countries, artistic expression and creativity are increasingly coming under threat due to intolerance by government.

- As the UN General Assembly Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur, Farida Shaheed, succinctly put it, "artists and creators need laws and regulations that promote artistic freedom, provide for their economic and social rights, that public sector financing is essential to make space for a diversity of cultural expressions."

Growing Corporatization and Commodification of the Creative Sector or 'Market Censorship'.

Furthermore, the case study revealed that there is a growing corporatization and commoditization of the creative sector with poor and hungry artists opting to fill their stomachs while compromising their creative output.

- Donor organizations in the three countries have also used their financial power to force creatives to put out works that are in many cases half-baked, agenda heavy or just not authentic. Due to a lack of sustainable livelihoods, creatives are often forced to opt for being paid at the expense of producing quality work. This new form of "market censorship" imposed by corporates and the donorization of creativity has the potential to take life out of critical creative expression in the three focus countries.

- The case study makes a key recommendation that it is key to increase the diversity of funding sources that can guarantee artistic autonomy and open spaces for all creative productions.

- This study acknowledges the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on the creative economy: we estimate significant losses in sales of goods and services, employment, and earnings for creative industries and creative occupations.
Due to limited research and documentation practices in the creative sector, the magnitude of the loss is difficult to quantify.

- According to UNESCO, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed and magnified the creative industries' pre-existing volatility.

- Due to the complex nature of their work, artists and cultural professionals are particularly affected and lockdown measures around the world directly impact the entire creative value chain –

creation, production, distribution and access.

- The case study confirmed that the creative sector in the three countries had been hit hard by the COVID-19 crisis with significant financial and job losses on the part of creatives.

Accelerated Digitisation of the Creative Sector

In addition, the crisis accelerated the digitization and online consumption of cultural content, creating new and unprecedented challenges for the diversity of cultural expressions.

- The market concentration of large platforms is indeed a problem for creatives in the region because it means that they are always at the mercy of algorithm driven, Silicon Valley led institutions where creatives have little to no recourse in the case of problems e.g. remuneration.

- Many new questions are emerging for the protection of artists rights and freedoms, the discoverability, recognition and fair remuneration for their creative works,

especially for women. The digital environment has also brought new threats to rights and freedoms.
Among them is online "trolling", where threats from other users can intimidate artists into withdrawing their work. Growing digital surveillance is also having a corrosive effect on artistic freedom.

Lack of Appropriate Policies for the Creative Sector

The lack of appropriate cultural policies that can propel the work of creatives emerged as a glaring gap.

- Some of the problems that exist in the creative sector are a result of poor policy making processes. The case study revealed that some of the new challenges for artists and creators such as lack of access to funding and social protection measures need to be addressed by cultural policy makers.

- Creatives in the region rely on informal cultural systems, processes and institutions.

Lack of Appropriate Policies for the Creative Sector

- Such environments leave many creatives beyond the reach of governance, regulation and investment opportunities, which is particularly harmful when considering the precarious state of artists' employment and social status.
Therefore, when crises such as COVID-19 hit, creatives in the region find themselves out in the cold.

Increase in Human Rights Violations to Creatives

In the three countries, there has been an increase in threats to human rights and creative freedoms that are weakening the fabric of democracy.

- Threats range from censorship by governments, corporations or political, religious or other groups, to imprisonment, physical threats, abductions, and even killings. For instance,

In undertaking the case study, we took a broad definition of creative ways of working blurring the imaginary boundaries that box creativity into compartments.

PEOPLE

In 2002, Malawi's reggae superstar, Evison Matafale, died mysteriously in police custody, on allegations of "publishing seditious material that could cause alarm and incite anarchy". Zimbabwe's top musician, Thomas Mapfumo was forced to flee into exile due to political intimidation. In Zambia, musician Chama Fumba, 31, was arrested in 2017 over a song that officials said defamed the president, Edgar Lungu.

Under- Representation of Women in the Creative Sector

The investigation revealed a serious under-representation of women in the creative sector in the three countries.

The underrepresentation of women is a long-standing challenge in the cultural and creative sector in the regions, and efforts need to be put in place to redress this matter.

Changing Audience Expectations and Shortening Attention Spans

Another key outcome of the investigation is that creatives are increasingly producing critical online content in a landscape where attention spans are becoming shorter.

- Getting attention in the digital space is increasingly a hard sell. Many of the audiences that are online are easily distracted. This is putting serious pressure on the productive capacity of creatives.

- Many creatives are putting out work that gets little to no traction across digital platforms.

