2023 SUB-SAHARAN

AFRICA VISUAL ART

MAPPING RESEARCH EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BRITISH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The British Council has commissioned this mapping study to provide an overview of the visual arts sector in nine countries within Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). These are: Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa (SA), Sudan, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

This report has been compiled by Andani.Africa to support the development of one of the key British Council programmatic areas, Culture Connects. By identifying emerging visual arts trends, opportunities, and innovative solutions within each of these SSA countries. It is envisioned that this research will provide renewed approaches for collaboration, funding models and programme initiatives.

For the purposes of this research, we have had to limit our boundaries of the definition of visual arts for the purposes of focus, depth, and accuracy of findings. Our definition of visual art is distinctly informed by the opportunities emerging in the growing international interest in African contemporary and Modern art.

In this case, our definition refers to the work more specifically aligned with investment potential, and a level of social critique and conceptual rigour, that is largely exhibited in more specialist environments (such as galleries) or engaged with the critique of these specialist spaces and operates within or adjacent to international circulation of contemporary and modern art practices. This definition, however, is also informed by the need for local, grassroots engagement and accessibility of art practitioners operating at various levels.

The research methods used in this study includes a combination of desktop research, surveys, and semi-structured interviews. Interviews were held with up to 6 people in each country representing expertise in curatorship, education, arts management, commercial galleries and artists themselves.

OUR STORY SO FAR

40% OF YOUNG CONTEMPORARY AUCTION ARTISTS ARE WOMEN

Strauss & Co (SA) reported sales totalling R354m ($20.6m) in 2022. That sum narrowly missed its highest annual total of R356m ($20.7m) achieved in 2021.

The sales of work by African art creatives SURGED BY 44% in 2022, reaching $72.4 million in sales compared to $50.2 million in 2021.

300%

GROWTH OF NUMBER OF WORKS SOLD AND TURNOVER GENERATED IN JUST A DECADE

Exhibitions with a focus on black and African modern and contemp. art at Tate Modern, Brooklyn Museum, Serpentine Galleries, Museum of Modern Art NY, in the past 5 years with increasing visibility at major national pavillions at Venice Biennale

ETHIOPIA

124.9 million people

0.499 HDI rating

$835 GDP per capita

median age: 18

*

BIGGEST CITY	ECONOMY	INTERNET USAGE
ADDIS ABABA Population 3,352,000	AGRICULTURE, FOOD PROCESSING, TEXTILE	16.7% of population

Summary of findings

STRENGTHS

- Historically strong art background
- Core base of arts infrastructures - education, artistic initiative and commercial
- Substantial collaboration and energy from creative initiatives themselves
- Young generation of practitioners self-initiating projects

WEAKNESSES

- Not an expansive enough infrastructure to meet the need for professionalisation and scaling
- Energy from young organisations risks sustainability and continuity

OPPORTUNITIES

- Using the core infrastructure base and finding ways to scale expertise and capacities
- Supporting the momentum generated from artist run initiatives
- Increasing young 'inquisitive' audiences

THREATS TO SUCESS

- High taxes on art-related goods including art supplies (paint, canvas etc.)
- Some challenges with import/export permits for travelling exhibitions

*wwww.data.worldbank.org; www.datareportal.com/reports; wwww.globaledge.msu.edu/countries; www.worlddata.info

ETHIOPIA

Addis Fine Art is a relatively new commercial gallery with a significant international presence showing at Frieze Art Fair, Armory, 1-54, Art X Lagos and two South African art fairs regularly and was described as one of the “Most Important Young Galleries in the World” by Artsy in 2019. In 2021 it opened a London premises in addition to its base in Addis Ababa. The owners describe it as an “incubator for emerging talent”, supporting artists to better understand contracts and remuneration, and find they must work to build trust because many artists have had negative experiences. Addis Fine Art is a site of continuous learning because in many ways artists and gallerists alike are charting new waters and growing amid a rapidly changing environment. They describe how much learning has to happen through experience, and in many ways, they are inventing the models as they go, adapting their strategies to complex contexts and differing challenges.

