

Women and the Creative Sector in Sub-Saharan Africa: A scoping Review



Prepared by the Behind
the Scenes Project Team

Abstract

The creative sector has been recognized as sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) 's next goldmine and most dynamic economic growth area. However, there is rising concern that gender inequities pervade the sector, impeding women's entry, participation, dignity, retention, and progress in the industry. We reviewed published literature on women creatives' participation, challenges, and coping mechanisms in the region's creative industry. Although scanty, the available literature indicates that women participate in both traditional and contemporary creative professions in SSA, but primarily in low-value creative roles. Systemic and institutional constraints, cultural expectations, globalization, unsupportive policy frameworks, male control of the creative sector's critical infrastructure, and gender stereotypes are among the key challenges that women creatives in the region face.

These challenges result in job insecurity, unsafe working conditions, irregular incomes and work schedules, limited recognition, exploitation, and the bypassing of women for opportunities. Women creatives cope with these challenges through advocacy, networking, acquiescence, family and community support, or by leaving the industry. For women creatives in SSA to fully benefit from prospects in the sector, more studies on their working conditions and experiences in the different sub-sectors in which they work, as well as targeted policy and programmatic responses, are needed.



The creative sector has been recognized as sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) 's next goldmine and most dynamic economic growth area. However, there is rising concern that gender inequities pervade the sector, impeding women's entry, participation, dignity, retention, and progress in the industry.





Introduction

The creative sector is now widely recognized as the next goldmine and most dynamic economic growth area in sub-Saharan Africa (Leke and Yeboah-Amankwah 2018; UNCTAD n.d.; UNDP and UNESCO n.d.). Since the last two decades, creative economy exports have continued to outpace those of other industries in region (UNCTAD 2022).

Creative and cultural productions, including digital artistic entrepreneurship, employ millions of Africans and generate billions of dollars in revenue (Leke and Yeboah-Amankwah 2018; Muchira 2023). For example, Africa's video, movie, and film sub-sector currently generates over \$5 billion in annual revenue and employs over

20 million people (Ayisi-Ahwireng 2017; UNCTAD n.d.). By 2040, this sub-sector will generate an additional \$20 billion in annual revenue and create 20 million new jobs (Leke and Yeboah-Amankwah 2018; UNCTAD n.d.).

The UNCTAD as well as other sources note that, even before the global crisis wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual platforms had birthed a thriving new generation of African creative and digital entrepreneurs who generate livable, sometimes abundant, wages online (Strong and Ossei-Owusu 2014; UNCTAD 2022). Revenue streams generated by music aggregators through downloads of Africa-based artists' music and ringtones

hit nearly \$10 billion at the end of 2020 (UNCTAD n.d.). From the actress and actor in a local movie, through the comedian telling jokes to live audiences, to the young dancer, documentarian, Instagrammer, fashion designer, photographer, spoken word artists, or TikTok skit performer, African creatives are reaping benefits from wide-ranging opportunities in the creative sector. The World Bank predicts that as connectivity and access to digital platforms grow, digital creative entrepreneurship in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) will also expand (World Bank 2019). Forecasts indicate that revenues from digital platforms in SSA will grow between 28% and 40% in the next decade, driven by youth entrepreneurs, creators, and consumers (Ernst & Young Global Limited 2020).

These exciting trends notwithstanding, SSA's creative industry faces myriad social, economic, equity, access, and inclusion challenges. For the region to fully seize the opportunity offered by the sector, investments must go into supporting, expanding, and sustaining women's and youth participation in the industry, inspiring more creativity, and addressing gendered and other inequities in and barriers to entry, retention, and advancement (Gregorio 2016). Evidence-

driven interventions are needed to ensure healthy, productive, dignified and fulfilling work futures for Africa's women creatives (Franco and Njogu 2020). Development actors emphasize the need for intentional strategies to prepare women and girls in Africa for future roles as dignified workers, sector leaders, entrepreneurs, professionals, and change agents (Alozie and Akpan-Obong 2017; Hakura et al. 2016; Manda and Mwakubo 2014; Tshishonga 2021). Such strategies will benefit from research and evidence on the circumstances and challenges of women creatives in the region.

However, currently and to the best of our knowledge, there is no systematic synthesis of evidence on women creatives in SSA. To understand the state of research and evidence on women creatives in SSA, the current scoping review covers three major questions: 1) In which sub-sectors and roles do female creatives in SSA participate in the industry? 2) What challenges do they face? And 3), how do they negotiate or cope with these challenges? Answers to these questions have the potential to inform new research questions and furnish evidence for the formulation and implementation of effective policy and programmatic action.



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The creative sector

In the literature, terms like “creative industries,” “creative sector,” “creative economy,” “cultural and creative sector,” and “cultural and creative economy” are used interchangeably to refer to the contested concept of the creative sector. The 2008 UN Creative Economy Report asserts that “there is no unique definition of the ‘creative economy’”. It is a subjective concept that is still being shaped. There is, however, growing convergence on a core group of activities and their interactions both in individual countries and at the international level” (UNCTAD 2008). The UK Department for Culture Media and Sport conceptualized the creative sectors in terms of “those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) 1998, 2018).