In this cluttered digital age, creatives have to work twice as hard, employing innovative storytelling approaches that can help them to grab potential audience attention. Meeting audiences in the right place, with the right messaging, and during the right time in their day is a winning attention formula for creatives.

Key Recommendations for NWoWC Framework

As creatives confront their global futures in current and hopefully post-pandemic contexts decisions to put in practice new ways of working will take on a renewed sense of urgency in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The following are seventeen key sets of recommendations that emerged from the case study.

1. Promoting the Wellbeing of Creatives:

The prosperity of the creative sector requires that the wellbeing of creatives to be considered. Issues related to income, social benefits and working conditions of creatives need to be put under the spotlight at policy level so that creatives are cushioned from future crises. Introduce measures for the recovery to help the self-employed and other creative projects adapt to structural changes (e.g. shifts in audience habits) and seize new opportunities, including digital tools. Creatives also need to take care of their own mental health. Therefore, raising mental health awareness increases the chances of creatives seeking professional help and educates them about the importance of keeping mentally healthy.

2. Develop a Creative Economy Recovery Strategy:

A substantial and sustained national creative-economy recovery strategy is required in the three countries. This strategy must be bottom-up but supported across the board and led by local public-private partnerships between the local government, arts and cultural organizations, economic development and community groups, donors, and the private sector, with support from government, donors, and large corporations.

3. Building Safe Spaces for Young Women and Upcoming Creatives to Flourish:

We propose the creation of safe spaces for young women to practice creativity without fear or judgment. But this should not preclude collaboration or working with males, whose preponderance of privilege or key knowledge, access and empowerment provides a staging platform for mentorship, curation and guidance.

4. Develop Localized Technological Solutions and Platforms for Creatives:

As Southern Africa becomes increasingly (and rapidly) online, the region's entire creative landscape has the potential to mature and diversify. However, there is a need for an endogenous approach that contextualizes technology as opposed

to merely adopting already existing technologies. Digital communication has the potential to act as the sustainable catalyst of the creative sectors in the target countries, but it needs to be grounded in contextual realities. Creative project should be underlined by the following: relevance, appropriateness, value, development, enablement.

African creatives are increasingly adopting social media as a tool for reaching out to new audiences, supported by increasingly reliable broadband infrastructure. While social media has proved a key tool for creatives especially in the face of COVID-19, the tools are largely Silicon Valley-driven and come with a price tag that is hidden.

However, opportunities are plenty:

Massive digitalisation coupled with emerging technologies, such as virtual and augmented realities, can create new forms of cultural experience, dissemination and new business models with market potential.

There is a growing awareness though that technologies developed under one set of conditions may not be effective under other economic, ecological, and socio-cultural situations.

According to OECD, while the provision of free and digitally mediated cultural content is not sustainable over time, it has opened the door to many future innovations. Now is an opportune time for creatives in the region to start designing and launching platforms that can stand their own against the Silicon Valley led platforms. There is a need to invest in digital infrastructure that can amplify advances in cultural and creative sectors.

5. Engender a Philosophical Framework of a Creativity of Practice:

Creativity of practice defined as the ways in which societies compose and invent themselves in the present provides a framework for understanding how the people actively rewrite their histories and invent their futures. Collectivism is key to this conception of creativity of practice, which is characterized by collaboration and a subject-centered communality that counters the hyper-individualism that defines and is promoted by the neoliberal art-world.

6. Enable processes to discover rural based creatives:

In the endogenous approach to creativity, rural based creatives need to play an active role. Rural based creatives have tended to be left out of creative projects in the region. Deliberate efforts are required to enable, empower and recognize age old skills, approaches and techniques. Adaptation and reinterpretation become critical. It is unconscionable and unsustainable to ignore or de prioritize the majority of our populations.

7. Equip Creatives with Advanced Social Media Management Skills:

The invention of social media has marked a historic milestone in global and local culture. That is because social networks have brought together communities that used to be remote and geographically isolated. They have also enabled these communities to be more densely networked, increasing the speed and intensity of collaboration. Now that the cultural influence of these communities does not depend on a single authority anymore, they have a direct and substantial effect - culture can now rely on the crowd.
We are in the era of crowd culture. Crowd culture fostered two different and intertwined phenomena: subcultures and art worlds.

To capture this magnificent potential, there is a need to address the digital skills shortages within the creative sector and improve digital access beyond urban areas, with the additional consideration that digital access does not replace live cultural experiences or all the jobs that go with it.

