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Beyond the Applause

Africa's creative economy and the Africa–Europe partnerships that build lasting value

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ABOUT THIS PAPER

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Executive summary

African music, film, fashion and games now draw audiences around the world. Applause, however, is not the same as income. Africa's creative economy is growing, but growth in audiences does not automatically translate into earnings for creators, enterprises and rights holders. Finance, distribution, rights management, payment systems and market conditions determine what reaches them.

The creative economy spans music, film and audiovisual production, festivals, design, fashion and textiles, publishing, games and the visual and performing arts. Across Africa, young people take part as creators, entrepreneurs, consumers and early adopters of digital technology.

Africa is home to about 1.5 billion people, and by 2050 about one in four people worldwide will be African. It is the world's youngest continent, with a median age of about 19 (UN DESA 2024). Creative industries are an important source of employment and entrepreneurship for young people worldwide (UNCTAD 2022).

Boston Consulting Group (BCG) estimates Africa's creative exports at US$58–59 billion, less than 3 percent of global creative trade. If Africa doubles its share by 2030, these exports could reach US$140–150 billion (Ivers et al. 2026).

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) provides a framework for trade in creative goods and services across the continent.

The European Union is Africa's largest trading partner and its largest source of foreign direct investment, with trade of US$367 billion in 2024 (Schrolle and Verhoeven 2025). For European firms, Africa's creative economy offers a young and growing audience, new content and catalogues, traceable supply chains, and a share in the growth of new markets.

Technology shapes how creative work reaches audiences and how it earns. Mobile money, developed and scaled in Africa through services such as Kenya's M-Pesa and MTN Group's MoMo, lets people send, receive and store money by phone. Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for two-thirds of the value of global mobile money transactions in 2025, about US$1.4 trillion (GSMA 2026), and the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS) now links more than 30 countries for payments in local currencies (TechEconomy 2026). Most of the platforms, app stores and cloud services that distribute African creative work internationally are operated by companies headquartered outside the continent.

The experience of international streaming services shows the commercial pressures facing particular business models in African markets: production costs, currency volatility, fragmented payment systems and cost structures built for other markets (Nzekwe 2024; Daily Maverick 2026). Over the same period, recorded music and games continued to grow (IFPI 2026; Carry1st and Newzoo 2026).

Strengthening these systems creates opportunities for jobs, enterprise, investment and trade between Africa and Europe. This paper sets out where the sector stands, what shapes its growth, and the pathways through which African and European partners can build value together.

Key findings

1. **The market is growing across value chains,** but from a small base. Africa accounts for under 3 percent of global creative trade, while music, games and digital media show measurable growth.

2. **Audience growth does not automatically translate into revenue.** Streaming services including Showmax, Netflix and Prime Video have cut back or closed in African markets, showing how hard it is for some business models to finance, distribute and earn from content.

3. **Payments and rights shape what creators earn.** Sub-Saharan Africa leads the world in mobile money, while cross-border payment costs, currency conversion, taxation and uneven rights collection affect how revenue reaches creators and enterprises.

4. **Value retained depends on processing and ownership.** In fashion and textiles, publishing and audiovisual production, the economic value retained in Africa grows with investment in local capabilities, intellectual property, commercial relationships and market access.

5. **Europe brings a distinctive combination of instruments, but many do not yet reach creative enterprises directly.** Europe combines trade agreements, development finance, standards, co-production treaties and commitments under the 2005 UNESCO Convention.

6. **Suitable capital and investment readiness are both limited.** Creative industries received less than 1 percent of African venture capital in 2024. Early-stage finance is scarce, and fragmented market data makes commercial risk harder to assess.

7. **The pathways are identifiable.** They include market integration through the AfCFTA, creative and digital infrastructure linked to government flagships, local processing and traceable supply, interoperable payments, tax treaties, co-production and licensing, early-stage finance through specialised intermediaries, the diaspora and returning talent, and shared market intelligence.

1. Where the sector stands

Africa's creative economy comprises connected value chains across music, film and audiovisual production, festivals, design, fashion and textiles, crafts, publishing, games, architecture, heritage, and the visual and performing arts.

