Creative Approach to Development: Leveraging the Sino-African Belt and Road Initiatives to Boost Africa’s Cultural and Creative Industries for Africa’s Development

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Received: 15 April 2022 / Accepted: 16 May 2022 / Published online: 31 May 2022 © The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature B.V. 2022

Abstract
The present study identifies investment in Africa’s cultural and creative industries (CCIs) as one of the strategic moves in the right direction for achieving sustainable development across the African continent. Cultural and creative industries (CCIs) offer an alternative approach to development through their wealth creation potential, socioeconomic development, employment opportunities, and promotion of cultural diversity. Nevertheless, CCIs are yet to feature categorically as a development strategy, owing to their many challenges, as indicated by the study. The study submits that partnerships under the Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) could offer an alternative source of mobilizing support for CCIs, as the BRI is a development framework with robust financing, infrastructure, and human resources development. However, it will require the pragmatic support of policymakers to leverage BRI and boost the expansion of CCIs in Africa.

Keywords Africa · Cultural and creative industries · Mobilization of support · Development strategy · Belt and Road Initiative · Partnership

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Introduction

The contributions of cultural and creative industries (CCI) across the globe have been of significant impact since the 2008 economic crisis, aiding value-centered economies that are best positioned to leapfrog and recover from the global economic crisis ([1], p.9). On the other hand, consumer-centered developing economies, whose large chunks constitute the African economies, are still struggling along the recovery path [2]. African countries are at various stages of economic development and will continue to be vulnerable to economic, social, and political shocks [2]. Interestingly, the continent’s demography continues to rise, demanding practical strategies to tackle development issues. An outlook on Africa’s development strategies has always emphasized the investment in infrastructure and human capital development [3, 4]. These areas underpin the whole processes involved in culture, creativity, and consumption. These areas underpin the whole processes involved in culture, creativity, and consumption, from imagination to production, all the way to marketization and consumption [5, 6].

Africa’s rich cultural heritage, ethnic diversity, and unique sense of esthetics are yet to form a major part of Africa’s development in a practical sense [7]. African cultural and creative goods are largely characterized by poor market structure and an informal economy ([6], p.16). The share of African countries’ creative goods exports—USD 1900 million in 2012—remains relatively low even among the global south’s trading partners, while its imports grew above its exports, standing at USD 5100 million in 2012 ([8], p.7). The continent continues to lag behind in terms of the global value chain [1] and the utilization of its talented and vibrant labor force [4]. African films, music, and fashion are making waves globally, with great economic potential yet untapped [9]. The transformation of Africa’s CCIs will improve trade of cultural goods, augment revenues, boost employment, and alleviate poverty by creating wealth [6, 9]. Nevertheless, the challenges of infrastructure, funding, and other strategic issues need to be tackled decisively to ensure practical results [1, 10].

Consequently, Africa’s partnership with the rest of the world needs to be strategic and geared towards Africa’s development programs [11]. Speaking of strategic partnerships, African countries have found a better partner in China. This partnership has grown from the decolonization era of the mid-twentieth century down to the millennial era, leading to the high level of cooperation informed by the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and the Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI).

During his 2013 visit to Kazakhstan, Chinese President Xi Jinping unveiled the BRI plan [12]. It aimed to rebuild the ancient Silk Road by establishing a network of railways, roads, pipelines, ports, and public power grids that link China to the rest of the world—connecting Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Africa [13]. The BRI offers a new development path for participating countries to promote inclusive growth and human development through infrastructural linkages, improved trade, investment, and financial integration [14]. In 2019, 6 years down the lane, a total of 126 countries and 29 international organizations have
signed cooperation agreements with China [13]. The initiative provides an alternative economic corridor in a global environment hostile to trade. For example, the environment, which generally discourages global productivity growth, makes it impossible for commodity exporters and low-income countries in general to develop new export models and gradually close income gaps with richer countries [15]. African countries’ participation in BRI is crucial for Africa’s development. It does mean that the continent cannot be a spectator but must rather play an active role that is beneficial for its own development.

