

Africa Unleashed: Empowering Women in Creative Industries – The Continent’s Next Growth Frontier

A new paradigm in value creation: could “creative resources” outpace
“extractive resources”?

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Contents

- 03** Key Messages
- 04** Introduction
- 05** Africa's Moment in the Global Creative Economy
- 09** Fashion as a Catalyst for Women Entrepreneurs
- 11** Women in the Creative Industries in Africa Drive Scalable Growth and Inclusion but remain Undercapitalized
- 14** Unlocking the Full Potential of Women-led Creative Industries: beyond Capital, toward purpose-built Ecosystems
- 16** Conclusion

Key messages



1 Africa's creative economy is emerging as a strategic engine of inclusive growth and soft power—\$140–150B export potential by 2030—as fashion, music, and digital content gain strong momentum



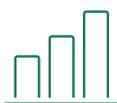
2 Unlike “extractive resources”, “creative resources” enable sustainable value capture, equitable redistribution, social uplift, and narrative power



3 Among these sectors, fashion stands out as a leading powerhouse driven by women, who represent over 60% of the workforce and anchor the sector's expansion



4 Women-led creative businesses generate more than financial returns: they create jobs, build resilient local supply chains, and reinvest in their communities



5 Despite their central role and potential for economic growth, these businesses remain severely undercapitalized and structurally under-served—receiving <1% of Africa's venture capital in 2024



6 To fully unlock this high-potential opportunity for the continent, capital must be coupled with targeted enablers



Introduction

Africa's economic narrative has historically been defined by its abundant natural resources. With over 30% of the world's mineral reserves, the continent holds trillions of dollars in extractive potential. Yet this immense wealth frequently remains untapped, restricted by minimal local processing, reliance on raw exports, and significant value erosion along global supply chains.

Today, however, a new kind of resource is reshaping the continent's growth story: Africa's creative economy. Fueled by cultural heritage, digital innovation, and entrepreneurial spirit—particularly among women, who represent over 60% of the sector's workforce—this emerging sector is redefining what sustainable and inclusive value creation can look like.

While extractive resources have often faced challenges in retaining or redistributing value locally, Africa's creative industries driven by women offer a fundamentally different model rooted in agency, innovation, and self-sufficiency. They deliver powerful outcomes:

- **Value Capture:** through intellectual property monetization, global exports, and digital platforms
- **Value Redistribution:** via job creation, strengthened local supply chains, and inclusion of informal and previously excluded workforce segments
- **Social Uplift:** by empowering women and youth, particularly in underserved communities, creating pathways to prosperity, visibility, and dignified recognition rooted in cultural pride and creative ownership
- **Narrative Power:** by reclaiming and reshaping Africa's global image through authentic, culturally resonant storytelling

This shift from resource extraction to creative production is not just symbolic. It signals a strategic reorientation of Africa's development model—one where human creativity, not raw commodities, drives long-term prosperity.



Africa's Moment in the Global Creative Economy

Africa is experiencing an explosion of cultural creativity, digital innovation, and entrepreneurial dynamism. Young creators across the continent are leveraging storytelling, music, fashion, animation, and digital platforms like TikTok, YouTube, and Spotify to export cultural identity and innovation moving beyond the continent's

traditional reliance on raw materials. In doing so, they are positioning Africa's creative industries not on the periphery, but as central engines of economic growth, innovation, and global influence. This rising sector is underpinned by four powerful strategic advantages:

- **Demographics:** Africa's greatest asset is a young, dynamic population of approximately 890 million¹ under-25s (nearly 60% of the total population), represents one of the world's most digitally