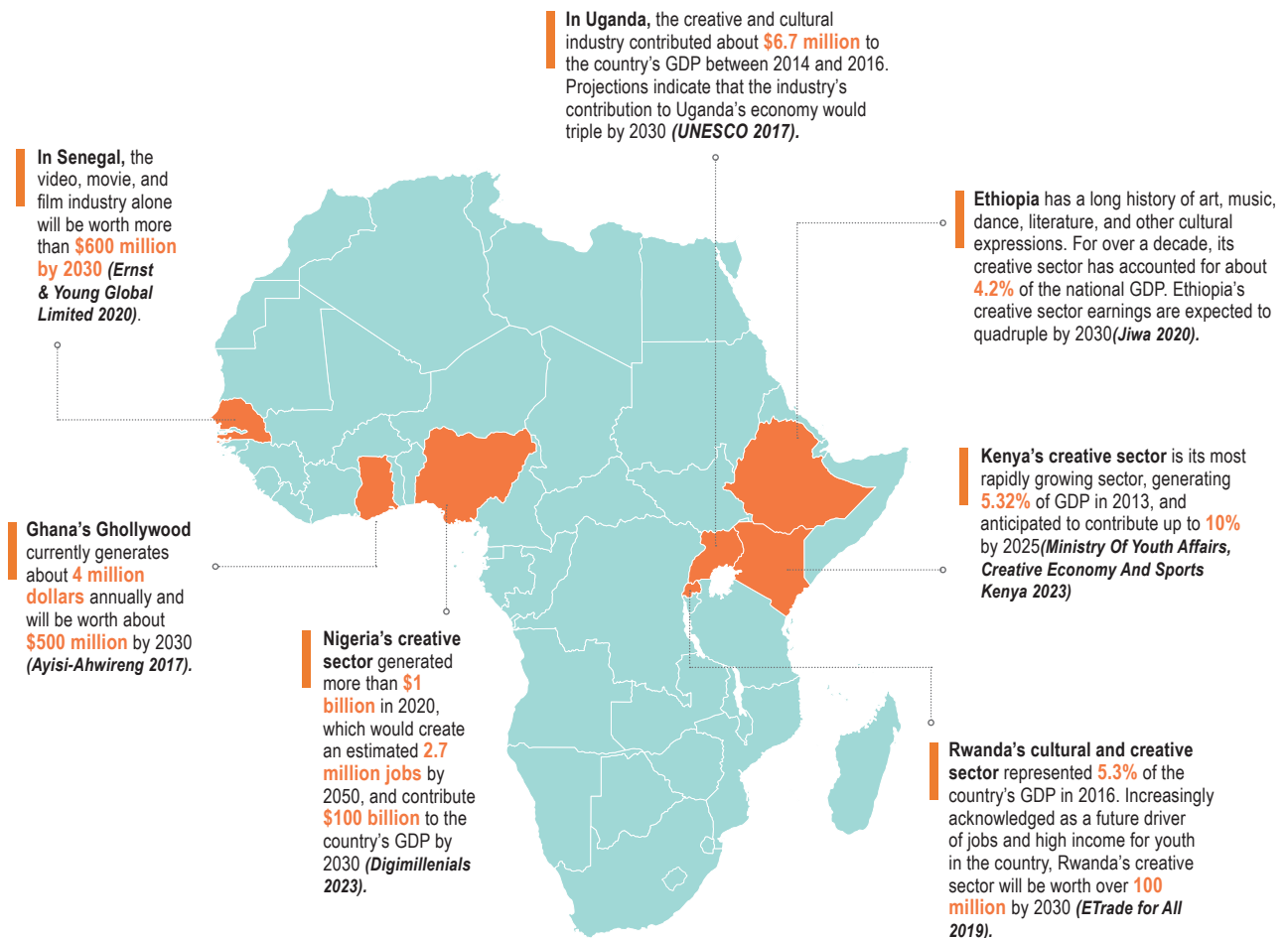
Broadly included in the sector are fashion design, film, theatre and the performing arts, advertising, architecture, publishing, broadcast media, software development, recorded music, and arts and crafts (Booyens 2012; Cunningham and Flew 2019; Davies and Sigthorsson, 2013; Franco and Njogu 2020; Ministry Of Youth Affairs, Creative

Economy And Sports Kenya 2023; Setyaningsih et al. 2012).

Once considered a fringe, low-margin businesses with little or no impact on the economy, creative industries have burst upon the development scene as one of the most promising business sectors in Africa (Muchira 2023; Strong and Ossei-Owusu 2014; Tshishonga 2021; Umbugadu 2015). For instance, Kenya’s creative sector is its most rapidly growing sector, generating 5.32% of GDP in 2013, and anticipated to contribute up to 10% by 2025 (Ministry Of Youth Affairs, Creative Economy And Sports Kenya 2023).

Ghana’s Ghollywood currently generates about 4 million dollars annually and will be worth about \$500 million by 2030 (Ayisi-Ahwireng 2017). In Senegal, the video, movie, and film industry alone will be worth more than \$600 million by 2030 (Ernst & Young Global Limited 2020). Nigeria’s creative sector generated more than \$1 billion in 2020, which would create an estimated 2.7 million jobs by 2050, and contribute \$100 billion to the country’s GDP by 2030 (Digimillennials 2023). In Uganda, the creative and cultural industry contributed about

The creative sector in Africa



\$6.7 million to the country's GDP between 2014 and 2016. Projections indicate that the industry's contribution to Uganda's economy would triple by 2030 (UNESCO 2017). Rwanda's cultural and creative sector represented 5.3% of the country's GDP in 2016. Increasingly acknowledged as a future driver of jobs and high income for youth in the country, Rwanda's creative sector will be worth over 100 million by 2030 (ETrade for All, 2019). Ethiopia has a long history of art, music, dance, literature, and other cultural expressions. For over a decade, its creative sector has accounted for about 4.2% of the national GDP. Ethiopia's creative sector earnings are expected to quadruple by 2030 (Jiwa 2020).

UNCTAD maintains that maximizing the potential of Africa's creative economy requires interventions that address inequities and support participation, access, safety, and dignity for creatives, particularly women and girls (UNCTAD

n.d.). Further, the COVID-19 pandemic affected Africa's creative industries, undermining entire value chains, and significantly distressing many creatives and cultural professionals (Yegon et al. 2021). The pandemic highlighted the urgent need for governments and countries to 'build back better' through economic recovery plans and policies that prioritize women and youth, and all those at risk of exploitation or being left behind (Fox and Signé 2020).

In this review, we synthesize the existing body of research on women creatives in SSA, a group that is increasingly at risk of not reaping the full benefits of the growth and advancements in the region's creative sector. The review specifically discusses issues pertaining to the participation of women creatives in the sector, the challenges they encounter, and their strategies for coping with these challenges.

Methodology

The literature search was carried out by a librarian with a PhD in archival research and more than ten years of expertise in systematic and scoping reviews. African Journals Online (AJOL), Africa-Wide Information, Web of Science, Art & Architecture Source, Google Scholar, JSTOR, Academic Search Ultimate, and Film & Television Literature Index were among the databases searched. The search focused on electronically accessible PhD and Master's theses, book chapters, research briefs, and

peer-reviewed journal articles about women creatives and the creative industry in SSA published between 2000 and 2024. The exact search terms varied by database, but most of the searches incorporated all the creative sectors and sub-creative sectors identified in the DCI (2001) definition as well as terms such as creative sectors, female / women creatives, creativity, cultural economy, creatives (and the different ways these are referred to in scholarly and development discourses).



Article selection, article quality evaluation and analysis

After removing duplicate search results, all remaining papers and documents were imported into Zotero, a reference software that provides electronic document management and allows for methodical review of paper titles and abstracts as well as full-text screening. To evaluate if the study met the inclusion criteria, three reviewers independently screened the title and abstract of each publication identified.

A fourth reviewer resolved discrepancies, and the reasons were communicated with the entire team of reviewers. Following the completion of the title and abstract screening, each potentially suitable article was subjected to an independent full text review by two reviewers. Reviewers used dialogue to settle any disagreements over the inclusion of an article.