Spotlight: ADAPTABILITY

GHANA

33.8 million people

0.632 HDI rating

$2014 GDP per capita

median age: 20

BIGGEST CITIES	ECONOMY	INTERNET USAGE
Kumasi 3,348,000 Accra 2,514,000	SERVICES, MINING, LUMBER, MANUFACT.	68.2% of population

Summary of findings

STRENGTHS

- Interdisciplinary artmaking growing
- Successful artists investing in local infrastructure
- More collectives emerging
- Artists doing well in international commercial markets
- More independent art spaces emerging

WEAKNESSES

- Not enough curators
- Insufficient governmental support for visual arts
- Limited connection between Francophone and Anglophone countries

OPPORTUNITIES

- More curatorial practice intervention is needed
- More visual arts research is required
- Increasing British Council engagement with practitioners on the ground

THREATS TO SUCESS

- Limitations to inter-regional collaboration
- Bureaucracy and expensive travel costs
- Political instability affecting the sector

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GHANA

Spotlight: SKILLS

Skills acquisition processes for visual artists in Ghana have not been uncomplicated. Teaching practices have historically centred on practical skills development, leading to a lack of consistent engagement with professional practice. Contemporary Ghanaian-led organisations such as CritLab and Exit Frame Collective actively challenge such models by filling in emerging gaps and encouraging visual art practitioners to explore both theoretical and practical elements of the visual arts. The sharing of a myriad of experiences as practitioners, including failures of accessing commercial markets, continues to equip emerging practitioners with the skills and knowledge required to navigate the sector.

KENYA

54.5 million people

0.575 HDI rating

$1705 GDP per capita

median age: 19 *

BIGGEST CITIES	ECONOMY	INTERNET USAGE
Nairobi 4,397,000 Mombasa 915,000	SMALL CONSUMER GOODS, AGRICULT., HORTICULT.	32.7% of population

Summary of findings

STRENGTHS

- New Association of Visual Artists and Collectives (AVAC) means a more coordinated ecosystem
- Strong linkages to the rest of East Africa
- A number of artists are very successful internationally, a few with new art spaces.

WEAKNESSES

- Arts initiatives have not been very robust and remain precarious
- Currently lacking strong institutional infrastructure

OPPORTUNITIES

- Potential to leverage existing infrastructures and amplify impacts through collaborations
- Support the momentum of the arts sector coordinating a new network
- Collectives serving as the primary site of energy and new work which is inherently collaborative

THREATS TO SUCESS

- Challenges to sustained impact due to precarity of ongoing energy and activity

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KENYA

Spotlight: INFRASTRUCTURES

Kenya does not have a national gallery but the National Museums of Kenya - a historical ethnographic museum - does have an active and agentive team and strong relationship with Google Arts and Culture. The museum invited Shujaa stories to have an exhibition of its Kenyan Heroes - digital illustrations of the stories of pre-independence heroes done in youthful and contemporary style and a great resource for museums to share history with its young audiences. Through this partnership, Google Arts and Culture became aware of Shujaa stories and have since supported them to do Phase II of the project. While the National Museums of Kenya are not distinctly considered visual arts infrastructure, their ongoing work and commitment to the Kenyan cultural scene has had significant impacts for other practitioners.

NIGERIA

221 million people

0.535 HDI rating

$2429 GDP per capita

median age: 17 *

BIGGEST CITIES	ECONOMY	INTERNET USAGE
Lagos 14,234,000 Kano 4,103,000	CRUDE OIL, COAL, TIN, COLUMBITE	55.4% of population

Summary of findings

STRENGTHS

- Strong commercial sector
- Collector and private sponsor support for the arts
- Vibrant ecosystem of museums, organisations, and galleries
- International representation and influence

WEAKNESSES

- Independent art spaces remain relatively precarious
- Limited collaboration and networking

OPPORTUNITIES

- Supporting a more networked and robust ecosystem
- Enabling greater sharing and capacity across individuals and initiatives
- Developing greater coordination and collaboration

THREATS TO SUCESS

- Some bureaucratic challenges with travelling exhibitions
- High costs of exhibition spaces and strong commercial impetus

*wwww.data.worldbank.org; www.datareportal.com/reports; wwww.globaledge.msu.edu/countries; www.worlddata.info

NIGERIA

Spotlight: AFRICA TO AFRICA

In 2010 the Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos, began an innovative programme with the aims of filling a gap in the educational system in Nigeria and many African countries. Asiko is a roaming curatorial and pedagogical alternative art school that seeks to answer the question "How can and do we move forward without the appropriate tools and systems for acquiring and disseminating knowledge?" Its solution is a format of part art laboratory, part residency and part informal art academy, usually over the course of 35 intensive days in a different city in Africa (and beyond) each time. It has hosted about 100 participants from approximately 20 African countries, with an almost equivalent number of international faculty. It is dedicated to education through collective learning, contextual connections, and intra-Africa collaborations.