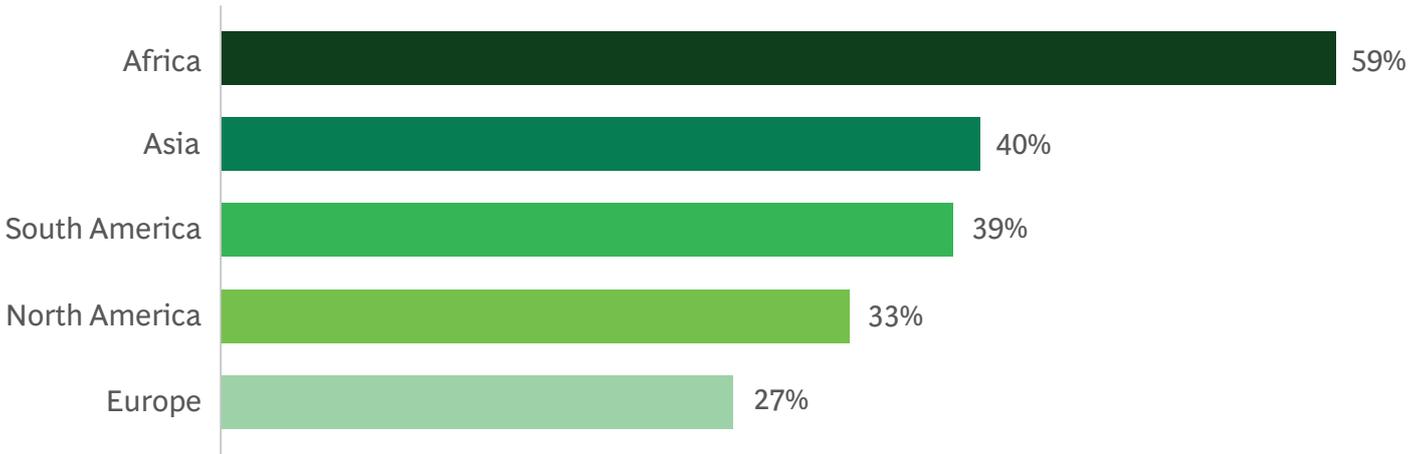
engaged and content-hungry generations, driving unprecedented cultural creativity, consumption, and innovation.

EXHIBIT 1

Africa is home to the largest and fastest-growing youth population, set to host 1 in 3 of the world's under-25s by 2050

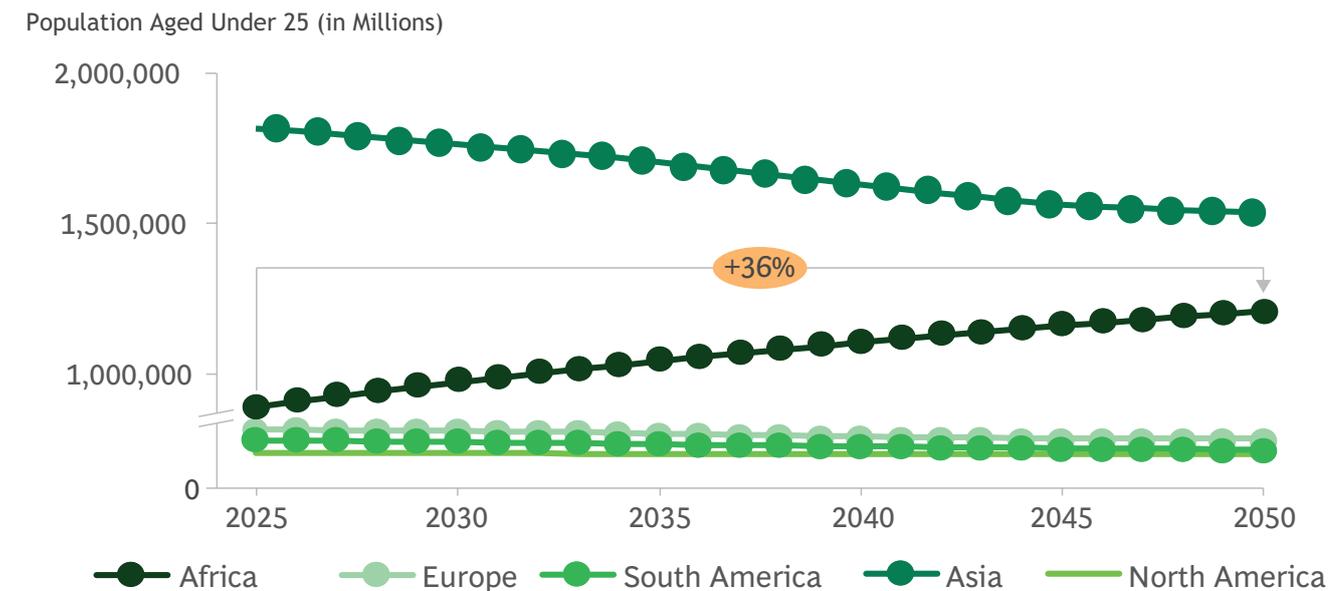
Africa leads globally with 59% of its population under 25