We used an adaptation of the Critical Appraisal Programme (CASP) quality assessment instrument to assess the quality of all research included. Author names and titles; publication and study years; study aim(s); study design; sampling strategy; data collection methods and setting; sample size and characteristics; inclusion and exclusion criteria; analysis methods; and relevant sample for the systematic review were extracted using a standardized form. We did not exclude any studies based on the quality assessment. Relying on Thomas and Harden's thematic

synthesis approach, we iteratively and collaboratively abstracted findings into analytical themes (Thomas and Harden 2008). The studies included in the review are on the reference list

The search phase, which took place between August 2024 and September 2024, produced 7031 articles. After more refined searches and deletion of duplicates in Zotero, we retained 2047 articles and screened the titles and abstracts of 327 unique papers. Based on our inclusion criteria, we eliminated 266 articles from the sample after conducting full-text reviews, leaving 61 articles that met the study's inclusion criteria.

The review includes qualitative, quantitative and mixed studies that featured primary and secondary research conducted in SSA. The methodological rigor and depth of analysis of the research differed substantially. We included only peer-reviewed journal papers, accessible graduate theses, book chapters and research-based briefs that focused on women creatives in the sector, their challenges, and coping strategies. Reviews, opinion papers, grey reports, editorials, and papers focused broadly on women entrepreneurship (that is, not focused on women creatives specifically) were excluded.

Organization of findings

The review's findings are presented under four main broad themes around: women's participation in creative occupations (including the kinds of creative works in which women are involved, the roles they play, the benefits they report, etc.); women

creatives' journeys (including research on how they entered their creative careers and how they experience their roles); women creatives' challenges; and women creatives' strategies for overcoming the challenges they face in the industry.



Findings

Women in creative occupations/ creative sector in SSA

Most published research on women creatives in sub-Saharan Africa has focused on a limited range of traditional and modern creative sectors and occupations, particularly visual and performing arts, photography, filmmaking, scriptwriting, digital arts, advertising, comedy, theater and drama acting, choreography, writing, poetry, music, hairstyling and body aesthetics and arts, traditional and modern craftmaking, including jewelry and beadwork, weaving, pottery, art deco, sculpting, fashion design, basketry, painting, and textile production, and several other self-expression art forms such as movement and painting.

The available research also acknowledges the existence of women managers of creative businesses in SSA (Alacovska, Langevang, and Steedman 2021; Anderson and Mdemu Komba 2017, 2017; DeMotts 2017; Dzisi 2008; Frank 2002; 2007; Hadisi and Snowball 2022; Jaiyeola and Adeyeye 2021; Jokia, Swanepoel, and Venter 2021; Kamara 2014; Katiji and Muranda 2023; Langevang 2017, 2017; Langevang and Gough 2012, 2012; Loots and Mbele 2020; Methodi, Dlamini, and Matlala 2024; Mhiripiri 2011; M. Motsamayi 2020; M. F. Motsamayi 2020; Nanbigne 2003; Nwanekezi and Onyekuru 2014; Nwanya and Ojemudia 2014a; Ojong 2006, 2017b; Okolo, Omorogbee, and Alufohai 2016; Oriakhogba 2020; Pereira, Shackleton, and Shackleton 2006; Ramafikeng 2016; Sibande and Chilongoshi 2017; Snowball 2016; Snowball and Hadisi 2020; Snowball and Mapuma 2020; Steedman and Brydges 2023; Verhoeven et al. 2018; Yusuf 2012).

Evident in the existing literature is the far-reaching ways that social media and other online technologies, and networking and communication tools have revolutionized

the work of women creatives in SSA. Writing specifically about female youth tweak dancers in Kenya, Kitata (2020) notes that the internet has offered alternative outlet for suppressed dance performance needs of Kenyan youth. Regarding creative entrepreneurship, existing research also indicates an upsurge in women who market their or others' creative works, train creatives, promote and manage creative events, and prospect and negotiate contracts and businesses on behalf of creatives.

Women managers of creative works are also leading efforts to modernize women traditional creative activities and promote creative businesses in socially and environmentally sustainable ways (Jokia, Swanepoel, and Venter 2021; Langevang and Gough 2012; Loots and Mbele 2020; Methodi, Dlamini, and Matlala 2024; Motsamayi 2020) (Jokia et al., 2021; Langevang & Gough, 2012; Loots & Mbele, 2020; Motsamayi, 2020; Motsamayi et al., 2024).

According to existing research, in SSA, women currently outnumber men in artistic roles such as storytellers, singers, dancers, riddle posers, dramatists, weavers, quilt makers, producers of cultural items such as mats and hats, tailors and fashion designers, hairdressers, and jewelry and bead makers (Abisuga-Oyekunle and Fillis 2017; Cohen 2023; Kamara 2014; Langevang 2017; Langevang and Gough 2012). However, women are underrepresented in leading roles as choreographers, directors, band leaders or solo artists (Kamara 2014; Katiji and Muranda 2023). Further, in both traditional and modern music industry-related activities in SSA, women creatives operate mainly as backing vocalists, singers, and dancers (Kamara 2014; Katiji



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“When I am asked why poetry is important as a medium, I understand how important it is to use whatever form I choose of storytelling to share particularized stories of women like me ... Black. African. Nigerian. Women who feel left out of stories that humanize their existence, who do not feel othered when they read my work’.

Umebinyuo (2020), poet, writer and storyteller

and Muranda 2023; Loots and Mbele 2020). Katiji and Muranda (2023) point out, for instance, that despite the strong contribution of women in the music industry in SSA, they remain very marginal in some of the creative aspects of music such as sound and music engineering. Rural women creatives in SSA also continue to operate largely within visual arts and craft sector (Hadisi and Snowball 2022).

The evolving and unique role of women in shaping the region’s creative sector is another important theme in the available literature (Abisuga and Fillis 2016; Cohen 2023; Dzisi 2008; Edgar 2023; Iwuchukwu 2017; Lekalake Plaatjie 2020; Loots, Hutchison, and Mbele 2020; Loots and Mbele 2020; Mbanda 2020; Nwanya and Ojemudia 2014a; Oriakhogba 2020; Sibande and Cholongoshi 2017; Umebinyuo 2020). More recently, there has also been a surge of women in creative writing and filmmaking in SSA as reported by Nwanya and Ojemudia (2014a) Steedman and Brydges (2023) and Iwuchukwu (2017).

Cohen (2023) writes that SSA women creatives have played pivotal roles in creating networks of exchange at both personal, national cross-border levels. The Liberian women she studied have been instrumental in fostering interest, recognition, and demand for African products globally through their legendary quilting craft. Additionally, women creatives’ presence is growing in digital fields, which equip them with essential skills for careers in creative technology and social entrepreneurship (Sibande and Cholongoshi 2017).

SSA women creatives are a significant force in preserving and safeguarding critical traditional handicrafts forms, including weaving, pottery and dyeing, etc., and in reshaping the perceptions about women and gender in Africa, which are frequently distorted and misrepresented in male-

dominated literature and art forms (Abisuga and Fillis 2016; Iwuchukwu 2017; Lekalake Plaatjie 2020; Loots, Hutchison, and Mbele 2020; Loots and Mbele 2020; Nwanya and Ojemudia 2014b; Pakade 2020; Umebinyuo 2020).