SENEGAL

17.5 million people

0.511 HDI rating

$1436 GDP per capita

median age: 18 *

BIGGEST CITIES	ECONOMY	INTERNET USAGE
Dakar 1,146,000 Touba 529,178	AGRICULTURAL & FISH PROCESSING, PHOSPHATE	58.1% of population

Summary of findings

STRENGTHS

- Visibility of Dak'Art biennale in international commercial art market
- Extensive history of visual arts development in country
- Well established history of collectives
- Visibility of leading regional organisation RAW Material Company

WEAKNESSES

- Insufficient governmental support for visual arts
- Fragile connection/engagement with Anglophone opportunities and regions due to language barriers

OPPORTUNITIES

- More local programmes are needed to retain visual arts skills and practitioners
- Emergence of more peer-to-peer learning
- Focus more on artistic practice and less so on training
- Exchanges could go both ways (cross-exchange for institutions too)

THREATS TO SUCESS

- Lack of a cultural policy

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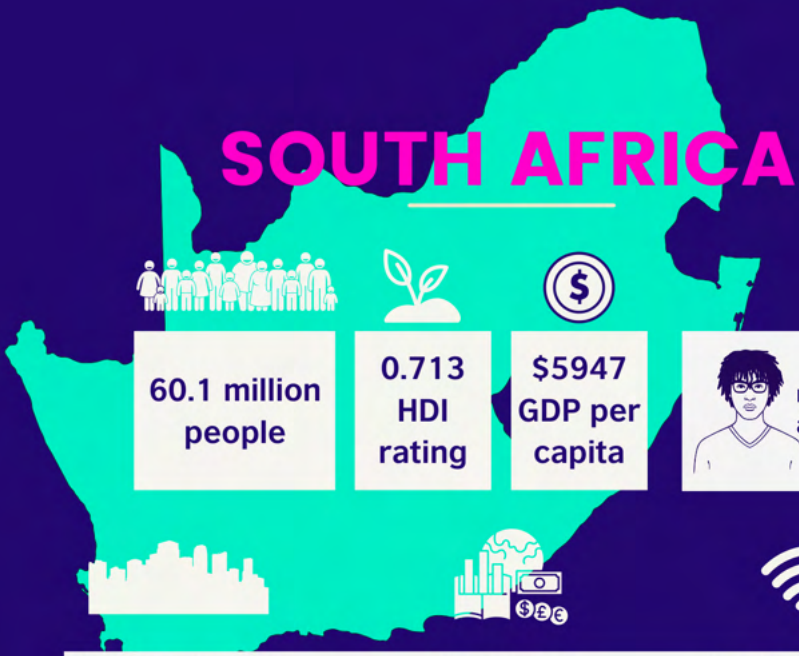
SENEGAL

Spotlight: LANGUAGE

Curator, cultural producer and mediator Akya Sy used to teach communications. Using these skills she has been able to travel from her native Senegal to Bujumbura, Burundi, to teach visual artists there. Forming connections with practitioners both in Senegal and in neighbouring countries has exposed her to the common concern of a disconnect in communication between French-speaking areas and English-speaking areas. Because of this gap, there is a perceived lack of access, which can be addressed by connecting with practitioners with firm knowledge of the context. Sharing open calls, fellowships, and grant collaboratories in multiple languages specific to particular SSA countries may help solve this issue.