Where activities take place, and who controls the assets, intellectual property and commercial relationships, determine the value each chain generates. In fashion, the chain runs from cotton and textile processing to design, garment manufacturing, branding and retail. In film, it runs from equipment and technical services through production and post-production to distribution and licensing. Activity that takes place in Africa is distinct from the revenue, intellectual property and profits retained by African enterprises, and available data rarely separates the two.

The data shows growth across several markets, with performance varying by subsector.

Value chain	Latest figures
Music	Sub-Saharan Africa's recorded music revenue rose 15.2% in 2025, to US$120 million.
Games	Forecast at US$1.98 billion in 2026, with about 406 million players, growing almost twice as fast as the global market.
Entertainment and media	Annual growth to 2029 of 7.2% in Nigeria and 5.2% in Kenya, where online advertising is among the fastest-growing worldwide.
Rights	About €90 million collected in 2024, 0.6% of global collections.
Publishing	US$597 million in book imports and US$81 million in exports in 2023.
Fashion and textiles	About US$31 billion across the full value chain, of which creative segments account for US$12.4–18.6 billion. In Sub-Saharan Africa, more than 81% of raw cotton was exported unprocessed in 2022.
Employment	3.2 million creative jobs in Nigeria and 680,000 in South Africa (2019, the latest national figures).

Each indicator identifies potential opportunities for partners, with commercial viability depending on costs, demand and conditions in each market. Growth in games and digital advertising creates demand for distribution, technology, local content and investment. Unprocessed cotton points to textile processing, manufacturing and traceable supply chains that meet new European market requirements. The publishing trade gap points to local printing, distribution and co-publishing. Rising royalty collections point to licensing and rights administration.

The data gap

Estimates of Africa's creative economy come from different countries, subsectors, methods and years, and continental coverage is incomplete. Headline figures often measure different things. BCG estimates Africa's creative exports against global creative trade of about US$2 trillion, close to the US$2.1 trillion in global creative exports that UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) records for 2022, while Brookings projects that the whole sector could reach US$200 billion by 2030 (Ivers et al. 2026; UNCTAD 2024; Signé 2026). Estimates of the same market also vary with definitions and methods: for 2024, Africa's games market was estimated at US$1.8 billion by Carry1st and Newzoo and at US$2.14 billion by Mordor Intelligence (Carry1st 2025; Mordor Intelligence 2024). Some national employment and enterprise statistics are several years old.

Two limitations matter most. Informal employment and enterprise activity mean that standard business and labour statistics capture only part of creative production and trade (Mastercard Foundation 2026). And much of the data on digital consumption, audience behaviour and transactions is held by private platforms, which limits its use for independent research and market analysis.

As a result, governments plan with incomplete evidence, financial institutions lack consistent data to assess creditworthiness and risk, and investors struggle to estimate market size, revenue and returns. African institutions, working with European statistical agencies, research organisations and financial institutions, can build these capabilities under national ownership and with consistent methods.

2. What constrains growth and value capture

Growth in creative output and audiences has exposed constraints in the systems through which creative activity generates revenue and attracts investment. This section looks first at what recent changes in streaming show, then sets out seven constraints, and ends with how value is distributed.

What the streaming experience shows

Three major streaming services operating in African markets changed course between 2024 and 2026. Their circumstances differ, but together they show several of the constraints set out below.

- **Amazon Prime Video** stopped commissioning new originals in Africa and the Middle East in January 2024, as part of a wider restructuring (TechCrunch 2024).

- **Netflix** reportedly reduced its Nigerian originals in 2024, with industry leaders citing production costs, currency volatility, fragmented digital payments and inflation. Netflix stated that it is "not exiting Nigeria" (Nzekwe 2024).

- **Showmax** relaunched in 2024 with NBCUniversal on technology adapted from the US service Peacock. MultiChoice reported trading losses for Showmax of about US$155 million in the financial year to March 2024 and about US$290 million in the year to March 2025, when revenue was about US$45 million. Canal+ described the service as "not a commercial success," and it closed in April 2026. Press analysis points to a cost structure built for Western broadband markets, set against mobile-first viewing, high data costs and price sensitivity, alongside rising content and sports rights costs (Daily Maverick 2026; Connecting Africa 2026).

These cases describe particular business models within a creative economy that continues to grow.