% of population under 25 by continent (2025)



Africa's youth population is expected to grow by ~40% from 2025 to 2050, while other continents are stagnating or declining

Evolution of population under 25 by continent (2024- 2050)



Source: United Nations World Population Prospects 2024

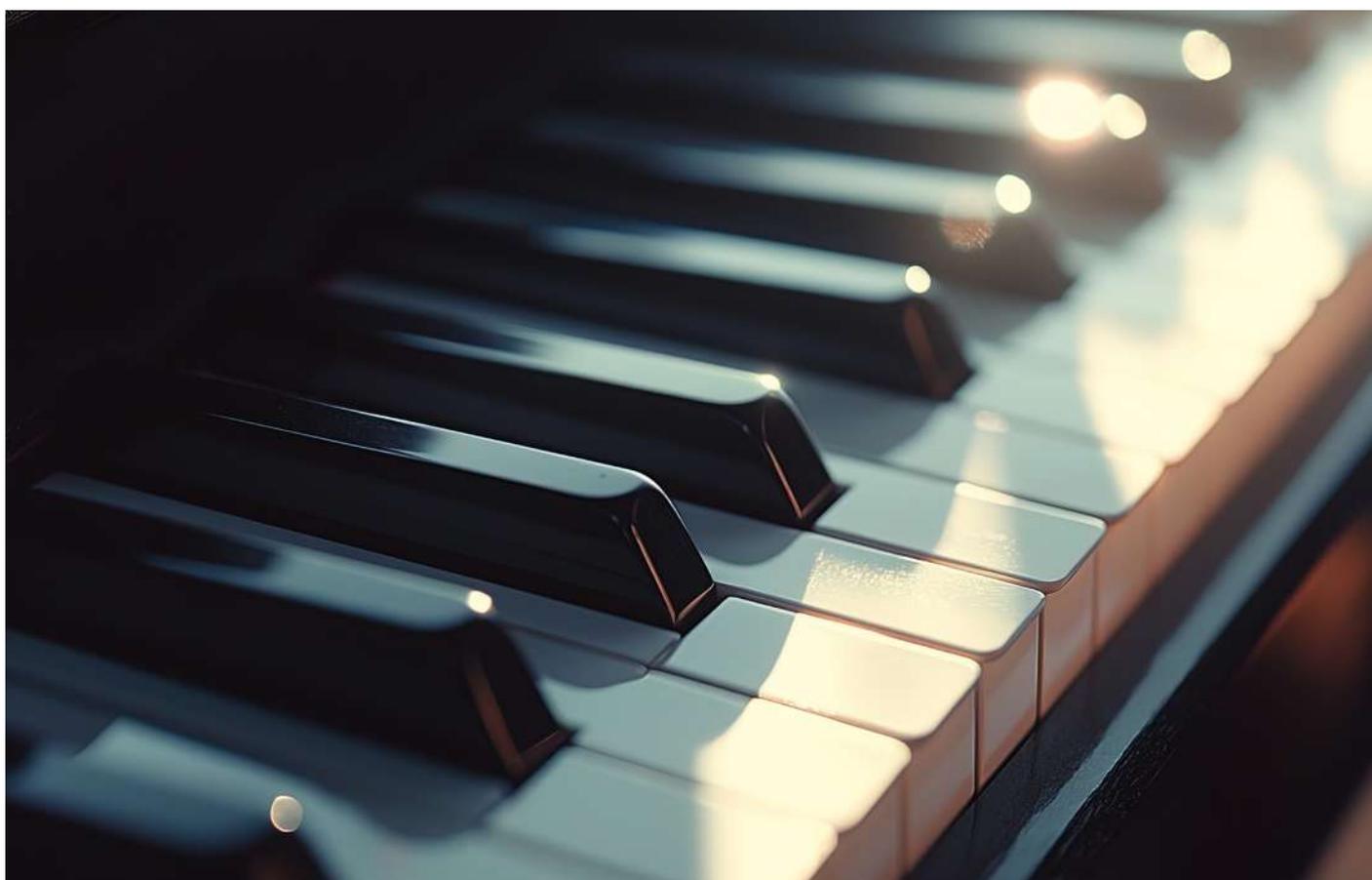
¹ United Nations, *World Population Prospects 2022*, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division