8. Develop new local collaboration strategies that support critical cultural and creative expression and catalysts of new models of economic and social value creation:

While creatives have a key role to play in society its foolhardy for them to expects handouts on a silver platter. Creatives have lives to live. Thus, it is vital for them touncover models that can ensure their self-reliance. Creatives have an ability to live in multiple worlds. They can use this sensibility to blur worlds and engage in a variety of activities that are founded in creativity.

In practical terms, creatives can tap into culture, food, design, and art with a singular to build models that are profitable and can provide value to society. This proposed approach requires an amalgamation of minds. It is founded in collaboration.

Creativity has long been thought to be an individual act. Collaboration is now necessary. We recommend that creatives collaborate at local, national and regional levels. The most radical creatives will likely emerge from a collaborative web as opposed to isolated, individual work. Creatives in the three countries need to realize that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts through working together and a collective. The most transformative creativity results when a group either thinks of a new way to frame a problem or finds a new problem that no one had noticed before.

9. On Creatives Becoming Influencers:

The social media influencer model has percolated the digital culture in the region so creatives might as well piggyback on it building themselves into influencers. Influencers have an easy time walking through this new culture simply because they are it. They help in building the new cultural landscape, they embrace it and represent it - and if they cannot find a subculture that fits them, they create one. They are not just influencers, but innovators and they are leading the art worlds into directions never thought before. Influencers are people that are leading the conversations and forming large communities around them that follow their every word. Creatives need to establish ways to tap into the values and characteristics that this generation represents.

10. Site Specific Creative Expression:

With reduced demand for large cultural and creative events as a result of social distancing, there is an opportunity for communities to shift to locally sourced culture and performance areas. Communities can develop strategies to hire local creatives and create online portals and platforms to allow residents to hire local artists, musicians, and performers for smaller-scale, local events. Africa is richly blessed with unique locations, beautiful landscapes and zones of silence or anonymity that can be translated into new and exciting venues. Local tourism emerges as having this grand potential (eco-tourism, cultural tourism and regional upliftment).

11. Self-Organizing Improvisational Creativity:

We recommend improvisational creative expressions that are self-organizing. With no director and no script, the creative expressions emerge from the joint actions of the actors. Creatives can restructure themselves in response to unexpected shifts in the environment; they don't need a strong leader to tell them what to do. Moreover, they tend to form spontaneously; when like-minded people find each other, a group emerges. It's riskier and less efficient, but when a successful innovation emerges, it's often so surprising and imaginative that no single individual could have thought of it.

12. Aesthetic Intelligence:

There is power inherent in utilizing aesthetics as strategic advantage in the creative approach. Eurocentric aesthetic and theoretical frameworks have long been used in critical and art-historical writing on African creativity, obscuring it with colonial epistemological matrices that are difficult to shake. Creatives need to engage in active process of reimagining the past in order to reinvent and unveil new models of creative. When creatives can tap into endogenously driven aesthetics, they are able to develop creative productions that give them a unique standing. This appreciation of aesthetic can propel the creative impulse and management system.

Why a Multi-Media Strategy Matters

Repurposing creativity in the post-COVID-19 era will require lateral thinking and approaches that are powered by data, scaled by a multi-platform strategy, and optimized by analytics. A multi-media strategy that brings together creatives and creative content from across the region will likely attract a wider audience that individual efforts. Multimedia is electronically delivered combination of media including video, still images, audio and text to send the required message to the audience. It is an extension of traditional audio-visual experience. Multimedia means – always on, multi-channel and multi-dimension communication.

A multimedia strategy will allow critical online content creators to reach out to audiences on more than one medium. Multimedia strategies involve a broad range of mediums, from motion graphics to social-media micro-narratives to interactive landing pages. Juggling all of these at once is not an easy task. Based on the creative strategy on hand, tactics to include one or more are:

- Motion graphics
- Interactive infographics, widgets, or landing pages
- Ebooks
- Social-media micronarratives
- Infographics
- Presentations
- Video
- Text
- Sound

At the outset, it will be vital to define a visual language. A visual language outlines the design style, fonts, color palette, icon style, among others. A visual language will ensure that materials maintain a consistent look and feel. In today's technology driven world, multimedia plays a crucial role in mobile broadcasting, live casting and podcasting, photo, video and file sharing, which can spread the word about a creative project and help build awareness in a very unique and powerful way.

When a creative project uses a multimedia strategy it can target a bigger audience and better fulfil the needs of that audience by having a concise and accessible message. While developing the strategy, creatives will work on the different characteristics of the multimedia strategy like multiple media, non-linearity, interactivity, integrity and digital representation. It also allows integrating all the media such as video, audio, pictures and graphics at one place.