Pakade (2020), writing about Celeste Ntuli in South Africa, suggests that she has led efforts to challenge stereotypes about standup comedy as a male terrain. Umebinyuo (2020), reflecting on her own work as a poet, writer and storyteller notes that **“When I am asked why poetry is important as a medium, I understand how important it is to use whatever form I choose of storytelling to share particularized stories of women like me ... Black. African. Nigerian.**

Women who feel left out of stories that humanize their existence, who do not feel othered when they read my work’. Focusing on the artist, Billie Zangewa of Malawi, Michna (2020) quotes her as saying “...so it is about identity for me. I’m expressing myself and embracing my femininity through my choice of material...I find relief in it.”

Working as a creative is not only a vital source of income and empowerment for women and their households (DeMotts 2017; Dzisi 2008; Frank 2002, 2007; Hadisi and Snowball 2022, 2022; Jaiyeola and Adeyeye 2021; Jokia, Swanepoel, and Venter 2021, 2021; Kamara 2014; Langevang 2017; Langevang and Gough 2012; Mathodi, Dlamini, and Matlala 2024, 2024; Motsamayi 2020; Nwanya and Ojemudia 2014a; Ojong 2006, 2017b; Oriakhogba 2020; Pereira, Shackleton, and Shackleton 2006; Rogerson 2006; Rogerson and Sithole 2001; Snowball 2016; Snowball and Hadisi 2020; Snowball and Mapuma 2020; Verhoeven et al. 2018), but it is also a route to prominence, a means for identity expression, and a source of pride (Frank 2002; Hadisi and Snowball 2022; Iwuchukwu 2017; Loots, Hutchison, and Mbele 2020; Loots and Mbele 2020; Nwanya and Ojemudia 2014a; Oriakhogba

2020; Pakade 2020; Umebinyuo 2020; Verhoeven et al. 2018).

Research in South Africa (Hadisi and Snowball, 2022) and Zimbabwe (Verhoeven et al., 2018), shows that women creatives have achieved local fame and social validation for their arts and crafts, and have also seen some of their work exhibited or sold internationally. Additionally, the works of African women creatives contribute both to debates and dialogues about pressing social and development problems as well as to their self-liberation and independence, reconstruction of the image and identity of women, and capacity to challenge the status quo, and explode myths and silences about women in the region (Loots, Hutchison, and Mbele 2020, 2020; Mbanda 2020, 2020; Nwanya and Ojemudia 2014a; Oda 2005).

Through their work, the region's women creatives have called attention to societal ills as demonstrated by Loots et.al (2020) who note that terrorism, taboos, gender-based violence, corruption, exclusion, state failure, racism, ethnicity and poverty are among topical issues in the region.

Women creatives' journeys

While research on African women's creative journeys is scant, the available evidence indicates that SSA women's paths into and through the field are as diverse as the women themselves. Generally, as shown in the existing literature, women creatives in SSA benefit from intergenerational transfer of skills (through family members such as mothers, grandmothers, or other elder relatives), informal networks and apprenticeship, self-discovery, formal education, and community learning (Alacovska, Langevang, and Steedman 2021; DeMotts 2017; Loots, Hutchison, and Mbele 2020; Jokia et al., (2021); Loots and Mbele 2020; Nwanya and Ojemudia 2014; Edgar, 2023; Oda 2005; Ojong, 2006, 2017; Pakade 2020; Pereira, Shackleton, and Shackleton

2006; Ramafikeng 2016; Rogerson and Sithole 2001; Motsamayi et al. (2024); Sibande and Chilongoshi 2017; Steedman and Brydges 2023; Umebinyuo 2020; Cohen 2023; Frank 2002, 2007; Iwuchukwu 2017; Mbanda 2020).

The creative careers of women in the region can result from informal and formal apprenticeship and training involving professional studies, creative club membership (e.g. coding and drama clubs), film schools, online courses, internships, and informal traineeship programs etc., as demonstrated by Iwuchukwu (2017); Sibande & Chilongoshi (2017), Loots, Hutchison, and Mbele (2020, 2020), Mbanda (2020) and Steedman and Brydges (2023) and Jokia et al., (2021). In rural Zimbabwe, women in pottery and batik dyeing often acquire their skills through community-based learning, where more experienced artisans informally mentor younger women (Verhoeven et al., 2018).

Economic hardships and livelihood challenges contribute to women's pursuit of careers as creatives in Africa (Alacovska, Langevang, and Steedman 2021; Anderson and Komba 2017; DeMotts 2017; Jokia, Swanepoel, and Venter 2021; Langevang and Gough 2012; Oda 2005; Ojong 2006; Rogerson and Sithole 2001; Steedman and Brydges 2023). For example, Langevang and Gough (2012) indicate that women in Ghana take up hairstyling and tailoring as a survival tactic. In their study of the economic actions and entrepreneurial behavior of creative entrepreneurs operating in precarious situations, Alacovska and colleagues (2021) argue that poverty and widespread economic uncertainty contribute to women's choice of creative professions.

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skills, access markets, and gain support from peers, leaders and stakeholder in the industry (DeMotts 2017; Edgar 2023; Loots, Hutchison, and Mbele 2020; Ojong 2017a; Christian Myles Rogerson and Sithole 2001; Yusuf 2012) . These networks may comprise family members, feminist and other organizations, friends, guilds and cooperatives, or local and online communities (Frank, 2002; Kamara, 2015; Hadisi and Snowball, 2022; Oriakhogba, 2020).

In rural Zulu communities, women creatives rely on traditional and communal ties to collaborate on craft production. Yusuf (2012) writes that, in Nigeria, women artisans also depend on these networks to seek new products, latest designs and raw materials. In Zimbabwe, women in craft production rely on their cooperatives to finance and expand their business (Verhoeven et al., 2018). Reliance on social networks for information and resources establishes a tightly knit support system that facilitates the pooling of resources, access to markets, training, clientele, tools, raw material, and skills, and more effective marketing of their products and to navigate other professional challenges in the sectors (Oriakhogba, 2020; Jaiyeola & Adeyeye, 2021; Oriakhogba, 2020; Verhoeven et al., 2018).

Available literature recognizes the role of feminist networks and organizations in supporting the creative journeys of women in Africa through, among others, establishing and nurturing platforms or curated events, festivals for creative performances, spaces for dialogue, collaborations, networking, and identity formation among women creatives (Alacovska, Langevang, and Steedman 2021; Jokia, Swanepoel, and Venter 2021; Kamara 2014; Katiji and Muranda 2023; Loots, Hutchison, and Mbele 2020; Loots and Mbele 2020; Motsamayi 2020; Steedman and Brydges 2023).