Seven constraints

Between an audience and a creator's income sits a chain of systems: the infrastructure that produces and distributes work, the markets it crosses, the payments that collect money, the currencies and taxes it passes through, the rights that assign it, and the capital that lets enterprises grow. Where any link is weak, value is lost before it reaches creators and enterprises. Seven constraints stand out. They fall into three groups: market access and distribution, revenue generation and collection, and enterprise development and investment. They interact, and progress on one supports progress on another.

Market access and distribution

Infrastructure. Creative work needs infrastructure to produce, such as studios, post-production, textile processing and venues, and infrastructure to distribute work to audiences, such as cinemas, connectivity and platforms. Africa is the continent least served by cinemas, with about one screen per 787,000 people in UNESCO's most recent estimate (UNESCO 2021). Digital access is a separate constraint: 36 percent of Africa's population used the internet in 2025, against 74 percent worldwide (ITU 2025), and data costs shape what audiences can stream. Much of the digital infrastructure that carries creative content is owned outside the continent. Ownership alone does not determine commercial outcomes; bargaining power, distribution terms, access to audience data and revenue shares do.

Fragmented markets. National regulations, licensing regimes, payment systems and currencies raise the cost of reaching audiences across borders, as Showmax and Netflix both experienced. The continental free trade framework provides a basis for reducing these barriers, with implementation at different stages for goods, services, intellectual property and digital trade.

Revenue generation and collection

Payments. Mobile money has expanded access to domestic payments, and Sub-Saharan Africa has the largest share of adults who hold only a mobile money account (World Bank 2025). Interoperability with international platforms remains uneven. Many platforms and app stores are built around card payments, so some audiences willing to pay cannot do so easily, and creators face the same gap when receiving income. Stripe, a payment processor used by many creator platforms, offers direct processing in only a few African countries (Salami 2025). Substack uses Stripe as its sole payment provider and advises writers in unsupported countries to set up a company and bank account in the United States (Substack 2026). Many creators use local payment companies and mobile money instead.

Currency. Firms that pay for imported equipment, licences, software or platform fees in dollars or euros while earning in local currency carry foreign-currency exposure, and depreciation raises their costs. In Nigeria, currency volatility and inflation have raised production costs (Nzekwe 2024).

Cross-border taxes. Platform earnings can be subject to withholding tax at source. YouTube withholds between 0 and 30 percent of earnings from US viewers for creators outside the United States, with 30 percent applied where no tax treaty reduces the rate (Google 2026). Tax treaties can reduce withholding and provide relief from double taxation, depending on how income is classified and where the earner is resident. Agreements between African and European countries play a similar role for earnings from European platforms and audiences.

Rights collection. African authors' societies collected about €90 million in 2024, up 14.2 percent, the fastest growth of any region, and about 0.6 percent of global collections of €13.97 billion (CISAC 2025). Where works are used but rights are not registered, licensed or collected, the revenue does not reach creators. In film, UNESCO identifies piracy as a significant source of lost revenue, while noting that precise data does not exist (UNESCO 2021).

Enterprise development and investment

Capital and investment readiness. Most creative enterprises are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). BCG, drawing on the African Fashion Development Initiative, reports that more than 90 percent of African fashion businesses operate with minimal capital, typically between US$300 and US$1,000. In venture capital, one financing channel among several, creative industries received less than 1 percent of African investment in 2024, with US$1.5 million in publicly disclosed deals, while fintech raised US$1.35 billion (Ivers et al. 2026). Development finance and investment funds typically require ticket sizes and due diligence that small firms cannot meet, and creative firms earn through projects, seasons and royalties that standard lending products do not easily accommodate.

Suitable capital and investment readiness are both limited, and the two reinforce each other. Firms need early-stage capital, including pre-seed and seed investment, to develop products, rights and revenue models, and investors need the skills to value intellectual property, catalogues and project-based revenue. Where both are present, an investable pipeline forms. Specialised intermediaries help build it by aggregating smaller enterprises and projects, strengthening documentation, structuring investment opportunities and supporting due diligence.