- **Digital Acceleration:** Rapid increases in smartphone penetration and improved broadband access have significantly lowered barriers to production, distribution, and engagement. Approximately 300–400 million Africans (about 40% of the continent’s population) actively engage with social media, signaling a profound shift toward mobile-first digital consumption and enabling creatives to reach broader global audiences seamlessly
- **Cultural IP Advantage:** African creativity draws upon a rich cultural heritage and deep-rooted storytelling traditions. African designs, patterns, and aesthetics offer distinctive and compelling content that remains underrepresented in international markets, bringing fresh, captivating perspectives to the global stage
- **Global diaspora networks** play a powerful role in expanding this reach: Africa’s creative economy holds influence far beyond its borders. With over 200 million people of African descent living outside the continent—and Africa projected to account for more than 25% of the global population in the

coming decades²—diaspora communities are not just consumers. They are also investors, champions, and cultural amplifiers, helping to finance, promote, and globalize Africa’s creative exports

Estimated at \$58-59 billion, Africa’s creative economy exports account for under 3% of the ~\$2 trillion global creative industry³, a solid foundation that reflects the continent’s untapped potential rather than its limits. While this corresponds to only ~2% of Africa’s total GDP (2.5⁴% when extractive industries are excluded), the creative industries are increasingly important for Africa to build a more diversified, sustainable and inclusive development model.

Momentum is accelerating across key creative sub-sectors including fashion, film, music, and digital content—with economic gains already beginning to materialize. If Africa doubles its share of the global creative economy by 2030 from 3% to 6%, and the global market grows at 6% annually⁵, Africa’s creative exports could reach \$140-150 billion by the end of the decade, underscoring the sector’s potential to drive large scale economic transformation.



² World Economic Forum (2024). The global Black economy: How Africa’s innovation drives global prosperity.

³ UNCTAD & UNESCO. (2022–2023). Creative Economy Outlook & Cultural Data Highlights

⁴ International Trade Centre. (2023). *ITC Trade Map – Export composition data for Africa*. Values for extractive exports and creative exports were used to calculate their respective shares of Africa’s GDP

⁵ UNCTAD, Creative Economy Outlook 2024, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2024.

EXHIBIT 2

With exports estimated at ~\$58-59 billion today, Africa’s creative economy is showing strong signals of growth, with several sub-sectors gaining significant momentum