Nonetheless, the question remains as to how African countries can best participate in the BRI in order to address their development challenges. What strategy should be adopted? This study looks at CCIs in Africa as an emerging sector with great prospects that complement the sustainable development goals and Africa’s Agenda 2063 and therefore requires the attention of policymakers. It seeks to present a comprehensive understanding of the contributions of CCIs to Africa’s sustainable development quest, as CCIs in Africa remain crucial for poverty and unemployment alleviation. The study views investment in Africa’s CCIs as a strategic development approach, while the BRI will serve as an alternative source for mobilizing funds and infrastructural support to boost the African CCIs. Thus, Africa’s CCIs need to be featured categorically under the broad framework of the Sino-African BRI partnership. The main focus of our study is to signal one of the many salient strategies for which African countries can leverage the BRI to address some of the development challenges, since the BRI is a development framework and also serves as an avenue for China’s global policy initiative with many participants other than African countries. The present study is exploratory; it adopts a critical design approach using context research and exploratory literature review for its analysis [16]. The next section discusses the development context of cultural and creative industries (CCIs), capturing the nature and significance of CCIs to Africa’s sustainable development initiatives. The third section focuses on leveraging the Sino-African BRI through strategic partnerships for Africa’s benefit. The fourth section discusses the major challenges of expanding the African CCIs. The fifth section highlights the prospects of expanding the African CCIs to include Africa’s sustainable development initiatives. The sixth section concludes with a policy rationale and strategy for expanding the African CCIs.

The development context of cultural and creative industries

Scientific constructs on the development of cultural and creative industries serve as the foundation for interdisciplinary approaches in economics, sociology, culture, politics, geography, and urban planning, among other disciplines, that seek to exploit and develop the potential of cultural and creative industries for their own appropriation [17–21]. For instance, in the economic domain, cultural and creative industries are a key sector in terms of growth and employment for national economies; in the political domain, cultural and creative industries are seen as vehicles of values and collective representations serving as resources of the power of states and their capacity to shape their international environment;
and culturally, as identity vehicles, cultural expressions distributed by cultural and creative industries are usually components of a national, regional, or local identity, with elements of concern over cultural dominance [21, 22]. Cultural and creative industries’ constructs may have varied application strategies to development. However, the perspective offered herein focuses on economic and cultural strategies that contribute to development.

“Cultural and creative industries” are organized activity sectors that produce or reproduce cultural, artistic, or heritage-related goods, services, and activities, as well as promote, distribute, and commercialize them [23]. They include the media and entertainment industries, the arts and cultural heritage, and creative business-to-business services [17]. Cultural and creative industries are the most dynamic sectors of the global economy, and as a result, they have attracted a variety of terms (such as creative economy, creative industries, cultural industries, cultural economy, the culture sector, and art industry) due to various interpretations and understandings of their content and potential [17, 24, 25]. They constitute the major drivers of economic strategies with tremendous potential for both developed and developing countries that seek to diversify their economies. The cultural and creative industries (CCIs) generate over $2.250 billion USD in global revenue and over $250 billion USD in exports per year [26]. CCIs are one of the world’s largest job-creating sectors, with nearly 30 million job openings that employ more women and youths and contribute to the GDPs of some countries [26].

In the UK, the gross value added (GVA) of the creative industries was £76.9 billion in 2013, accounting for 5.6% of total UK jobs and 5.0% of the UK economy [5]. By 2017, creative industries contributed £101.5 billion to the country’s economy, with a growth rate of nearly twice that since 2010 [27]. In Indonesia, the creative economy contributes 7.4% to the nation’s GDP and employs 14.3% of its workforce [27]. A study conducted by EY and CISAC [6] examined the global performance of CCI by region. Asia–Pacific is the world’s largest market for cultural and creative industries (CCI), accounting for US $743 billion in revenue (33% of global CCI revenues) and 12.7 million jobs, representing 43 percent of CCI jobs worldwide. Europe and North America made up the second and third largest CCI markets, with 32% and 28% of global revenues, respectively. CCI global sales ranked fourth, at 6% in Latin America, while Africa and the Middle East combined ranked fifth. According to an EY and CISAC study, Africa and the Middle East region generate $58 billion in revenue (3% of global CCI revenues) and employ 2.4 million people (8% of total CCI jobs), and the study also captured comparative disparities within the various CCIs’ goods and services that form the major revenue generators in the various regions. For instance, revenues from gaming and newspapers dominated the Asia–Pacific region; advertisements and museums dominated European CCI markets; entertainment content like TV, movies, and radio, boosted by digital transformation, capped the North American CCI revenues; cultural heritage sites in Latin America dominated the CCI revenues of the region; and music and movies dominated the African CCI market sales (p.16), operating largely under unorganized structures.
The nature of cultural and creative industries in Africa