Jokia et al. (2021) argues that training opportunities organized by feminist organizations have enabled women art and craft entrepreneurs to acquire the skills they need to generate income. Further, an artistic literacy training forum for women creatives in South Africa supported them to “initiate and run projects...share expertise, innovative ideas, and artistic interests with colleagues” (Motsamayi, 2020, p.11).

The forum also offered space for women to share skills and knowledge, overcame gender-related challenges, and expand their social and professional networks (Motsamayi et al., 2024; Motsamayi, 2020). For instance, in a study by Loots, Hutchison, and Mbele (2020), one woman playwright extolled the African Women Playwrights Network for offering her a platform to publish her play and anthology.

The complexities that surround women's creative journeys are documented in the literature. Writers (such as Jaiyeola & Adeyeye, 2021; Jokia et al., 2021; and Kamara, 2015) suggest that while several women receive support, training or mentorship in launching and growing their careers, others cultivate their skills autonomously by experimenting with various materials and techniques. Research by Okolo et al., 2016; Pereira et al., 2006; and Steedman & Brydges, 2021, and Oda (2005) shows that women creatives in the region also often participate in different facets of their own enterprises. For example, hairstylists in Ghana provide services and run the financial side of their salons, which can involve juggling professional and domestic duties simultaneously (Oda, 2005).

Newer creative industries, like filmmaking and fashion design, more overtly incorporate multiple identities; that is, a woman may at once be the creator and entrepreneur or a “hustler” taking on multiple projects, from social justice documentaries to



corporate work, while managing their creative business on their own (Steedman & Brydges, 2021).

Systemic and structural barriers societal expectations, unsupportive policy contexts, male control of creative sector infrastructure, cultural biases and gender inequities and prejudices are at the root of the challenges faced by women creatives in SSA (Duignan-Pearson 2019; Dzisi 2008; Frank 2002, 2002; Hadisi and Snowball 2022; Jaga et al. 2018; Kaburire and Msoka 2024; Loots, Hutchison, and Mbele 2020; Mbanda 2020; Snowball and Hadisi 2020; Umebinyuo 2020; Verhoeven et al. 2018).

These challenges manifest in multiple

ways and have implications for the growth, advancement, workplace satisfaction, and work conditions of women creatives (Frank, 2002; Hadisi & Snowball, 2022; Verhoeven et al., 2018). For instance, across the region, men own or control most of the infrastructure in the creative sector (such as universities, training institutes, studios, film production and book publishing companies, creative businesses etc.), which puts women creatives at their mercy (Alacovska, Langevang, and Steedman 2021; Duignan-Pearson 2019; Iwuchukwu 2017; Loots, Hutchison, and Mbele 2020; Mbanda 2020; Steedman and Brydges 2023).

A commonly reported challenge for African women creatives is gender pay



Gender-based discriminations against women creatives in Africa is not limited to pay inequality. They also suffer a lack of recognition for their contributions, and in some creative settings or contexts, their works are valued less than men's

(Nanhigne, 2003, Mhiripiri, 2011; Mugo, 1994; Mhiripiri, 2011; Mugo, 1994; Nwanya & Ojemudia, 2014), Chitando and Mateveke 2012, Nwanya & Ojemudia, 2014; Ojong, 2017), Katiji & Muranda, 2023; Langevang, 2017; Marina & Nkemdili, 2024; Motsamayi et al., 2024; Nwanya & Ojemudia, 2014; Mhiripiri, 2011).

gap. Though equally skilled, versatile, and educated like their male counterparts, it is not uncommon for women creatives to earn less than their male counterparts for similar work or roles (Adelinah, 2016; De Motts, 2017; Ojong, 2017; Rogerson & Sithole, 2001; Abisuga and Fillis 2016; Katiji & Muranda, 2023; Langevang, 2017; Marina & Nkemdili, 2024; Motsamayi et al., 2024, Hadisi & Snowball, 2022; Jaga, Arabandi, Bagraim, & Mdlongwa, 2018; Frank, 2002).

Women creatives are also often frequently relegated to less profitable roles even when they possess equivalent educational backgrounds and experience as men (Hadisi & Snowball, 2022). They also experience unfair compensation for their work, particularly in situations and areas where informal networks dictate market rates and job opportunities (Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013). In such situations, women creatives are often forced to accept lower wages or unpaid work in hopes of prospects or recognition.

Snowball (2016) notes that in creative sub-sectors, where market volatility and consumer demand heavily influence income levels, women creatives tend to be less pay than they are worth. Overall, as Jaga et al. (2018) assert women in creative industries face slower career progression, lower pay, and limited access to leadership positions than their male counterparts.

Women creatives in the region also experience minimal job security due to their overrepresentation in informal or freelance creative roles which have irregular incomes and work schedules, and may lack formal contracts (Hadisi & Snowball, 2022; Snowball, 2016; Verhoeven et al., 2018). For instance, women in the bead-making and pottery sectors in Zimbabwe report that their income is highly contingent on market demand, which can be unpredictable and inconsistent (Verhoeven et al., 2018).

Creative activities such as hairstyling, handicrafts, fashion-designing and movie and film making industry are also increasingly competitive which often makes it difficult for women to enjoy a decent living on incomes from their creativity alone (Oda, 2005). Women craft workers often lack access to non-traditional markets and experience seasonality which limits their economic returns (Pereira et al., 2006).

Women, particularly, rural women in creative occupations also often contend with limited access to resources, opportunities, training, and markets, with potentially damaging impacts on their incomes as well as creative expression and potential (De Motts, 2017; Rogerson & Sithole, 2001; Ojong, 2006).

Gender-based discriminations against women creatives in Africa is not limited to pay inequality. They also suffer a lack of recognition for their contributions, and in some creative settings or contexts, their works are valued less than men's (Nanhigne, 2003, Mhiripiri, 2011; Mugo, 1994; Mhiripiri, 2011; Mugo, 1994; Nwanya & Ojemudia, 2014), Chitando and Mateveke 2012, Nwanya & Ojemudia, 2014; Ojong, 2017), Katiji & Muranda, 2023; Langevang, 2017; Marina & Nkemdili, 2024; Motsamayi et al., 2024; Nwanya & Ojemudia, 2014; Mhiripiri, 2011). In some parts of SSA, women are culturally forbidden from participating in some creative activities, such as weaving, carving, sculpture, leading men in dances, and playing certain instruments such as drums, xylophone, and horns, thereby limiting their participation in local creative events and activities (Boateng 2007; Nanbigne 2003).

In Ghana, Boateng (2007) asserts that "the gender of cloth production is quite stable since men almost exclusively produce kente and adinkra cloth. Taboos reinforce this male dominance by threatening

women with barrenness if they practice these crafts. Further, the prestigious status of both adinkra and kente translates into social and economic advantages for men". As Nwanya and Ojemudia (2014) suggest, the creative persona in SSA is frequently constituted as a masculine subject, which can hinder women from engaging and flourishing in creative industries.