Sector	% of Total (2025)	2025e exports (Bn USD)	2025 Drivers	2030f exports ¹ (Bn USD)	2030 Drivers	CAGR 25-30
 Film & Audiovisual	~21%	~13	Rapid growth of local production industries & mass production (Nollywood, Bongo films, etc.), rise of mobile-first streaming, strong diaspora demand, regional public/private investment	~29	Deeper monetization, global licensing deals, growth of local streaming platforms, IP protection reforms	~8%
 Music	~19%	~11	Globalization of African genres (Afrobeats, Amapiano), mobile-first listening habits, high engagement on social and creator platforms, rising international collaborations	~28	Full-scale streaming monetization, global touring circuits, sync licensing, African-owned digital service provider expansion	~11%
 Fashion & Design²	~17%	~10	Rising African brands & designers, “Made in Africa” movement, online fashion platforms, cultural export via TikTok/Instagram, 30+ fashion weeks/year	~21	Expansion of circular and ethical fashion, international recognition, regional production ecosystems, e-commerce adoption	~7%
 Digital Content & Gaming	~14%	~9	Youth-led creator economy, widespread gaming adoption via smartphones, growing African presence in global content platforms, monetization model diversification (in-app purchases, advertising, microtransactions)	~28	Creator monetization maturity, regional gaming studios scaling up, localized platforms, entry of telcos and fintech into game distribution/payment systems	~16%
 Advertising & Marketing	~12%	~7	Surge in social and digital advertising, regional brand building, rise of African creative agencies	~16	Dominance of mobile advertising, cross-border media networks, AI-driven creative production and personalization	~9%
 Others (incl. Books, Arts, Radio, etc.)	~15%	~9	Strong cultural and artistic tradition, expansion of creative festivals and fairs, growing interest in local storytelling and publishing, digital reading platforms (eBooks, audio books, apps)	~18	Cultural resurgence, digital publishing & reading platforms scale-up, heritage-led tourism, broader visibility of African contemporary art	~7%
Total		~58-59		~140-150		

High cultural weight but lower traceability in export systems; likely under-reported

¹ If Africa doubles its share of the global creative economy by 2030 — from 3 % to 6 % — and assuming the global market grows at 6 % annually (UNCTAD baseline)

² The total fashion industry is worth ~\$31 billion

Note: All figures are estimates based on best available data as of 2025. Sectoral market values were approximated using export share proxies, combined with insights on domestic consumption, triangulated with industry reports and observed market trends. Informal and under-reported segments may be partially underestimated.

Sources: UNESCO, UNCTAD, AfDB, PwC, Statista, Brookings, Newzoo, IFPI, BCG analysis



Fashion as a Catalyst for Women Entrepreneurs

Within the broader surge of Africa's creative economy, the fashion and design sector stand out as a particularly promising segment:

- The African textile and apparel sector possesses significant economic potential, with a current market value estimated at \$31 billion⁶, according to the African Development Bank, spanning the full value chain/ from raw material production (e.g. cotton) to locally consumed finished garments
- However, it is the creative segments of this value chain — where design, cultural expression, and brand identity are concentrated — that generate the most significant economic value (between \$12.4 billion and \$18.6 billion), far exceeding the upstream industrial stages in terms of profitability, differentiation, and global relevance⁷

- In addition, over 40% of Africa's textile output already incorporates recycling or upcycling, positioning the continent as a leader in circular fashion. Brands adopting regenerative materials can achieve up to a 6% profit increase within five years, highlighting both economic and environmental opportunities⁸

Fashion and design are far more than just consumer-facing industries— they are powerful catalysts for women's entrepreneurship, cultural expression, and sustainable innovation. Women constitute over 60%⁹ of Africa's fashion workforce, and that figure rises to over 80% in countries like Kenya and Madagascar¹⁰. From textile production and tailoring to creative direction and cross-border retail, women anchor and drive every stage of the fashion value chain, building resilient local ecosystems and creating sustainable livelihoods across both the formal and informal sectors. Their central role underscores the industry's substantial potential to power inclusive economic growth across the continent.

⁶ African Development Bank (AfDB). (2022). Fashionomics Africa: Investing in the Creative Industries – Executive Summary

⁷ Based on global value chain benchmarks (UNCTAD, WIPO), between 40% and 60% of the sector's total value can cautiously be considered "creative", depending on the level of cultural and design input embedded in the final product.