Cultural and creative industries in Africa include functional creation, heritage, arts, and media, as shown in Table 1, capturing the goods and services they offer. According to the African Creative Economy Conference (ACEC) [28], there is no shortage of artistic talent on the African continent. However, the continent lags behind when it comes to transforming opportunities into a sustainable and thriving creative economy through creative and cultural producers. Africa’s CCIs operate largely in the unstructured/informal sector, which is often characterized by workers with low literacy rates and low levels of education, but who possess impressive artistic skills [29–31]. The largely unstructured nature of African CCIs [30], coupled with little understanding of their potential for Africa’s sustainable development [32], often leads to a lack of pragmatism towards the sector. As a result, non-Africans, particularly in the West, frequently underestimate the importance of African CCIs [33]. At the same time, they remain vulnerable to political manipulations within the continent [9].

Subsequently, studies have shown that investing in CCIs is key to alleviating poverty in countries and communities that need liberation from economic deprivation if these industries are well-established [34–36]. The development of cultural industries is no longer explained as the outcome of economic growth but the dynamics of a new economy [35]. It calls for an actionable point that will necessitate the contributions of cultural, innovative, technical, and organizational expertise in order to ensure significant contributions to national economies. To better leverage the potential of CCIs for Africa’s development, it is pertinent to note that developing Africa’s cultural industries is not solely about technical interventions, enabling environments, and economic indicators; it is about understanding the role culture can play in development and strategically harnessing it [32].

Culture and creative industries in the context of Africa’s development

Culture and creativity are a combination of the human quest for well-being, the artistic quest for beauty, and the scientific quest for truth [35], which are intrinsic parts of human development. The creativity and cultural innovations of human artistry are then converted into finished goods and services that impact on societal socioeconomic development by the cultural and creative industries ([6], p.9). Cultural and creative industries are critical diversification areas that offer a shift to non-agricultural products and guarantee broad and dynamic participation and job opportunities for African youths in private sectors ([4], p.x). These areas are service-oriented [37] and largely supported by the proliferation of digital technologies [9]. The share of African CCIs accounts for $4.2 billion in revenues and employs about half a million people [6]. They serve as a source of income for those with access to resources and an employment opportunity for the underprivileged. For instance, Africa’s most prominent film industry, the Nigerian Nollywood, directly employs 300,000 people and, indirectly, is estimated to employ over one million people, including actors,
Table 1  Shows the lists of cultural and creative industries goods and services

| Groups                  | Functional creation | Heritage | Arts & Media |
|-------------------------|---------------------|----------|-------------|
| Sub-groups              |                     |          |             |
| Design                  | Creative services   |          |             |
| Interior design         | Architecture        | Wicker   |             |
| Jewelry                 | Creative R&D Advertise| Glass    |             |
| Toys                    | Architectural drawing| Carpets  |             |
| Glass ware              | Other arts crafts    | Yarn and fabrics |     |

Source: authors computation based on (Adebola 2020) with minor changes
directors, hair stylists, sound technicians, marketers, and advertisers [9] and contributes USD $600 million annually to the country’s economy [38]. In South Africa, CCIs account for 2.9% of the gross domestic product (GDP) and constitute 3.6% of the country’s total employment [9].

Furthermore, studies have shown that investing in Africa’s CCIs is one of the salient strategies that could enhance human development and industrialization, as the eradication of poverty alone is not enough to stimulate development [30, 31]. The demography of sub-Saharan Africa is projected to increase over the next 20 years and have more working age ranges (ages 15–64) than the rest of the world combined by 2035. Africa will need to create 18 million jobs every year until 2035 to absorb these vibrant and talented growing labor forces ([4], p.x). In its various sectors, the CCIs could absorb these workforces, giving Africa a comparative advantage in terms of demography and demographic dividends through industrialization. As part of getting creative with development [9], it becomes vital to adopt the sustainability strategic thinking approach, such that policymakers begin to pay more attention to CCI issues and seek ways to leverage the talent pool of the workforce for Africa’s transformation.