How value is distributed

The location of creative production does not determine where its economic returns are retained. Ownership of intellectual property, contracts, distribution infrastructure, payment systems and access to capital determine how revenue is distributed. Nigerian artists' more than 30 billion Spotify streams in 2025 generated about US$43.8 million in revenue, with independent artists and labels accounting for about 58 percent of royalties generated (Music In Africa 2026). This measures revenue generated by Nigerian artists' music, not payments received in Nigeria: rights holders include labels and publishers on and off the continent. The share retained shapes the capacity of African enterprises to reinvest, build assets and attract finance.
Addressing these constraints requires coordinated investment in infrastructure, payment and rights systems, enterprise capability and appropriate financing, and institutions and intermediaries that connect creative enterprises to markets and capital.

3. Africa's international partners

Africa's creative economy is connected to international partners through technology, investment, trade, financing and cultural cooperation. These partners contribute different forms of capital, technology, market access and institutional cooperation to the systems identified in Section 2. The examples below are illustrative, not exhaustive, and are not a ranking.

Partner	Main channels	Illustrative examples
China	Devices, broadcasting, music streaming	Transsion, maker of Tecno, Infinix and itel phones, accounted for 48 percent of smartphone shipments in Africa in 2025 (Omdia 2026) and launched the music streaming service Boomplay. StarTimes operates pay television across the continent.
Gulf states	Film funding and festivals	Saudi Arabia's Red Sea Fund supports filmmakers from the Arab world, Africa and Asia, and backed 30 projects in its first two 2026 funding cycles (Asharq Al-Awsat 2026), and the Doha Film Institute funds African projects among others (Gulf Times 2026).
United States	Platforms, investment promotion	Netflix, YouTube, Amazon and the major app stores distribute much African content. Prosper Africa, a US government initiative, has worked to connect US investors with African creative firms (Chironda 2024).
Europe	Commercial investment; trade, finance and cultural cooperation	Commercial: Canal+ took control of MultiChoice in 2025 after final regulatory approval in July (TheCable 2025), and Universal Music Group agreed in 2024 to acquire a majority stake in Nigeria's Mavin Records (Africanews 2024). Public: Africa-Europe Partnerships for Culture, a €30 million EU initiative implemented by the Goethe-Institut, supports artists, professionals and festivals (ThisDay 2025).

Creative exchange and soft power

Creative exchange also carries influence, often described as soft power. Music, film, fashion and festivals shape how audiences see a country, and that recognition supports tourism, trade and investment over time. Between Africa and Europe, this influence runs in both directions. Partnerships that share financing, rights and returns build the familiarity and trust on which commercial relationships grow. For Africa and Europe, the opportunity lies in applying existing instruments more effectively, developing new arrangements where gaps remain, and building the capabilities needed to translate cooperation into investment and trade.

Europe's role

Europe's position combines established trade and investment relationships, regulatory frameworks, development finance, cultural cooperation and commitments under the 2005 UNESCO Convention. Taken collectively, the EU is Africa's most important trading partner, with trade of about US$367 billion in 2024, and holds the largest stock of foreign direct investment on the continent, US$254 billion in 2023, ahead of the United States, the United Kingdom and China (Schrolle and Verhoeven 2025). The benefits run both ways. African enterprises can gain access to capital, markets, technology and distribution, while European firms can access growing audiences, invest in content and intellectual property catalogues, develop supply chains and participate in expanding markets.

German institutions already take part across these channels: the Goethe-Institut implements the EU's culture partnership, Germany funds cotton development assistance, and German and South African producers can co-produce under a bilateral film treaty.

In the Luanda Joint Declaration of November 2025, African Union and European Union leaders committed to "promote the sustainable development of value chains to enhance the capacity of local industries" and to "ensuring fair remuneration for creators and the sustainable circulation of cultural goods" (AU–EU 2025, paras. 9, 21).

The effectiveness of these mechanisms depends on their accessibility to creative enterprises, on African institutional leadership and domestic regulatory environments, and on commercially viable projects. The table below maps Europe's main instruments against the constraints set out in Section 2.