⁸ BCG analysis

⁹ International Labour Organization. (2021). How to achieve gender equality in global garment supply chains

¹⁰ The Exchange Africa, Africa Fashionomics: Making Sense of the \$31 Billion Industry, 2023.

Yet fashion and design are far more than just consumer-facing industries— they are powerful catalysts for women’s entrepreneurship, cultural expression, and sustainable innovation. Women constitute over 60%¹¹ of Africa’s fashion workforce, with that figure rising to over 80% in countries like Kenya and Madagascar¹². From textile production and tailoring to creative direction

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EXHIBIT 3

How Fashion Fuels Women’s Entrepreneurship in Africa (Women-led fashion success stories across Africa)



Vivo is **Kenya’s largest women’s fashion brand** designed and manufactured entirely on the African continent. Vivo has become a cornerstone of Kenya’s fashion industry and earned **numerous awards for innovation and sustainability**. In 2024, Vivo opened its **27th store in Atlanta**, an event attended by Kenyan President Ruto

The brand expanded its physical presence with **27 stores** across Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and in other continents. Today Vivo Fashion Group employs some **450 staff, 70% of whom are women**



MAFI MAFI

Founded by Mahlet Afework, Mafi Mafi is a **contemporary Ethiopian fashion brand** that blends handwoven traditional fabrics with modern design. Through its designs, Mafi Mafi showcases the cultural richness of Ethiopia on global fashion stages, including **New York Fashion Week and international exhibitions**

Mafi Mafi partners with **rural weaving co-operatives**, creating jobs for rural women and preserving indigenous techniques. To date, it has **empowered dozens of women artisans**, promoted **indigenous textile traditions and ethical sourcing** and elevated Ethiopia’s creative economy through fashion rooted in cultural identity



Founded by South African designer Palesa Mokubung, Mantsho is a **womenswear brand that fuses bold prints, rich colors, and contemporary silhouettes** to celebrate African femininity. The brand draws deeply on South African culture while creating globally relevant fashion

In 2019, Mantsho became the **first African label to collaborate with H&M**, a historic milestone for the African industry. The brand champions **local production, supports job creation** in the fashion ecosystem, and inspires a new generation of African designers through its success on global platforms

¹¹ International Labour Organization. (2021). How to achieve gender equality in global garment supply chains

¹² The Exchange Africa, Africa Fashionomics: Making Sense of the \$31 Billion Industry, 2023.



Women in the Creative Industries in Africa Drive Scalable Growth and Inclusion but remain Undercapitalized

Africa's fashion industry could contribute up to \$50 billion to the continent's GDP by 2030¹¹ provided the sector receives adequate investment and structural support. With the right financing and infrastructure, the industry also holds the potential to create up to

400,000 new jobs in sub-Saharan Africa alone¹². Their impact extends well beyond employment: women in fashion are shaping cultural narratives, building resilient communities, and advancing inclusive economic development across both formal and informal economies.

¹¹ AFDI, Investing in African Fashion: How Small Investments Can Drive Employment, Economic Growth, and Sustainable Development, 2025

¹²With Fashionomics, the AfDB plans to raise the profile of African fashion and textiles on the international stage

EXHIBIT 4

Case studies in Ethiopia & Rwanda demonstrate that targeted support for the fashion industry can deliver inclusive economic growth

	 Ethiopia – Hawassa Industrial Park	 Rwanda – Domestic Textile Policy Shift
 Driver	Creation of eco-industrial park as a flagship and blueprint for future industrial parks in Ethiopia under its national industrialization strategy	2018 ban on second-hand clothing imports , implemented as part of the government’s strategy to promote local textile and garment manufacturing
 Economic Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$110 million+ in exports annually; first large-scale investment by global apparel firm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Textile and leather firms grew from <10 (2015) to ~70 (2021) Output in the textile and footwear sectors rose from \$59.5 million in 2015 to \$70.6 million in 2017 Reinforced local manufacturing capacity and value addition
 Social Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 24,000+ jobs created by 2019; expected to scale up to 60,000 at full capacity through double-shift operations 80% of workers are women aged 18–35, mostly from rural areas (SNNPR) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of thousands of local jobs across emerging SMEs Strengthened urban and semi-urban manufacturing ecosystems Rise in entrepreneurship and formalization of small-scale producers
	Women-led industrial jobs backed by government can be an engine of growth, equity & social transformation, shifting norms in rural regions	Policy reform driving local job creation and SME growth reinforced national industrial resilience and sovereignty