Nevertheless, the lack of both infrastructure and capacity (financial and technical support) to transform the potential of the continent’s creative talents into concrete output poses a challenge and leads to a minimal contribution to the economies and global output [32]. In addition, Africa’s consumption of creative goods is increasing considerably. However, the continent’s consumption exceeds its production capacity, leading to imports exceeding exports (see Fig. 1). Consequently, to better address the challenges of Africa’s CCIs, one of the many options (externally) for mobilizing support is presented through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI remains an unprecedented opportunity to attract funding for CCIs that will drive mutually

![Creative Industries Trade Performances of African Countries in 2014](image)

**Fig. 1** List of 27 African countries performances in creative goods trade 2014. Source: authors computation from UNCTAD (2018). The report showed list of countries, observers, territories, and non-state entities profile for creative economy trade performances from 2005 to 2014, capturing 27 African countries performances in creative goods (design, audio visuals, art crafts, visual arts, publishing, performing arts, and new media) trades. N.B. The above computation was limited to only 2014 creative goods trade performances; data from the previous years were not included. It showed trade deficits of creative goods among African countries, of which Egypt and Madagascar were the only countries with good performance, respectively, while countries like Gabon, Ghana, and Kenya recorded negligible trade values.
beneficial economic growth and address vital issues such as job creation, infrastructure development, and improved social services [39].

**Leveraging on BRI to bolster Africa’s cultural and creative industries**

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is the revamped ancient Silk Road, which dates back more than 2000 years ago. It was a peaceful way in which interstate commercial activities and cultural exchanges were conducted, and it covered more than 10,000 km from China to Rome [12, 14]. The initiative is essentially China’s global expansion through the “opening up” and “going global” strategies, with a regional focus on Asia, Europe, and Africa [14, 40]. The BRI combines different foreign and domestic policies with existing and alternative political, economic, and financial cooperation mechanisms into a new geographical format [40]. The initiative is highly infrastructure-oriented, with robust financing to boost economic activity and long-term growth and development of participating countries. With the announcement of BRI, China launched various financial initiatives to support its financing with a total initial capital base of USD $240 billion from three banks (see Table 2). In 2017, various financial pledges were made to support the BRI projects. China announced an injection of RMB 100 billion into the Silk Road Fund. The China Development Bank and China Export–Import Bank will provide RMB 250 billion and RMB 130 billion in loans, while other Chinese financial institutions are encouraged to expand overseas funds by RMB 300 billion [41]. The BRI's multifaceted funding sources make the initiative more attractive for participating countries and economies that seek to leverage it and address their development challenges. For

| Table 2 | Showing initial capital injection into the BRI framework |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| **BRICS Development Bank *1** | **US$ 100 Billion** |
| Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank | **US$ 100 billion** |
| Silk Road Infrastructure Fund | **US$ 40 billion** |
| China Development Bank |  |
| China Export–Import Bank |  |
| China Export and Credit Insurance Corp (Sinosure) |  |
| China Investment Corp (CIC) |  |
| Bank of China |  |

*1Initial subscribed capital = US$ 50B
Source: Chua (2017) with minor changes
instance, sub-Saharan African countries remain the largest recipients of China’s out-band investment at a ton of USD $297.6 billion [41].

**Strategic partnership in BRI**

The term “strategic” refers to a strategy model that depicts well-planned “objectives, concepts, and resources within acceptable bounds of risk to create more favorable outcomes than might otherwise exist by chance or at the hands of others” [42]. Yarger’s view on strategy further identified the need for a synergy and symmetry of objectives, concepts, and resources to increase the probability of policy success and the favorable consequences that follow from that success, which the BRI embodies. Africa’s development strategy for achieving the sustainable development goals (SDG) and Agenda 2063 includes the overall efforts of creating Africa for the African people and for Africa to assume its rightful position within the global community [11]. At the 2018 FOCAC high-level meeting, a sizeable chunk of African countries (37) and the African Union signed cooperation agreements on the BRI to facilitate the alignment of the BRI with the African Union’s Agenda 2063 and the United Nation’s sustainable development goals for Africa’s development [13]. Abegunrin and Manyeruke [14] noted that the BRI presents enormous opportunities for unprecedented economic development in Africa. China has been keen on bolstering Africa’s development through its many efforts in financing and constructing infrastructural projects across the continent. Beijing supports Africa’s development blueprints like the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), Africa50fund, and Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), among others, through its financial contributions aimed at projects with long-term development benefits for Africa [14, 43].