Constraint (Section 2)	Instrument	Status	What partners can do
Market access	EU Economic Partnership Agreements: duty-free, quota-free access for qualifying goods from several African countries (European Commission 2024).	Operational; terms and rules of origin differ by agreement.	Help creative exporters meet rules of origin and buyer requirements, and extend cooperation to services, licensing and distribution.
Infrastructure	The EU's Africa-Europe Global Gateway Investment Package, a framework with a €150 billion mobilisation target covering connectivity, energy and transport (European Commission 2022).	Operational framework; the figure is a target, not funding allocated to the creative economy.	Bring forward creative production and distribution projects, such as studios, hubs and digital platforms, where projects are eligible and commercially viable and participating institutions can finance them.
Cross-border taxes	Bilateral double taxation agreements between individual European and African countries.	Operational where agreements exist; no common framework.	Review how royalty and service income from creative work is treated in existing agreements and new negotiations.
Rights administration	Reciprocal agreements between European and African collecting societies.	Operational; effectiveness uneven.	Strengthen registration, reporting and licensing capacity so cross-border royalties are collected and distributed.
Product standards	EU Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation: textile requirements, including a digital product passport, indicatively due for adoption in 2027, applying after a transition period (European Union 2024; European Commission 2025).	Forthcoming.	Prepare producers for traceability and product information requirements, alongside buyer partnerships, certification and pricing.

Constraint (Section 2)	Instrument	Status	What partners can do
Co-production	Bilateral film co-production treaties, such as South Africa's treaty with Germany, which give qualifying productions national status in both countries.	Operational between signatory countries.	Use existing treaties and extend them to more country pairs.
Preferential treatment	Article 16 of the 2005 UNESCO Convention commits developed-country parties, including the EU and its member states, to preferential treatment for artists, cultural professionals and creative goods and services from developing countries (UNESCO 2005). The EU applied it through a cultural cooperation protocol in its 2008 agreement with Caribbean states (European Commission n.d.-a).	Commitment in force; application to African partners would require specific arrangements.	Translate the commitment into practical arrangements for artist mobility, distribution and market access.
Capital	Guarantees under the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+), which operate through eligible financial institutions and investment structures, and European development finance institutions.	Operational; not direct finance for creative enterprises.	Structure guarantees and facilities to reach smaller creative enterprises through local banks, funds and specialised intermediaries that aggregate transactions and prepare firms for investment.

4. Markets and pathways

This section identifies pathways through which African and European partners can address the constraints set out in Section 2. Each pathway responds to one of those constraints and sets out the commercial opportunity, what partners can do, and how the resulting value can be retained and shared.

Market integration

Responds to fragmented markets. By September 2026, 50 of the AfCFTA's 54 signatory states, with a combined GDP of about US$3.4 trillion, had ratified the Agreement (African Development Bank 2025). Its Protocol on Digital Trade was adopted in 2024, and the annexes to its Protocol on Intellectual Property Rights, adopted in February 2026, cover copyright, related rights and traditional cultural expressions. Services commitments so far cover transport, communications, tourism, financial and business services (tralac 2026). Intra-African trade reached US$213.8 billion in 2025 (Afreximbank 2026). As implementation progresses, governments can bring creative and audiovisual services into the next round of negotiations, and European firms can build distribution, licensing and supply chains across several markets under common rules. The benefits depend on ratification, implementation and enforcement.

Creative infrastructure and flagship markets

Responds to infrastructure. Government flagships in sport, festivals and landmark venues concentrate demand for broadcasting, content, design, events, merchandise and hospitality. Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda will co-host the Africa Cup of Nations from 19 June to 17 July 2027 (CAF 2026). In Ghana, international arrivals in December, the peak of the festival and concert season, rose 11.35 percent in 2025, to 141,186 (MyJoyOnline 2026). Flagships build lasting value when procurement reserves a share of contracts for local creative firms, when venues and studios have operating plans for year-round commercial use, and when broadcasting and media rights agreements build domestic production capability. European development finance is already active here: Proparco has committed up to US$20 million, alongside up to US$30 million from the International Finance Corporation (IFC), to Helios Sports and Entertainment Group's US$75 million vehicle, which invests in sports rights, events, infrastructure and hospitality (IFC 2025; AllAfrica 2025). Digital infrastructure carries the fastest-growing segments. Africa's games market is forecast to reach US$1.98 billion in 2026, with about 406 million players, growing almost twice as fast as the global market (Carry1st and Newzoo 2026). Global Gateway's connectivity investments support these markets, and studios, creative hubs, platforms and payment links may also qualify where projects meet its eligibility criteria and participating institutions can finance them, creating openings for European technology firms, investors and publishers.