Gender biases in the attribution of artistic and creative works increase the lack of recognition for female creatives by obscuring their artistic identities behind those of their male counterparts, reducing their visibility and career chances (Boateng 2007). In some instances, gender-based discrimination results in the bypassing of women for training opportunities out of concern that they will become pregnant and abandon an assignment or role.

Further, there is evidence that in some creative contexts in SSA, some men feel reluctant or refuse to be directed or managed by a woman (Iwuchukwu 2017). Relating the case of Sofola, the acclaimed female Nigerian playwright, Iwuchukwu (2017) describes her experience directing actors on stage during which some of the male actors resisted being instructed by her or purposefully chose to frustrate her efforts or ruin her production, either through outright confrontational disobedience or by carrying out instructions incorrectly. In yet another case reported by Iwuchukwu (2017), a female university playwright and lecturer from Nigeria was unable to produce one of her plays due to harassment by a male colleague. Her second play was dismissed as polluting the theater with a "dirty, smelling odor".

Also, while sexual harassment and abuse is extensive in some creative sectors, fears of retaliation or harm to their careers deter women from reporting such incidents, perpetuating a culture of silence. Most of these discriminatory practices

also feed into and sustain the continuing stigmatization and negative portrayal of women in technology, innovation and other science-related creative activities (Sibande & Chilongoshi, 2017).

Further, in SSA, perceptions of women artists and creatives such as dancers, musicians, hairdressers, and actresses frequently depict them as available for sex, prostitutes and sexually decadent persons (Kamara, 2015; Iwuchukwu 2017; Ojong 2006; Katiji & Muranda, 2023) Nwanya & Ojemudia, 2014. Women in some of these creative careers often lack family and social support to continue in such professions, particularly after marriage (Kamara, 2015). Katiji and Muranda (2023, p. 206) observed that "the Zimbabwe music industry has lost some amazing talent that got stifled after marriage".

Sexual and gender-based harassment and exploitation against women creatives are common and take the form of cyberbullying, gossips, rumors, trolling, and body shaming. In some instances, abuse, intimidation and silencing of African women creatives have led some of them to abandon the use of social media and their occupations (Iwuchukwu 2017; Kamara 2014; Katiji and Muranda 2023; Matsipa 2017; Tlelima 2022). In South Africa for instance, hairdressers, particularly migrant hairdressers are subjected to harassment from police, and men who see them as sexually available (Matsipa 2017).

Limited access to education, information, training and entrepreneurial skills is a widely reported challenge for women creatives in SSA (Kamara, 2015; Edgar, 2023; Yusuf, 2012; Iwuchukwu 2017; Loots, Hutchison, and Mbele 2020; 2017; Kaburire and Msoka, 2014; Langevang, 2017; Motsamayi, 2020; Marina & Nkemdili, 2024). For instance, Oda (2005) and Langevang and Gough (2012) found a preponderance of women creatives with



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little or no formal education in activities such as hairdressing, fashion or tailoring, and arts and crafts.

In South Africa (Jokia et al., 2021) found that 94% of women creatives required training in entrepreneurial skills, 97% required communication skills and 97% required negotiating and networking skills. Low level education and limited skills were the most cited reason among these creatives for avoiding paperwork and registration processes for their business (Jokia, Swanepoel, and Venter 2021). In the handcraft industry in Tanzania, Kaburire

and Msoka (2024) found that men fared better than women creatives with regards to product development information or knowledge and market accessibility due largely to gender roles.

Many women creatives in SSA struggle to work and thrive due to limited access to financial resources (Jokia et al., 2021; Kamara, 2015; Edgar, 2023; Hadisi & Snowball, 2022; Jaga et al., 2018; Nyawo & Mubangizi, 2015; Okolo et al., 2016; Pereira et al., 2006; Steedman & Brydges, 2021; Nyawo & Mubangizi, 2015; Jaga et al., 2018; Kaburire and Msoka, 2024; Dzisi, 2008). Motsamayi (2020) reports that women creatives

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and creative entrepreneurs have a harder time than their men counterparts in obtaining credit facilities from banks. Langevang's (2017) study of women in the fashion industry Ghana, Uganda and Zambia showed that largely because of limited resources to finance and scale up their businesses, most young women creatives failed in their first year of business, and even those who survived remained as a one-woman business. Similar findings have been reported about women in craftmaking in South Africa (Nyawo & Mubangizi, 2015), migrant women creatives (Jaga et al., 2018), and rural and indigenous women creatives (Dzisi, 2008).

Poor governmental support, weak policy and institutional support to women creatives is widely reported as a major drawback for women in the creative sector (Okolo et al., 2016; Pereira et al., 2006; Steedman & Brydges, 2021; Hadisi & Snowball, 2022; Jaga et al., 2018; Dzisi, 2008). The lack of government and institutional support for women in creative fields hinders them from accessing business capital and larger, more profitable markets, leaving them confined to local or regional markets with limited growth potential, and struggling with inadequate capital, difficulties obtaining



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In South Africa as Matsipa (2014) notes, city authorities and police rely on environmental and traffic laws to harass street-based women creatives, such as hairstylists, pedicurists and manicurists. Iwuchukwu (2017) also reports that many publishers do not invest in playwrights, forcing them to resort to self-publishing which reduces their reach, readership, and recognition in the field.

In addition to dealing with long and unpredictable work schedules, including working late and risky hours, women creatives in SSA frequently have to balance professional jobs and positions with household duties and obligations including childcare (Langevang, 2017; Iwuchukwu 2017; Loots, Hutchison, and Mbele 2020). Iwuchukwu's (2017) study of women creatives playwrights suggested that while some took their children to rehearsals, others were forced to write after their children were grown and able to fend for themselves. They were also those who took a long break after their marriage or gave up their marriages to concentrate on their careers.

Other challenges include low self-esteem as well as the marginalization of rural and disabled women (Motsamayi, 2020), globalization, and competition with artistic products that are increasingly being mass-produced (Langevang and Gough 2012; Mathodi, Dlamini, and Matlala 2024; Motsamayi 2020; Tapfuma, Musavengane, and Magwaza 2024), and safety and security risks when working late hours or traveling alone (Duignan-Pearson, 2019). Female DJs, for example, report safety concerns, including hijackings or assaults, when commuting to, and from performances in South Africa (Duignan-Pearson, 2019). These challenges limit their movement and access to opportunities and add anxiety to their work.

How women creative manage their work-related challenges

Women creatives use a combination of advocacy, community support, and personal initiative or agency to deal with the difficulties they face at work. African women creatives' use of agency as a coping strategy for their work-related challenge takes multiple forms, including the use of their creative skills and energies to confront the prejudice and stereotypes that hold them back and disregard their potential and achievement, and to re-imagine women as powerful and liberated characters (Abisuga-Oyekunle and Fillis 2017; Cassiman 2022; Chitando 2020; Edgar 2023; Iwuchukwu 2017; Loots, Hutchison, and Mbele 2020; Mbanda 2020; Mhiripiri 2011; Nwafor 2022; Nwanya and Ojemudia 2014a; Umebinyuo 2020).