SOUTH AFRICA



BIGGEST CITIES	ECONOMY	INTERNET USAGE
Joburg 4,434,827 Cape Town 3,740,026	MINING: PLATINUM, GOLD, CHROMIUM, AUTOMOBILE	72.3% of population

Summary of findings

STRENGTHS

- Established funding models
- Multiple art fairs
- Established galleries with local and international presence
- Established curatorial practice
- Well-funded formal education institutions
- Extensive research on visual arts

WEAKNESSES

- Dysfunctional regional network platform
- Precarity of independent art spaces
- Strongly commercially influenced sector with limited experimental opportunities
- Inequality

OPPORTUNITIES

- Partnering with collectives already pooling resources, skill, and intellect
- Tapping into the existing drive for fostering connections with peers in different African regions
- Growing more collaboration strategies across the sector

THREATS TO SUCESS

- Electricity crisis threatening the sustainability of both emerging and established spaces
- Corruption of government officials
- Dysfunctional government agencies

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SOUTH AFRICA

A curatorial collective formed by emerging artists in South Africa who were united after initially rejecting an internship opportunity members were supposed to be part of, Work In Progress morphed into a space dedicated towards reimagining curating as a profession. Based on the idea of “knowing through doing”, members support each other and intentionally resist ways of working steeped in academic models. A trip to Ghana in 2022 prompted the collective to start finding more ways of enhancing their practices, conceptual tools and connecting with peers in different African regions. By investing more support for intra-African travel through diplomatic relations, this could potentially enable ease of access for visual arts practitioners.

Spotlight: COLLABORATION

SUDAN

45.6 million people

0.508 HDI rating

$1746 GDP per capita

median age: 18 *

BIGGEST CITIES	ECONOMY	INTERNET USAGE
Khartoum and Omdurman 5,274,321	SMALL CONSUMER GOODS, AGRICULT., HORTICULT.	32.7% of population

Summary of findings

STRENGTHS

- Strong community of practitioners
- Very collaborative and self-initiating
- Post-revolutionary energy and drive for culture and art in society
- Strong art history tradition
- Many young women driving artistic practice

WEAKNESSES

- Few institutions
- Limited arts infrastructure
- Limited professionalisation
- Lack of sustainability
- Political situation remains precarious
- Language access (Arabic)

OPPORTUNITIES

- Supporting the new energy emerging from the revolution, and the new spaces opening
- More public support for the arts after their important role in the revolution
- The collaborative approach of the sector means reaching many people and wider impact

THREATS TO SUCESS

- Lack of long-term strength of visual arts initiatives threatens sustainability of activities and actions

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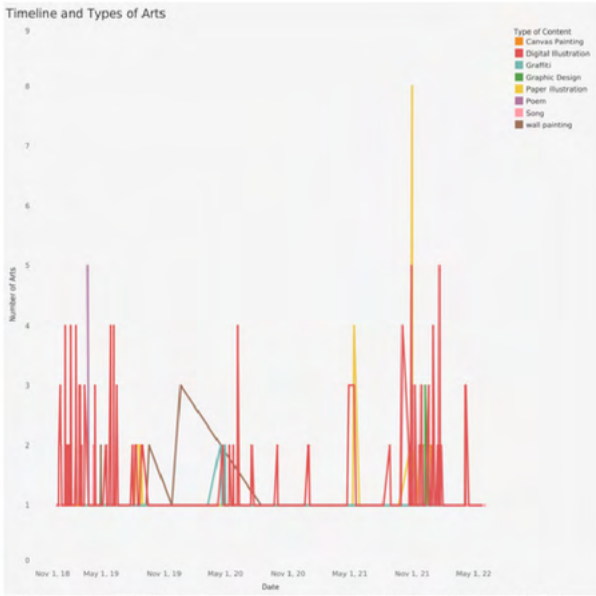
SUDAN

Spotlight: CONTEXT



Research and Graphic of arts production by @affendi_xiii

Ahmed El-Affendi is a data journalist and storyteller who undertook data analysis of the levels of art output over the period of the revolution to show the degree to which the two were intertwined. In Sudan today, artistic practice is deeply informed by the social needs of the local context in the aftermath of its recent history.

UGANDA

47.9 million people

0.525 HDI rating

$920 GDP per capita

median age: 16 *

BIGGEST CITIES	ECONOMY	INTERNET USAGE
Kampala 1,507,000	SUGAR, BREWING, TOBACCO, COTTON TEXTILES	24.6% of population

Summary of findings

STRENGTHS

- Strong technical tertiary art education
- 32 Degrees East emerging as a strong regional body in East Africa
- Emerging independent art spaces

WEAKNESSES

- Poor retention of curators
- Not enough physical spaces
- Same circle of people getting opportunities
- Insufficient governmental support for visual arts
- Lack of auctions in local commercial market