Processing and traceable supply

Responds to market access and value retention. Sub-Saharan countries exported more than 81 percent of their raw cotton unprocessed in 2022, while garments made from cotton are worth more than ten times as much (UNESCO 2023; WTO 2026). The EU plans to adopt textile requirements under its Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation in the fourth quarter of 2027, including a digital product passport, on an indicative timeline (European Commission n.d.-b). European brands and retailers will need suppliers that can document origin, materials and processing. Investment in spinning, weaving, garment manufacturing and traceability systems positions African producers to meet that demand and gives European buyers diversified, compliant supply. Value is retained when processing, design and brand ownership move onto the continent alongside raw material supply.

Interoperable payments

Responds to payments and currency. PAPSS operates in more than 30 countries and connects 24 central banks and more than 200 commercial banks and payment service providers. Between comparable periods of 2025 and 2026, its transaction volumes rose about 1,000 percent and values about 120 percent (TechEconomy 2026). The next step for the creative economy is integration at the point of sale and payout: linking mobile money and local payment companies to international platforms, app stores and creator tools, so that audiences can pay and creators can be paid in local currency. European payment providers, platforms and banks can partner with African payment companies to build these links. Lower conversion and transfer costs increase the share of each sale that reaches creators.

Tax treaties

Responds to cross-border taxes. African and European governments can review how royalties, licensing fees and platform earnings are treated in existing and new double taxation agreements. Depending on how income is classified and on domestic rules, clearer treaty provisions can reduce withholding on creative income and give firms on both sides more predictable returns.

Rights, co-production and licensing

Responds to rights collection and distribution. Co-production treaties allow partners to share financing, rights and returns. Under the treaty Germany and South Africa signed in 2004, qualifying co-productions are treated as national films in both countries and can access the support available in each (European Audiovisual Observatory n.d.). Licensing and catalogue investment, such as Universal Music Group's majority stake in Mavin Records, show European commercial interest in African intellectual property. The economic outcome depends on the terms: who owns the masters and copyrights and earns from future use, how long and in which territories rights are licensed, how revenue is shared, and when costs are recouped. It also depends on how effectively reciprocal collection arrangements between European and African societies, including registration, usage reporting and distribution, carry royalties from European use back to African creators.

Early-stage finance and specialised intermediaries

Responds to capital and investment readiness. The investment case rests on three signals. Investors pay for established African media assets: Canal+ acquired MultiChoice in a transaction valued at about US$3 billion (Daily Maverick 2025), evidence of appetite at the established end of the market, not of finance available to smaller enterprises.
Demand for finance exceeds supply: Kenya's Sanara programme, supported by the Mastercard Foundation, has deployed about US$9.3 million in loans and grants to more than 330 creative enterprises against loan demand of about US$31 million, and about 30 percent of borrowers accessed formal credit for the first time (Bizcommunity 2026). And programmes that pair finance with business development support report that it makes enterprises more attractive to investors, although published data on repayment and returns remains limited. The investment opportunity extends beyond individual creative enterprises to the infrastructure, financial services, distribution systems and specialised intermediaries that enable creative markets to function and grow.

The financing gap is concentrated at the earliest stages and in transaction sizes too small for most funds. Three instruments illustrate different financing approaches. The CREA Fund, an EU-backed facility signed by Proparco in 2022 under the European Commission's CreatiFI initiative, was designed to combine a €5 million guarantee for creative enterprise investments in Sub-Saharan Africa with €1.47 million in technical assistance for pipelines and due diligence, aiming to mobilise more than €20 million in private finance (Proparco 2022). CANEX is an announced commitment, with a financing target of US$2 billion (Afreximbank 2024). The Africa Film Fund, launched by Afreximbank's impact investment arm, FEDA, in 2025, is a private equity fund with a stated size of US$1 billion for film and television production and distribution (GNA 2025). Partners can build on these models through:

- pre-seed and seed funds sized for creative enterprises;
- guarantees and first-loss capital that let local banks and funds lend to smaller firms;
- revenue-based and royalty-backed finance suited to project and catalogue income;
- specialised intermediaries that aggregate enterprises and projects, prepare them for investment, and help investors value catalogues and intellectual property.