Conclusion ▷

Fueled by the current reality, the race to become digitally-savvy creatives while embracing the ground reality of disconnected millions of people in the region has never been greater. Besides technology, there is a need to foster new ways of working that can unite creatives across national boundaries and build innovative solutions to the challenges made worse by the pandemic.

People in creative industries in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe have seen their work undervalued for decades. Artists, photographers, writers and more are expected to work "for exposure" or have their rates severely undercut. While the three countries may boom with creative talent, they have so far has not been able to profit much from it.

One reason why creatives are exploited is that it is assumed they are doing it out of passion and not a means to make a living. Not only are creative jobs more likely to be underpaid, but creatives are often expected to do work without pay.

In March, as people searched for entertainment during lockdown, creativity flourished. With nowhere to go and a limited amount of things to do, quarantine unveiled creativity some may have never explored before.

If examined closely, one can already observe abundant creativity and innovation emerging at the national, institutional, organizational, and individual levels within the countries affected by COVID-19.

One reason why creatives are exploited is that it is assumed they are doing it out of passion and not a means to make a living. Not only are creative jobs more likely to be underpaid, but creatives are often expected to do work without pay.

Technology is the golden thread running throughout: More than perhaps any other region, Africa is piloting digitally enabled breakthroughs that can aid in surmounting entrenched barriers and unlocking exponential progress. The potential for digital hubs has to be revisited as they are a springboard for accelerated growth of creativity.

Creatives have a right to have their work supported, distributed and remunerated. They are entitled to their rights to freedom of movement, expression and of association. To their rights to social protection and to citizens' rights to participate in cultural life of their choosing. To freedom of conscience and the pursuit of happiness, fulfilment and representation.

In a post- COVID-19 world, creativity is going to be ranked higher because of its capacity to homogenize values, relieve stress and communicate positive messages for example health, communal aspirations and envisioning the future. Creatives have their work cut out for them. With the right philosophical approach and a determination for self-reliance, creatives In Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe have a huge opportunity to turn the page and unlock the value that is inherent in critical online content creation.

The potential for digital hubs has to be revisited as they are a springboard for accelerated growth of creativity.

References

Grey A. 2016. The 10 skills you need to thrive in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. World Economic Forum (Accessed October 11, 2020: https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/the-10-skills-you-need-to-thrive-in-the-fourth-industrial-revolution/)

Langevang T et al. 2017 Creativity: Africa's new gold? (Accessed 15 October 2020: http://www.bos-cbscsr.dk/2017/05/30/creativity-africas-new-gold/)

Creativity and Innovation in Times of Crisis (COVID-19) (Accessed on 01 October 2020: https://www.frontiersin.org/research-topics/13833/creativity-and-innovation-in-times-of-crisis-covid-19)

Sawyer, K. 2007. Group Genius_ The Creative Power of Collaboration. Basic Books.
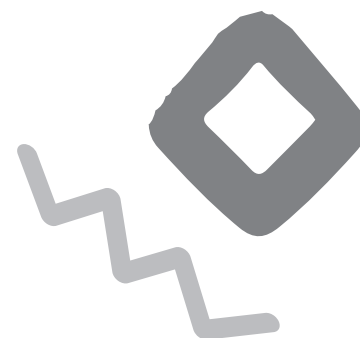
African Creative Industries: The Sleeping Giant. African Business Magazine. (Accessed online on October 18, 2020: https://africanbusinessmagazine.com/uncategorised/african-creative-industries-the-sleeping-giant/)

Culture and Working Conditions for Artists. Implementing the 1980 Recommendation Concerning the Status of the Artist. 2020. UNESCO. (Accessed online on 16 October 2020: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000371790)

Protecting the diversity of cultural expressions is more important than ever, UNESCO (Accessed online on 15 October 2020: https://en.unesco.org/creativity/covid-19)

Lemu M. 2019. Creativity of practice in African townships: a framework for performance art. Contemporary (Accessed on October 21, 2020 online at: http://contemporary.burlington.org.uk/journal/journal/creativity-of-practice-in-african-townships-a-framework-for-performance-art)

OECD. 2020. Culture shock: COVID-19 and the cultural and creative sectors (Accessed 10 October 2020: https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/culture-shock-covid-19-and-the-cultural-and-creative-sectors-08da9e0e/)

Email: info@geronimo.co.zw
Tel: +263 242 772 665

Hivos Regional Office for Southern Africa
20 Phillips Avenue, Belgravia
PO Box 2227
Harare, Zimbabwe
t : 263 242 706 125/ 706 704/250 463
e : Info@hivos.org
y @hivosrosa
f @hivossouthernafrica
: Http://southern-africa.hivos.org