OPPORTUNITIES

- Developing more curatorial practice programmes
- A more inclusive approach to grant funding
- A more reciprocal approach to collaborations
- Funding options should enable independence

THREATS TO SUCESS

- Complicated logistics involved in inter-regional collaborations
- Too great a focus on instrumentalising the arts
- Elusive IP and copyright policies
- Poor infrastructure

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UGANDA

Spotlight: SOCIAL IMPACT

Informed by an interest in the skin condition vitiligo, Martin Senkubuge's artistic practice has a wider-reaching impact beyond commercial artistic production. Tapping into social concerns through his art, he has managed to raise awareness about the need to de-stigmatise people living with vitiligo in Uganda. Operating in a local art ecosystem that isn't fully developed enough to support his endeavours and vision is an indicator that the Ugandan art scene is fertile ground for enhanced efforts to support cultural producers. Support for smaller projects with an ability to develop for greater impact, may be one way of engaging with the local environment and helping to build a self-sustaining sector.

ZIMBABWE

16.4 million people

0.593 HDI rating

$1289 GDP per capita

median age: 18 *

BIGGEST CITIES	ECONOMY	INTERNET USAGE
Harare 3,121,000 Bulawayo 653,000	MINING: COAL, GOLD, PLATINUM, COPPER, ETC.	34.8% of population

Summary of findings

STRENGTHS

- Robust and committed art ecosystem
- Self-initiated and coordinated sector
- Substantial infrastructure of museums and artist run spaces
- Strong sense of responsibility of successful artists towards their context
- Collaborative approach

WEAKNESSES

- Significant economic and political challenges
- Very limited local audience
- Precarity threatens sustainability
- Self-initiated infrastructure relies on individuals to keep it running

OPPORTUNITIES

- Capacity for leveraged impact due to collective, artist-run initiatives
- Collaborative approach of the sector means reaching many people and wider impact
- Tapping into established and accessible exhibition spaces and programmes

THREATS TO SUCESS

- Precarity of financial sustainability
- Burn out of artist-driven initiatives

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ZIMBABWE

Spotlight: ARTIST-LED SPACES

Many successful artists in Zimbabwe return to establish their own artist-run spaces, such as Moffat Takadiwa, who is a well-known artist based in Harare, most familiar to non-art audiences due to the acquisition of his work by Jay Z. He has been developing Mbare Art Space, an art-centred urban renewal project. It is a highly localised and inclusive artist-run space that serves other artists through studio space, mentoring and exhibition possibilities. Takadiwa has brought together individuals with experience in developing multi-use spaces and heritage architecture, and they are in the process of fundraising, as currently the project has primarily been self-funded. As a successful artist, Takadiwa understands the needs of local artists in the township he is from and is invested in enabling access. However, as he continues as a professional artist, the space requires capacity and investment to become sustainable beyond the drive of a single individual.

CONCLUSION

The visual arts from the African continent is growing exponentially. International visibility for art from the continent is greater than it's ever been. Within Africa, we see growth and excitement about the potential of the visual arts in all nine countries discussed in this research. The nature of this growth differs from context to context, but we can determine the following:

1

GREATER COMMERCIAL REPRESENTATION

All countries have greater commercial representation of contemporary art from their contexts, for some countries this is across a wide range of galleries and fairs, but for most it is isolated to one or two key commercial galleries.

2

VISUAL ARTS ECOSYSTEM IS COLLABORATIVE & SUPPORTIVE

To a greater or lesser degree practitioners of the visual arts are collaborating, especially through independent art spaces and projects, to create social infrastructures for the visual arts.
In many contexts, artists that are relatively successful on the international stage are returning home to develop new projects and art spaces. These spaces need institution building and people with expertise to enable their sustainability.

3

LOCAL STRUCTURES REMAIN PRECARIOUS

Local infrastructures for the visual arts remain precarious and fluctuating, without the strength to actively capitalise on the growth and development of the international interest in African visual art, despite being the spaces educating, supporting, and building African visual artists that then go on to be successful internationally.