Source: AfDB, ILO, Rwanda Today, RoundUp, UNESCO

Moreover, investing in women-led businesses generates powerful multiplier effects. Research consistently shows that women reinvest up to 90% of their income into their families and communities, making them vital drivers of inclusive and sustainable development. At the same time, the creative economy offers strong economic returns: every dollar invested can generate up to \$2.50 in broader economic activity, positioning it as one of the most impactful sectors in emerging markets¹³.

Despite this tremendous potential, the fashion sector and the broader creative industries remain significantly undercapitalized, especially for women entrepreneurs.

While sectors like Fintech (\$1.35B across 131 deals), Cleantech (\$192M, 37 deals), and e/M/S-Commerce (\$157M, 62 deals) in Africa attracted significant venture capital in 2024, the creative industries received less than 1%, with only \$1.5 million in disclosed deals across the continent¹⁴.

Within the fashion industry specifically, over 90% of businesses typically operate with minimal capital typically between \$300 and \$1,000 according to the African Fashion Development Initiative (AFDI). This limited initial funding is often used for essential early-stage needs such as purchasing equipment, paying artisans, building websites,

¹³ IFC Creative industries sector

¹⁴ Partech (2024). 2024 Africa Tech Venture Capital Report

and securing spaces at local marketplaces. Despite women comprising a substantial portion of the fashion workforce, they receive less than 10% of total investment capital across the continent and often less than 1% in major markets like Nigeria¹⁵. This persistent funding gap

is not due to a lack of opportunity, but to deep rooted under-recognition and undervaluation, reflected in a range of structural barriers that continue to hold women-led creative businesses back.

EXHIBIT 5

Four main systemic barriers prevent women’s growth in the Creative Industries

 Limited access to capital & growth financing	 Cultural norms limiting women’s visibility	 Social constraints & unpaid care responsibilities	 Infrastructure & technology barriers
<p>Women creatives face systemic underinvestment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal VC allocation: The creative economy received <1% of venture capital in Africa in 2024, with only \$1.5 million in disclosed deals continent-wide Severe funding gap in fashion: Most women-led businesses operate with <\$10,000 in seed capital and receive <10% of total investment—often <1% in large markets like Nigeria Investor bias: Women creatives are perceived as higher-risk and often lack access to pitch forums, investor networks, and accelerators that favor tech or male-led ventures 	<p>Women creatives often lack access to platforms, networks, & industry spaces that enable visibility and deal flow. Gender norms further restrict participation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Media: Akua Sika, a trained broadcaster in Ghana, was sidelined from prime-time shows deemed “men’s territory” by male managers Crafts and textiles: In Ghana, men dominate production of kente and adinkra (traditional fabrics); women are discouraged by cultural taboos linking craft-making to infertility Music: In Kenya and Nigeria, instruments like the nyatiti, Ebokano, & drums are culturally restricted to men 	<p>Unpaid domestic and care work such as childcare and household tasks limit their time, mobility, and ability to engage in creative work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time poverty: Balancing unpaid care with creative ambitions limits production, collaboration and travel Irregular hours: Sectors like fashion, media, or performing arts often require non-standard schedules, making them harder to access without flexible care support Risk aversion: Family roles and societal expectations reduce willingness to pursue unstable or time-intensive creative careers 	<p>Women entrepreneurs face unequal access to essential digital and technological resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Device and internet gap: Women are 28% less likely to own a smartphone and 32% less likely to use mobile internet than men These disparities hinder women's ability to market, network, and scale creative businesses effectively Affordability, literacy, and digital skills are among the primary barriers contributing to this digital divide

Source: GSMA, British Council, GIZ, Art Africa Magazine, Partech

These challenges are widespread across the creative industries. However, given the strong economic returns and amplified social impact, closing the investment gap in

women-led creative businesses represents one of Africa’s most promising yet underrecognized economic opportunities.