Africa’s participation in BRI presents a window of opportunities that complements FOCAC’s ability to address its development challenges through fund mobilization, human and technical support, and development experience. Unlike FOCAC, BRI aims to connect other regions of the world. As a result, participating countries must draw up their strategies to ensure mutual benefits and favorable outcomes [14]. According to Abegunrin and Manyeruke [14], when it comes to supporting the importance China places on Africa under the BRI, the initiative is deemed inadequate as Africa’s role in the BRI is minimal. They argue that Africa is somewhat of a peripheral player, and only a few African countries on the periphery of BRI benefit more from the initiative.

Consequently, this calls for improved engagement strategies that benefit all African countries under the BRI framework. In this case, creative approaches to development, such as investing in and expanding the African CCIs, should be prioritized by policymakers as well as stakeholders and be featured in Africa’s strategies for engaging in BRI. African CCIs have the potential to transform the current value sets of African people and boost revenues [7]. Nevertheless, without the provision of financial support, quality infrastructure, and human and technical resources, no meaningful change can be achieved [7, 10, 32]. To this end, the
concept of sustainability thinking strategy that deals with inclusive approaches is vital for African countries to better leverage on BRI and to address its pressing development challenges.

**Impediments to the development of Africa’s cultural and creative industries**

**Lack of funding for CCIs**

Limited access to funds has been one of the major bottlenecks to the development of Africa’s CCIs [10]. It frustrates the many efforts by the sector to expand and transform into a high-revenue yielding and alternative socioeconomic development sector. They include challenges such as lack of funds to turn talents into business opportunities, augment existing creative industries, and hire skilled workers, market or business planning allocation, product preservation, and research and development of business capacity that can be remedied through sufficient financing [36, 44]. Sufficient funding remains vital to the long-term sustainability of Africa’s CCIs, as financial security is a critical change driver in terms of boosting capacity, creativity, and innovation in CCIs. Lack of sufficient funding has left African CCIs to rely majorly on self-sponsorship ([6], p.9), resulting in small-scale production of creative goods and services, while Africa’s share of the global creative economy remains at less than 1% ([45], p.130).

In terms of mobilizing resources domestically, there are a series of innovative approaches that have been engineered to financially support Africa’s CCIs by providing funds for individuals to support their projects. They feature innovative approaches like crowdfunding, using African microfinance platforms such as ThundFund (ZA), StartCrunch (Nigeria), M-Changa (Kenya), Nairobi-based HEVA, and direct intervention by banks, such as the announcement by the African Export–Import Bank (Afreximbank) to inject USD $500 million in stimulus [46–48]. Despite the support from domestic mobilization of resources, Africa’s CCIs are still largely underfunded, as resource mobilization in the form of financial intervention is largely dependent on external financial inflows, which constitute about 11.6% of Africa’s GDP [49]. Africa’s CCIs receive more support from western nations than any other region [39]. However, it does come with conditions that are deemed culturally imperialistic [50]. For instance, the right presentation and usage of Africa’s own themes that portray the richness of its own culture in creative industries [7] are compromised. This situation underscores the demand for alternative funding sources such as the BRI. As a development framework, the BRI is boosted by strong financial coordination to enhance trade, investment, and infrastructural development among participating countries [41], based on the tenets of mutual respect and non-interference. In this case, the sourcing of funds from the BRI framework would likely not interfere with Africa’s own development pattern, while the CCIs would be encouraged through cultural diplomacy.
Inadequate infrastructure

Infrastructure in its various forms—transport infrastructure (road, rail, ports and airports); power generation; the information and communications (ICT) highway; irrigation for the agricultural sector; and social infrastructures such as water and sanitation—are all critical for African and global growth and development [51]. In terms of infrastructural development, the continent is marred by a shortage of adequate infrastructure, both hard (physical) and soft (knowledge-based) [3]. Africa’s infrastructure financing is experiencing a financial gap of between USD 68–108 billion and would require about USD 130–170 billion yearly for its financing [52]. Since proper and functional infrastructures are crucial for cultural and creative industries to effectively add value to their products, the challenge of infrastructure could be remedied through the BRI as the initiative is highly infrastructure-oriented [14, 41]. However, it will require a pragmatic approach and a focus on priority areas rather than vanity projects.