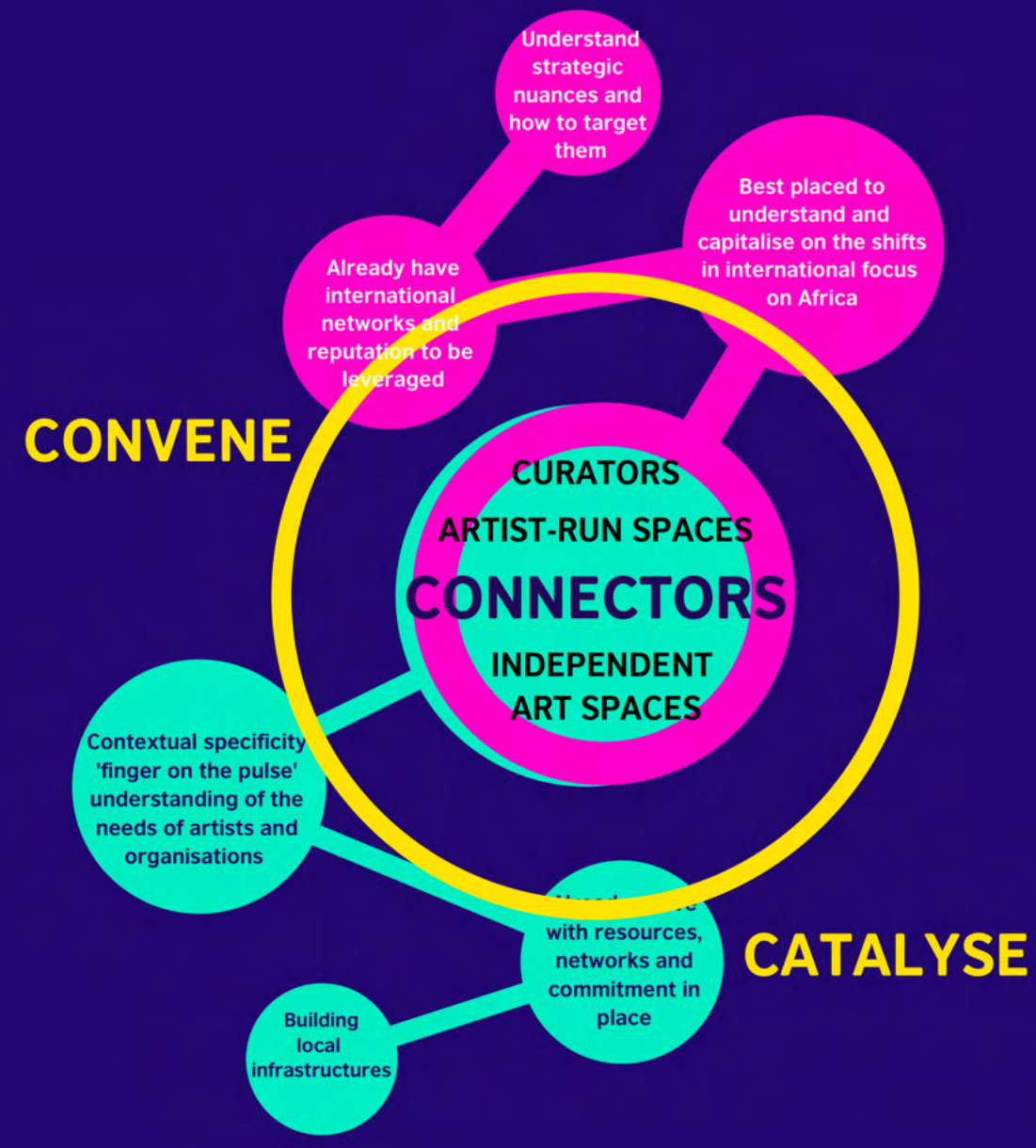
4

AUDIENCES ARE GROWING

Young people are increasingly interested in the visual arts, regardless of their areas of profession, and are a potential growing audience for the arts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Growing arts ecosystems	Some of the countries in this report have distinctly collaborative and networked arts ecosystems, others much less so. However, in all cases, there is a lack of active structures and strategies for strengthening visual arts ecosystems, at city, country, and regional level. A large number of interviewees across the continent pointed to the need for stronger networks and opportunities for skills sharing and exchange. While a few platforms such as PAN!C were initiated, they have not been sustained. Some, such as Asiko, have been recently revived. Enabling this kind of exchange and connection would have substantial immediate impact, especially among enablers and nodes within ecosystems - such as curators, independent art spaces, and artist-run initiatives.
Individuals and initiatives = connectors!	Across the continent there was the same statement, that maintaining independent curatorial practice was incredibly difficult. Because of this, most curators who operate independently are also associated with institutions and organisations in their countries, and exhibitions by independent curators are undertaken within these same organisations. While artists are often considered to work in relative isolation, in many contexts across the continent it has been successful artists who have established initiatives for access and support for other practitioners - from developmental level to some of the most prestigious art spaces in their countries. It becomes clear, therefore, that separating out the impacts of individual practitioner's vs organisations or curators vs artists should not be assumed. Rather, any projects that look to create impact should work with independent practitioners but also ensure they support the incredibly precarious independent art space landscape on the African continent. In some senses this links to the notion of an ecosystemic approach in point 1. Importantly, many interviewees in many different countries pointed to the need to "not just support exhibitions", i.e., not only the product of the work but also the process of creating the work itself. There was a sense that there is more support for outcomes than for research, production, and exchange.
Young 'inquisitive' audiences	Across our interviews, a common comment was that people were noticing a growing and increasingly present cohort of "inquisitive" and "curious" young audiences. These are noted because, usually, visual arts audiences are made up primarily of people already active in the arts and perhaps in some contexts, a very small cohort of older collectors. However, this new emerging audience comprises not artists themselves, but individuals who have developed an interest in art - often as part of a significance of value within social media and influencer circles. For many, this points to a potential that, if harnessed, could enable a growing African audience for art. However, many practitioners pointed out that they are unsure of how to capitalise on this potential and ensure they "keep their attention". There is an organic emergence here that has potential for long-term impact, and that is closely aligned with the identified need for digital, social media and communications skills that has emerged across the continent - particularly to build audiences and therefore build an argument for visual arts value.