¹⁵ Intelpoint (2023). *Women-led businesses in Africa receive only a fraction of available capital despite high entrepreneurship rates*; IFC / African Business (2023). *Women must own their place in Africa’s business world.*; BusinessDay NG (2023). *Only 10% of Nigerian female-led startups got funding in 5 years.*



Unlocking the Full Potential of Women-Led Creative Industries: Beyond Capital, Toward Purpose-Built Ecosystems

Realizing the full potential of Africa's women-led creative industries requires more than just increased capital— it demands targeted investment mechanisms designed

specifically to address the unique challenges and realities faced by women entrepreneurs in this sector.

EXHIBIT 6

Unlocking women-led creative industries requires more than capital: fit-for-purpose enablers are essential.

 Tailored Capital Instruments	 Community-Based Production Access	 Market Access facilitation	 Digital Enablement	 Legal & Formalization Support
<p>Women-led creative businesses need capital solutions adapted to informal, seasonal, and brand-driven realities to enable early revenues and formalization at women's own pace</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-cycle working capital • Revenue-based or milestone-linked financing • Brand/IP-backed lending • Microgrants and blended finance with first-loss guarantees 	<p>Home-based operations limit scale. Localized production hubs can unlock growth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up decentralized micro-production hubs to bring high-quality equipment directly into communities (e.g. micro-factories / sewing collectives...) • Shared flexible production space with booking systems • Hubs that align with caregiving roles to reduce mobility/safety constraints 	<p>Despite robust creative outputs, women-led brands struggle with limited exposure and buyer trust</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matchmaking platforms, subsidized access to showcases and trade fairs can boost exposure and unlock access to formal buyers • Simplified certification and toolkits for formal/export markets can help women reach diaspora and regional markets • Access to mentorship and peer networks can build strategic confidence and visibility 	<p>Tech tools unlock scale, professionalism, and back-end efficiency. They can enable growth of lean but scalable operations, from home or micro hubs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to digital platforms (e.g. Shopify, inventory plug-ins) simplifies selling • Mobile-first training improves merchandising, pricing, and financial literacy • Shared back-end services (payments, logistics, licensing) reduce technical complexity 	<p>Without legal literacy and protection, creativity cannot translate into sustainable entrepreneurship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toolkits on copyright, branding, and business set-up can demystify formalization • Awareness and training sessions to navigate contracts and compliance • Mobile legal clinics and helpdesks in hubs to offer localized legal guidance • Template libraries and peer-led sessions make legal literacy practical

Advocacy and policy must anchor the ecosystem - without them, support remains fragmented and unsustainable

Source: BCG



Conclusion

Africa's creative economy is not just a growth frontier, it marks a paradigm shift in how development can be driven: locally, inclusively, and sustainably. Among its diverse sectors, fashion stands out as a catalyst: high-potential, culturally rooted, and uniquely effective in empowering women.

But the opportunity reaches far beyond cultural expression. The creative economy is a strategic lever for Africa's economic transformation driving large-scale job creation, amplifying the continent's global influence, and unlocking value through renewable, resilient, and innovation-led sectors. Unlike extractive industries, it is immune to global commodity price shocks, because it is powered by people, creativity, and identity.

At the heart of this movement are women, not as passive beneficiaries, but as architects of the future. Women-led creative businesses are building new value chains, redefining production narratives, and accelerating inclusive prosperity. To unlock their full potential, stakeholders must go beyond generic funding approaches. They must invest in purpose-fit ecosystems that combine capital, infrastructure, visibility, legal empowerment, and networks—laying the foundation for long-term, systemic growth.

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