In a study of female musicians in Zimbabwe, Chitando and Mateveke (2012) showed that they use their music and talent to speak out against oppressive gender norms and assert themselves as capable and worthy creatives, a point which Cassiman (2022) also makes about upcoming women creatives in Ghana. Agentive deployment of creative energies also often involves artistic innovations and products that help women creatives stand out in the market and establish a niche for themselves.

According to Abisuga-Oyekunle and Fillis (2016), women handicraft makers in Africa are incorporating indigenous styles in their businesses which keeps the business costs low and improves the appeal and uniqueness of their products (Abisuga and Fillis 2016). On the other hand, Edgar (2023) found 'purpose' to be the primary driver of women-owned artisan social enterprises in Zambia, with female leadership as a critical factor.

Agency in confronting the challenges they face also frequently involves women creatives' use of social media platforms to build networks, speak out about

discrimination or other gendered injustices in the sector, advocate for change, address barriers to their progress, acquire skills, improve their access to resources and markets, and seek recognition (Langevang, 2017; Mhandu, 2020; Kamara, 2015; Motsamayi, 2020; Motsamayi et al., 2024 Steedman & Brydges, 2021; Pereira et al., 2006; Sibande & Chilongoshi, 2017).

Women creatives' agency is also often expressed through seeking training opportunities to attain skills and competencies to launch their enterprises, expand their skill sets, and adapt to new social and other technologies, ensuring their relevance in a rapidly evolving sector (Adelinah, 2016; De Motts, 2017; Ojong, 2006; 2017; Rogerson & Sithole, 2001, Motsamayi, 2020; Motsamayi et al., 2024; Loots & Mbele, 2020). For instance, Motsamayi (2020) and Motsamayi et al (2024) showed that many women creatives in SSA are using social media technologies, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp to address their lack of access to critical information, develop skills, support each other, and advertise and sell their goods and services.

Women creatives' agentive use of social media resources have also helped them cut out intermediaries and decrease reliance on dealers who reduce their profit margins. Steedman & Brydges (2021) found that difficulties in navigating established markets have led some African women fashion designers and filmmakers to agentively seek new and fresh markets for their goods.

Innovative use of agency among women crafters includes their growing the plants they use in the work in their own garden to improve access to resources which were previously controlled by others or difficult to obtain (Pereira et al., 2006). Agentive use of social media has helped



Among women creatives, networking is a key strategy for fostering collective action against some of the major challenges. Networking by women creatives involves building alliances with other creatives, forming women-only guilds, and cooperatives, working with family members and organizations that support women creatives.

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some women creatives to generate funding and capital for their work. to directly reach their clients and fans and promote their products and skills (Steedman & Brydges, 2021; Adelinah, 2016; Rogerson & Sithole, 2001, Sibande & Chilongoshi, 2017).

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As an aspect of strategic networking, resource pooling and crowdfunding have been used by women creative collectives to generate funds and launch new products (Steedman & Brydges, 2021, Brogan and Dooley (2024) Networking has also been used by women creatives to develop social capital that transcends their local and national boundaries which serves to expand their resources, mentorship opportunities, and markets, enabling them to tackle structural and systemic barriers effectively (Brogan and Dooley 2024). In South Africa, Duignan-Pearson (2019) notes that female Disc Jockeys (DJs) established the S.H.E network, an

all-female creatives networking platform to share resources, hone their skills, boost their confidence, exchange experiences, provide mentorship and training, nurture the next generation of DJs, and combat the traditional gatekeeping that restricts access to gigs and performance spaces.

Graduates of the FUSE program run by female DJs in South Africa, have achieved notable success, highlighting the transformative impact of networks for women creatives' professional journeys (Duignan-Pearson, 2019).

Other coping strategies employed by African women creatives include advocacy against unfair creative workplace practices, such as unequal compensation and poor working conditions (Chitando 2020; Duignan-Pearson 2019; Iwuchukwu 2017; Loots, Hutchison, and Mbele 2020; Steedman and Brydges 2023; Umebinyuo 2020); staying silent and enduring abuses in the industry (Kamara, 2015; Katiji & Miranda, 2023); reliance on family members for support, including help with childcare duties (Motsamayi et al., 2024); leaving the industry to pursue other livelihoods (Iwuchukwu 2017); combining their creative work with other more regular employment; and keeping their businesses small and informal (Abisuga-Oyekunle and Fillis 2017; Alacovska, Langevang, and Steedman 2021; Steedman and Brydges 2023; Van Eeden 2011).

Discussions

Africa's creative sector offers enormous potential for job creation, wealth generation, and economic transformation (Franco and Njogu 2020; Leke and Yeboah-Amankwah 2018). However, the industry faces significant obstacles that prevent it from reaching its full potential. One of these challenges is gender inequity, which prevents African women creatives from having productive, dignified, and meaningful careers in the sector. The current scoping review synthesized existing research and knowledge regarding women creatives in Africa to inform future research as well as policy and programmatic action.

The work lives and experiences of African women creatives are underexplored issues in the literature. Less is written on these topics in comparison to many other areas such as older women's life,

unpaid care challenges of women, and women's empowerment issues generally. In the available scant literature on women creatives however, a few major issues emerge.

A common thread in the reviewed studies is the strong and growing presence and contribution of women in both traditional and modern creative sectors and occupations in SSA, particularly visual and performing arts, photography, writing, poetry, music, hairstyling, craftmaking, fashion design, and textile production. Women appear to be underrepresented in high-value creative roles and subsectors.

However, there is also evidence that most women creatives in SSA work in roles that pay less than males because of historic structural barriers to women's access to higher education and skills as well as



decades of sexist norms, regulations, and work practices that continue to undervalue women's labor and reproduce 'inequality regimes' in the creative workplace as in other organizations (Acker 2006). As Nwanya and Ojemudia (2014) posited, the creative persona in SSA continues to be frequently constructed as a masculine subject, which can hinder women from engaging and flourishing in creative industries.

Judging from the available literature, creative work is not only a vital source of income and empowerment for women and their households, but it is also a means through which women creatives confront social and development challenges including terrorism, taboos, gender-based violence, corruption, exclusion, state failure, racism, ethnicity and poverty among other topical issues in the region.

Iwuchukwu (2017) suggests that the creative sector in Africa offers a unique and invaluable avenue for women to earn livelihoods and express themselves, challenge societal norms, and promote empowerment. As women harness the power of creative expression to tell their stories, advocate for gender equality, and inspire change, the sector and indeed society at large, can become more inclusive and equitable.