Africa - Africa partnerships	Across the board, in every country, interviewees indicated that they are most interested in Africa-Africa connections. African practitioners want to meet, collaborate with, and learn from other African practitioners. There is the sense that the knowledge exchanged from different African contexts is more relevant to one's own work, but also that a growing and strengthening African visual arts ecosystem enables greater leveraging of the new interest in African visual arts. In many ways, African practitioners have been doing so relatively independently at peer-to-peer levels; however, enabling African exchange will garner greater impacts and very positive outcomes. For some, the capacity to share projects, to enable travelling exhibitions, to ensure work shown in one's own country is shown in other parts of Africa, also serves as an arena of great potential. There are significant challenges to travelling exhibitions in Africa - including costs, permits and logistics; however, projects such as Boda Boda Lounge Video festival (a networked festival that happens across the continent in various venues over the same weekend - sending USB sticks of the selected videos because internet connections aren't strong enough for downloads) and others have sought out strategies for easier ways of enabling these kinds of collaborations.
Global partnerships	Interviewees are clear that international partnerships also have great potential and value. However, they need to be strategic and built over time, rather than just an urgent response to an open call, in order to be effective. Furthermore, international partnerships need to indicate a sense of respect and equality of roles and capacities rather than create repeated power imbalances. For many, partnerships with people of colour or even of the African diaspora have been deeply meaningful and enabled a local relevance and engagement. Themes such as decolonisation, or community-focused agendas for people of colour, have been mentioned as enabling greater exchange for all partners involved. In particular, interviewees identified potential for institutional exchanges that could enable more strategic skills acquisition at institutional levels. The case of the Ithuba Director learning about artist-run initiative structures and funding models is one such example of how these exchanges may enable professionalisation of skills that are largely learned through action, experience, and exposure, rather than workshops.


Understand strategic nuances and how to target them
Best placed to understand and capitalise on the shifts in international focus on Africa
Already have international networks and reputation to be leveraged
CONVENE
CURATORS
ARTIST-RUN SPACES
CONNECTORS
INDEPENDENT ART SPACES
Contextual specificity 'finger on the pulse' understanding of the needs of artists and organisations
with resources, networks and commitment in place
CATALYSE
Building local infrastructures

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all the participants who took part in this research and shared their knowledge and expertise with the research team.

Report Commissioned by the British Council

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Developed by Andani.Africa
Research Team
Molemo Moiloa
Lonwabo Mavuso
Phumzile Twala
Avril Mafemba
Madeleine Lambert

THIS IS A SHORT SUMMARY OF A LONGER REPORT BY BRITISH COUNCIL

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