Additionally, African CCIs are actively making headway towards digitizing their content by making use of the available technological tools in the absence of adequate digital infrastructures [9]. Digital infrastructures are crucial when it comes to Africa participating in the digital revolution and the 4th industrial revolution. According to PwC’s [53] study, robust and adequate digital infrastructures will benefit Africa’s CCIs, while they offer the continent an alternative opportunity to chart its own development paradigm. Africa’s advantage over other advanced regions of the world is the absence of an infrastructural legacy [53]. Therefore, the continent can build new infrastructure without going through the hurdles of trying to remove the previously built ones. In other words, Africa’s infrastructural disappointment can be a blessing in disguise since it offers “a clean sheet on which industries can develop their own distinctive business models” [53].

Copyright and piracy issues

To better understand the lingering act of piracy, the term which refers to unauthorized appropriation and sales of creative works other than one’s own [32], it is pertinent to identify its stem source. By this, we mean the attitude and the preconception of culture, which from an African perspective is commonly disconnected from the economic dimension [6]. In some parts of Africa, particularly in Francophone Africa, events such as festivals, performances, and active theater are frequently free to attend, while artists are compensated through sponsorship of such events ([6], p.71). These attitudes make it easier for people to ignore copyright and intellectual property theft regulations. Copyright and intellectual property theft regulations have raised many arguments regarding their efficacy in promoting the development of CCIs. Lobato [54] argued that the success of Nollywood in Nigeria is an indication that strict copyright regulation is not a precondition for the development of thriving cultural industries. Similarly, techno reggae (cheesy techno) live events in north-east Brazil [55],
and the music industries in Kingston, Jamaica [32], are vibrant under a less effective copyright and intellectual property regulatory system, which gives credence to the above standpoint. The rationale therefore remains that there is little focus on the complete eradication of copyright and piracy issues, owing to the level of illicit ends that help to sustain livelihoods against the norms (western) of intellectual property theft [32, 54].

Moreover, this does not mean that there is no copyright or intellectual property protection legislation, but the implementation and enforcement of these rights are poorly executed [7, 9, 32]. On the other hand, piracy is causing more major harm than the good it harbors per say for Africa’s CCIs. There is a high risk of illicit appropriation of creative content, huge revenue loss, inhibition of collaborations in foreign markets, loss of young talents to countries with well-organized and efficient regulatory systems, and a lack of sponsorship for young talents [9, 32]. These huge disadvantages can be mitigated through adhering to local and international agreements. By enacting a proper regulatory framework that enforces the property right of use of creative content [56, 57], as well as diligently implementing the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions,

**Lack of proper understanding of the contributions of CCIs to development**

Regardless of the systematic market obstructions and restrictions imposed on developing economies under the guise of globalization, there is a lack of a clear vision for Africa’s CCIs’ long-term sustainability [36]. The challenge becomes more overwhelming as the understanding of the potential of CCIs to Africa’s development seems to elude most policymakers [32]. This is not a coincidence, but rather the result of modest efforts to become acquainted with the knowledge and potential of African CCIs for the continent’s development strategies. As a result, the discourse on Africa’s CCIs among policymakers and stakeholders often tends to be contextualized with what is obtainable in developed economies. De Beukelaer [32] noted that, in defining the CCIs, the notion of “creative industries” was rejected on the grounds of its unorganized nature based on the conception of what an ideal image of such industries should look like. In De Beukelaer [32]’s study, the Burkinabé and Ghanaian debates captured different opinions based on the concept of the size and functions of the cultural and creative industries in the context of development. Similar opinions were found to forestall the development of CCIs in South Africa [58]. The debate on “what difference can the creative industries make to economic development or to social and human development in Africa that more important and more highly invested economic sectors have been unable to do” [59] still occupies the mainstream discourse on development. These arguments indicate that the lack of pragmatism in this area stems from a little understanding from abstract contemplation of CCIs rather than a focus on physical actualization that complements the sustainable development approach.
The potential of cultural and creative industries to Africa’s development

Bolster socioeconomic development

With increased globalization and rapid transformation within the CCIs, countries that seek to improve their economies through diversification are increasingly investing in CCIs to empower their citizens, create jobs, culturally expand their sphere of influence, and augment economic returns [35]. Increasingly, there is a gradual shift from an era characterized by reliance on minerals, technology, and management that saw the rapid development of many Asian economies to a new era propelled by creativity [9, 35]. The size of the global market for creative goods has expanded considerably, more than doubling in size from $208 billion in 2002 to $509 billion in 2015. As a result, the Asian region surpassed global trade in creative goods and services, accounting for $228 billion in creative goods exports, nearly doubling that of Europe ([1], p.9). Creativity-based models are rapidly becoming the new normal in economic and industrial strategies for integrating national and regional socioeconomic development [35]. According to the UNCTAD [27] report, CCIs have the potential to support developing countries and transit ing economies in diversifying production and exports and to deliver comprehensive and equitable sustainable development.