Specialised intermediaries can reduce transaction costs for investors while helping African enterprises secure financing on terms that support local ownership and decision-making.

The diaspora and returning talent

Responds to market access and capital. The diaspora contributes in two distinct ways. As a market, diaspora communities in Europe are audiences, buyers and distribution networks for African creative work, reached through touring, festivals, retail and streaming. As a potential source of capital, remittances to Africa exceeded US$95 billion in 2024, roughly equal to total foreign direct investment that year (Africa Finance Corporation 2025). These are mainly private household transfers. Diaspora investment vehicles and co-investment with established funds offer a prospective route to channel part of diaspora savings into creative enterprises. Artists, producers and professionals who return, or who work across both continents, bring networks, skills, capital and audiences. Visa and mobility arrangements for touring artists and cultural professionals, a practical application of Article 16 of the 2005 UNESCO Convention, would let these circuits grow.

Shared market intelligence

Responds to the data gap. Lenders and investors price risk on evidence. Consistent definitions, enterprise-level surveys and agreements on access to platform sales and streaming data would give them the revenue histories, market sizes and comparables that credit and investment decisions require. Better data can reduce information asymmetries, improve risk assessment and strengthen the conditions for financing creative enterprises.

Retaining value

Each pathway can increase activity without increasing the value retained in Africa. The terms decide the outcome: ownership of intellectual property, revenue shares, local procurement, access to audience and sales data, and the capacity of African firms to reinvest. Partnerships designed with these terms in view build value that both continents can share over time.

5. Priorities for partnership

The pathways in Section 4 converge on five practical priorities for African and European decision-makers, drawing on existing institutions and instruments.

Priority	Who acts	Mechanisms	What progress would look like
Integrate markets and payments	AfCFTA Secretariat, governments, central banks, payment companies, platforms	Creative services in AfCFTA negotiations; ratification of the digital trade and intellectual property protocols; links between PAPSS, mobile money and international platforms; cooperation under EU Economic Partnership Agreements extended to services and licensing	Creative services included in AfCFTA negotiations; more cross-border creative transactions settled through interoperable payment systems
Finance the pipeline	Development finance institutions, Afreximbank, local banks, investors, specialised intermediaries	EFSD+ guarantees and first-loss capital; facilities such as the CREA Fund and CANEX; seed funds; royalty-backed finance; technical assistance	More financing transactions reaching creative enterprises, with disclosed ticket sizes and financing terms
Build production and processing capacity	Governments, the EU and European development finance institutions, brands and retailers	Local procurement in flagships; Global Gateway projects for studios, hubs and connectivity; textile processing and traceability that meet EU ecodesign requirements	Higher local procurement participation in flagship projects; increased domestic processing; infrastructure in sustained commercial use
Secure rights and fair terms	Governments, collecting societies, labels, producers, platforms	Reciprocal collection agreements; co-production and double taxation treaties; artist mobility under Article 16 of the 2005 UNESCO Convention	Improved royalty registration, collection and distribution; more co-productions with transparent ownership and revenue-sharing terms
Invest in evidence	Statistical agencies, research institutions, platforms	Common definitions, enterprise surveys and agreements on data access, with cooperation between African and European statistical agencies	Comparable enterprise and market data produced regularly and used in investment and policy decisions

Each priority has a commercial rationale on both sides. African enterprises gain production capacity, finance and access to international markets. European firms gain audiences, creative assets, suppliers and investment opportunities. The measure of success is whether these arrangements generate sustainable returns and strengthen African enterprises over time.

Applause measures a moment. Ownership, capability and trust measure what remains.



About the author

Rita Ngenzi is the Founding Executive Director of the Africa Creatives Alliance (ACA), a pan-African coalition of partners and members across more than 10 countries. ACA brings together market intermediaries, including innovation hubs, makerspaces and industry associations, to strengthen the institutions, markets and enterprise capabilities that support Africa's creative economy.

Collaboration is the foundation of her work. Rita builds the partnerships and systems that connect creative enterprise to economic opportunity, convening governments, the private sector, development partners and creative-sector institutions across countries, and turning shared priorities into joint delivery for jobs, trade and inclusion.

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