Individual women creatives' pathways to and through the sector are as diverse as the women themselves. Women creatives learn and hone their creative skills through family members, informal and formal networks, apprenticeship, self-discovery, formal education, and community learning. The multiple paths of the creative journeys of women creatives have different implications for their growth, resilience, retention, experience and capacity to fully benefit from the promises of the sector. Loeffen (2016)

and Swann (2014) note that women's professional journeys and trajectories are shaped by many factors, each of which has great implications for their work outcomes and experiences. For instance, while formal education can build professional and creative skill and reputations, lack of access to strong networks can affect progression by hindering access to social connections, mentorship and partnerships (Ely, Ibarra, and Kolb 2011; Etzkowitz, Kemelgor, and Uzzi 2000; Kleihauer, Stephens, and Hart 2012).

The evidence that economic hardship and livelihood challenges contribute to women's resort to careers as creatives in Africa is important and shows the vast employment opportunities of the sector. However, it also suggests the widespread precarity under which many women creatives operate and the need for policies to support them.

Systemic and institutional constraints, male control of creative sector infrastructure, cultural expectations, unsupportive policy frameworks, and deeply rooted gender stereotypes are just a few of the many obstacles that women creatives in SSA must overcome. These challenges result in job insecurity, unsafe working conditions, irregular incomes and work schedules, limited recognition for women creatives, and the bypassing of women for opportunities and roles in the sector.

Women creatives experience sexual harassment and abuse, lack of family and social support, bullying and trolling, police harassment, limited access to training and financial resources, poor governmental support, and several of them juggle domestic and professional responsibilities.

In some creative sub-sectors, globalization is resulting in the influx of mass-produced artistic products that pose major challenges to women creatives. Literature on women



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(Iwuchukwu (2017))

and work is replete with implications of the identified challenges for women's capacity to flourish in work and thrive as professionals. Many of the gender-based challenges and inequities that women and girls face in other industries and sectors are also present in the creative industry (Aborisade and Ariyo 2023; Bobbitt-Zeher 2011; Botha 2016; Tiwari, Mathur, and Awasthi 2018). Nigeria's Inkblot Women in Film, an association of women in Nigeria's film industry, has noted that male supporting actors sometimes get paid more than female lead actors (Anaesoronye 2021).

Abaga (2021) also writes that women's participation in the sector is hampered by gender inequality, including gender-insensitive workplace and industry practices that undervalue women creatives, and creative settings that devalue them and offer less than the talent they bring. In Uganda for instance, evidence indicates that many businesses, including creative ventures are unregistered, which exposes employees, particularly women and girls, to abusive and poor working conditions (Okafor 2023).

Generally, across Africa, the sector suffers from limited policy-relevant research, gender and other inequities, restricted space for cultural expression, and insufficient labor rights protection (Loots, Hutchison, and Mbele 2020; Ntoele and Atouguia 2017; Snowball and Mapuma 2020; Steedman and

Brydges 2023). In addition to stifling women creatives' capacity to work on their own terms in the sector, these barriers result in slow progression, work dissatisfaction, lack of capacity to expand businesses, feeling of helplessness, and career interruptions (Iwuchukwu 2017).

Women creatives rely on advocacy, social networks, family and community support, and agency to deal with the difficulties they face at work. In addition to using their creative skills and energies to confront the challenges they face, women creatives in Africa also agentively seek training opportunities to attain critical skills and competencies, use social media resources to crowdfund or navigate other work-related challenges, and network with other women creatives.

However, there is also evidence that some of them stay silent and endure their abuses and marginalization, rely on family and community members for support, including help with childcare duties, discontinue or suspend their careers out of frustration and lack of support, or combine their creative work with other more regular employments.

While some of the strategies resorted to by the region's women creatives are effective in helping them navigate the challenges they face, there are also those that are maladaptive and prevent them from actualizing their full potential or benefiting fully from prospects in the sector (Rao, Apte, and Subbakrishna 2003).



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Conclusion

The creative industry has emerged as a significant driver of innovation, growth, and employment in SSA. Throughout the region, the industry employs millions of people, creates innovations, solves problems, educates, entertains, informs, and contributes to economic development and community well-being (Muchira 2023). Growth in the creative sector overflows into other industries, creates new jobs, and brings new ideas, products and ways of working (UNCTAD n.d.). Women are making critical strides in the creative sector in SSA, contributing to these innovations, leading change in the sector, and advancing development efforts in the region.

However, despite the growing importance of the industry in Africa and the numerous contributions of women creatives, the work lives and experiences of women creatives in the region have received little attention. Women writers, hairstylists, fashion designers, performing and visual artists, weavers, potters, film and movie actresses, and photographers have been the focus of existing research on women creatives in SSA. The circumstances and experiences of women creatives in several creative sub-sectors such as architecture, video games, museums, galleries, and heritage, product and graphic design, advertising, and other sub-sectors have received little attention. Research on women creatives in these subsectors will be critical in understanding the scope of discrimination and exclusion that women creatives in the region suffer. There is also a need for research on the socioeconomic costs of gender inequity in the sector. Such research will be crucial in designing policies and initiatives to increase

women's participation and benefits in the sector.

The numerous problems that female creatives encounter, as well as their ways for dealing with them, highlight the need for effective policy and programmatic responses. The sector needs evidence-based strategies to address the structural constraints that women creatives encounter. Issues such as gender wage discrimination, dangerous working conditions, sexual abuse and harassment, and a lack of financial access require immediate policy action. Guilds, professional bodies, and networks can be key in developing sector-specific interventions and programs to address some of the difficulties associated with mentorship, skill development, workplace safety, and market and funding access. Generally, as (Ferreira 2024) notes, a credible growth trajectory can be created in SSA's creative industry through improved governance, addressing persistent inequality and the expansion of public initiatives through creative intermediaries, including guilds and networks.

In conclusion, the creative industries are more productive and meaningful when they include people from all different backgrounds, with different skills and personalities, and when they raise up voices that are not often heard (Discover Creative Careers N.D). In SSA, the creative sector is at risk of leaving women creatives behind due to insufficient research evidence on their works and lives in the sector, ineffective and poor policies, and the scarcity of platforms that can promote and advance their interest and meaningful engagement in the sector.



In conclusion, the creative industries are more productive and meaningful when they include people from all different backgrounds, with different skills and personalities, and when they raise up voices that are not often heard.

(Discover Creative Careers Not Dated)

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ICRW Africa Regional Office (Kenya)

Vienna Court, Fourth Floor, State House Crescent,
Nairobi, Kenya
P.O. Box 44168 – 00100 Nairobi, Kenya
Phone numbers: (+254) 769 060 463 / 785 048 377
Email: info.kenya@icrw.org

ICRW Africa Regional Office (Uganda)

1st Floor, S&L Chambers, Plot 14 Mackinnon Road,
Nakasero – Kampala, Uganda
P.O. Box 131136, Kampala, Uganda
Phone Number: (+256) 760 004 478
Email: info.uganda@icrw.org