African countries have also recognized the potential of CCIs and are making efforts towards integrating the various aspects of the CCIs into their development strategies to achieve socioeconomic development. Hruby [9] argued that investing in the creative talent pool of the continent’s young, vibrant, and ambitious youths would benefit Africa’s development more than replicating, for example, the old pattern that aided Southeast Asian countries. Cultural and creative industries (CCIs) present Africa with an alternative opportunity for increasing economic returns through creativity linked to an export-oriented industrialization model [39]. The CCIs sector offers an economic recovery opportunity to African countries from the devastating effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw 20 million jobs lost [49], and economic disruption from revenue realization from the export of raw materials. African countries such as Côte d’Ivoire, Egypt, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, South Africa, and Tunisia, whose manufacturing and services sectors account for 70 to 90% of GDP, and countries like Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, and others, which have a larger population and larger markets, are likely to benefit more from the creative sector [9, 39].

As more African countries seek to diversify their economies, infusing creativity and innovation into the manufacturing sector will guarantee high-end, high-value products, thereby boosting economic gains [48]. Furthermore, with the proliferation of digital technologies, creative industries are pioneering innovative businesses and solutions geared towards tackling the challenges of inequality and vulnerability to achieve socioeconomic well-being for people [39, 44]. Digital penetration is re-inventing and creating new ways of adding values to culture and creative products from various industries such as education, financial, health,
energy, and agribusiness, opening up new markets and attractive opportunities for economic returns [39]. Thus, investing in the African CCIs not only increases income, standard of living, and access to better health and education, and boosts inclusive growth that will translate to a 10 to 20% increase in Africa’s GDP [60], but also presents a profitable strategy to tackle unemployment challenges.

**Employment opportunities**

In the context of a growing economy, development entails the reduction or abolition of poverty, inequality, and unemployment [61]. Unemployment and underemployment are the root causes of many restiveness and insurgencies that are destabilizing the continent’s social and political cohesion [62]. Many young people have little or no skills, typically exhibit skills irrelevant to the labor market, and are therefore largely excluded from a productive economic and social life [44]. The rising population of the workforce with limited options for absorption also fuels the many challenges of unemployment on the continent. Africa’s youth population is growing exponentially and is projected to double to over 830 million by 2050. Despite the 10–12 million young people that enter the workforce annually, only 3 million formal jobs are created each year [60]. As a result, the continent must devise an innovative strategy to mitigate the challenge’s impending consequences [44, 60–62].

Consequently, to better harness the productive capacities of this rising pool of human capital, creative approaches that encourage job creation and innovative entrepreneurship for youths are required. At the same time, cultural and creative industries have the potential to contribute towards solving Africa’s job creation and youth unemployment challenges while serving as profitable investments for socioeconomic transformation within the continent [48]. African music, film, TV, gaming, design, and fashion industries are emerging sectors with attractive opportunities for returns on investment. These sectors present huge markets of non-rival goods for investors and directly benefit from both Africa’s expanding digital economy and consumers’ shifts due to the pandemic [48, 53].

CCIs offer an unrivaled opportunity for inclusive economic and social development that focuses on harnessing raw talents, especially for young women with limited employment opportunities. In South Africa, the visual arts and craft industries offer social and independence benefits to rural women with lower levels of education and few employment alternatives and opportunities [31]. The music industry in Nigeria serves as a job incubator for young talents, offering job opportunities to artists, musicians, producers, promoters, managers, distributors, and marketers [63], thus contributing to the individual, national, and global benefits of expanding employment opportunities.

**Strengthening of cultural bonds among African people**

The cultural and creative industries (CCIs) significantly contribute to the economic development, cultural development, and social development of people, especially in countries where the industries are organized [35]. Cultural and creative industries
are critical to preserving cultural heritage and promoting cultural identity and human development processes, and they are essential components of the development process that ensures people’s social cohesion [26]. African CCIs have the potential to build and strengthen the cultural identities and cultural bonds of more than 2000 diverse ethnic groups and languages on the continent [7]. Africa is blessed with a rich diversity of human and natural resources. However, there is a growing identity crisis due to a lack of cultural propagation [47]. Foreign ideologies and tendencies aimed at undermining the cultural integration of Africans have persisted, with detrimental consequences for Africa’s development. For instance, commentators like Benedict Diorama noted that a Senegalese knows more about cultural products in France than in Ghana [47].

Cultural and creative industries’ goods and services are avenues to share Africa’s creativity among African countries, to boost competitiveness, and with the world. As the global demand for Africa’s creativity in textiles, fashion, designs, art, music, movies, and crafts increases, Africans as well as non-Africans are beginning to appreciate and pay attention to the peculiarities and uniqueness of African culture [47], triggering a gradual switch to cultural and leisure lifestyles that increases consumption of cultural goods and services. More so, cultural and creative industries form part of the national development strategy, as can be seen in many Asian countries, such as Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and China [35]. It also allows the use of popular culture as soft power—an approach that allows countries to draw a degree of interest and appeal to their country inadvertently by sharing their cultural stories with others [1]. Through this approach, China is increasing its soft power by promoting Chinese culture overseas and establishing internationally competitive creators of content [1, 20]. The country has demonstrated, through its investments in cultural and creative industries, the crucial role of this sector in achieving sustainable development initiatives [21]. Similarly, this strategy could be adopted by African countries to promote African popular cultures through quality content and products from CCIs that inspire and instill cultural understanding and present Africa’s heritage to the world.

Conclusion: strategic option for improving Africa’s culture and creative industries

Strategic options herein refer to policy rationales focusing on interlinked actions among policymakers, stakeholders, businessmen, corporations, government agencies, entrepreneurs, artisans, media, and curators [7] that foster the inclusive development of Africa’s CCIs. As De Beukelaer [32] noted, developing cultural industries is not just about economic indices, but about understanding the role of culture in development and clearly separating culture as merchandize from culture as something sacred. Anon [7] backed this up by saying that policies and strategies aimed at developing African CCIs should be designed to achieve the harmonious coexistence of achieving economic development, advancing indigenous values and ethical norms, and preserving traditions and beliefs. The sustainable development of Africa’s CCIs would require an improved cultural governance system that can offer
lasting solutions to the challenges discussed above, which include infrastructure, funding, understanding of CCIs, piracy issues, and a shortage of technical expertise and organizational assistance.

African countries’ issues with governance, such as lack of coordination, poor program evaluation and monitoring, fragmented policies, poor policy implementation, inadequate capacity for governments to make timely decisions, a paucity of good communication, solid decision making, and political will [36, 44], have kept African countries far from advancing their development course rather than a shortage of resources. As part of the sustainable development strategies of getting creative with development, this section calls for timely interventions in the form of critical reforms to address these setbacks. The reformative tendencies of governance that critically translate policies into practice are vital remedial options for the sustainable development of Africa’s CCIs. As indicated by Xiang and Walker [35], improving and implementing policies and reforms to the cultural governance system will strengthen cultural creativity, safeguard the basic cultural rights and interests of the people, promote cultural innovation, and ultimately usher in a prosperous cultural market that meets the cultural needs of the people.

In the African CCIs lie the dreams and metaphors, the arts that mirror the new Africa with complex expressions of aspirations for African nations to take charge of their own destinies [64]. As a result, Africa needs to conceptualize and theorize its own models and approaches to the development of cultural industries [65]. To achieve this noble goal would require an inclusive design approach, focusing on mutual support and contributions of all stakeholders: government agencies, entrepreneurs, corporate innovation players, organized private sector bodies, financial institutions, research institutions, etc., that are dedicated to the promotion and development of African CCIs. The above design is crucial to participating in viable platforms that stimulate business networks and domestic and global partnerships and promote and support sustainable development initiatives like the BRI, where infrastructure, financial, and technical support for African CCIs can be guaranteed.

Conclusively, cultural and creative industries are important sustainable development strategies through which African countries can benefit from economic, social, cultural, and even political gains. They stimulate innovation and diversification processes that support entrepreneurship, the proper functioning of the burgeoning services sector, and the development and enrichment of cultural diversity. Thus, Africa’s expanding CCIs offer new innovative business models, products and services, jobs, partnerships, and social models that complement the sustainable development approaches for Africa’s transformation.

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