

“Talent will become huge commodity for Africa, if Africa properly positioned”

— Adebayo, CEO, Ckrowd; board director, Arts Connect Africa (ACA)

Let's begin with your knowledge of this industry. What is the size of the global music and creative industry and what amount of this is available in Africa?

IN 2023, THE TOTAL REVENUE OF THE RECORDED music industry amounted to 28.6 billion U.S. dollars. While the Global Live Music Market was about \$59 billion in the same year, as referenced on Hagnetics.com. The Africa Music Market is valued to be about \$3 billion, but has shown the highest digital music growth globally in 2023. The market grew by more than 30 percent in the same year (2023), with South Africa leading by owning 70 percent of that growth. The Global Creative Economy is valued to be more than \$56 billion, but unfortunately Africa only captures only 2.9 percent of that value. It provides just about two million jobs.

The economic ecosystem and the balance of power still reside outside of Africa. How can the quest for African talents find balance in the distribution of economic rewards?

Africa needs to be deliberate in how she plays at global level when it comes to her economics and commerce, just like China did 30-40 years ago. A deliberate futuristic approach in tapping into her Human Resource primarily, then the developed Human Resources will develop the other huge potentials that Africa is blessed with. Massive investment in modern, marketable and mass education is needed urgently. By 2035 almost 70 percent of the African population will be less than 25 years old. This is a blessing if managed right and a curse, if mismanaged. It means Africa will become the biggest labour market on the globe. The value of that labour force will depend on the level of training and education they have received before that period. Africa has the potential to be a huge Business Outsourcing Market, cornering a huge chunk of the Global Business Outsourcing Market, which is valued at \$92.5 billion. We have seen how businesses like Andela have helped many talented technology savvy Africans find high paying jobs with big tech companies in more developed markets. Ckrowd.com as a company is running about the same model by helping music organisations in the developed markets go global by helping them hire affordable music industry professionals from developing markets like Africa and processing their payroll. The willingness of Africa to invest into making her human resource valuable, the more Africa can capture in global economics in 10-20 years, just because of the biological advantage that Africa presently has of being the continent with the youngest people presently.

From the creative and culture perspective, a music industry professional network called Arts Connect Africa (ACA) has been working on education and training projects that will deliver the next wave of Music and Culture Business Leaders from Africa. The network has members that have delivered the biggest and most structured music and culture industry initiatives on the continent. Members are spread across more than 15 countries in Africa, Latin & North America, Asia. Their goal has been to make African music and her rich culture global and vice-versa. Members operate Music Festivals,

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OLUKAYODE ADEBAYO, founder and chief executive officer, Ckrowd.com, and board director, Arts Connect Africa (ACA), a music business education and digital profiling platform for music industry professionals, is a seasoned professional in the creative and culture industries, media, events, technology, and consultancy; the convener of the African Music and Cultural Expo (Amfest Expo), orchestrating bespoke culture professionals gatherings across Africa and beyond, fostering enterprise development, and facilitating invaluable networking opportunities for culture industry practitioners, in this wide ranging interview with Business a.m.'s PHILLIP ISAKPA and ONOME AMUGE, provides valuable insights on the economics, business, technology, creative, cultural, human resources landscape of Africa's entertainment and creative industries and their connection with the world. He talks about the potential, the opportunities and how Africa's young population, especially its Gen Z and Gen Alpha, brimming with talents, can become for the world, the human resource pool and the new hub for talent in the hiring of professionals across the creative industries. As board director for the Arts Connect Africa (ACA), he belongs to a platform that facilitates training, verifications and endorsements for African music professionals, facilitating international music industry earning opportunities and career development. Below are EXCERPTS.



Commodity for Jobs for it”

“Beyond white collar aspirations, the informal sector which contains the Entertainment, Creative and Tourism industries, have the highest capacity to mop up unemployment from the streets in Africa. African youths will be gainfully employed if proper attention is paid to developing the Music, Film, Fashion, Culinary, Creative Arts, Technology industries

Concerts, Music Conferences, Technology Platforms, Booking, Artistes Management Companies, etc.

Is there a formula to structure the business landscape of the entertainment and creative industry of Africa to see local equivalents of Spotify, Amazon Music, YouTube, AppleMusic, Sound cloud music, etc emerge and hold sway?

This is already happening as Africa has become one of the fastest growing technology markets in the world. Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya and Egypt are leading as technology hubs. Despite the investor winter that has been experienced since 2022, Africa received \$3 billion in Tech Start-Up investments. There has been a slight drop in 2023, but 406 start-ups have received \$2.4 billion in investment, a slight 28 percent fall from 2022. Despite Africa's relatively slow start in technology and startup landscape, Africa has produced seven Unicorns (companies valued at or more than \$1billion), most have been in the payment solution (fintech) space, which establishes that Africa has huge payment problem which is solidified by the fact that the continent has 54 countries with separate borders, different languages and hardly do business with each other.

Other technologies are fast growing especially in E-commerce, Talent Sourcing, Logistics, Content Monetisation, Educational Services etc. With more investments entering Africa, with the global businesses seeking to increase their market share into developing markets like Africa, with high-speed internet infrastructure and government policy support to protect local companies, Africa will definitely see companies emerge that will call at Africa's problems using models that fit the local market and local adoption, that will grow from the local market into international markets.

Given the recent global trends of talent shortages and global insecurities, how do you see the music and creative industry contributing to new employment opportunities for Gen Z and Gen Alpha in Africa?

As I have mentioned earlier, talent will become a huge commodity for Africa now and in the future if Africa properly positions for it. Nigeria in technology and creativity is presently positioned 6th on the global talent ranking, according to a popular Talent Immigration company working in partnership with the UK Immigration. This is just behind India. India as a country earns a huge tax from their talents being engaged by foreign companies, which allows the country to use this to continue to retrain new and younger talents. This is revenue that Africa isn't capturing yet, despite the huge diaspora and skilled population that the continent has in developed, high income paying economies.

Beyond white collar aspirations, the informal sector which contains the Entertainment, Creative and Tourism industries, have the highest capacity to mop up unemployment from the streets in Africa. African youths will be gainfully employed if proper attention is paid to developing the Music, Film, Fashion, Culinary, Creative Arts, Technology industries. If the supply and value chain for these industries are properly developed to capture value within the African continent, it would not only employ massively, it will also



generate a lot of foreign exchange for the continent. Film Studios, Amusement Parks, Concert and Music Festivals, Event Arena, Technology Start Up Campuses, etc. According to UNESCO, the creative industry can create 20 million jobs on the African continent and generate more than \$20 billion annually.

Imagine that Burna Boy didn't need to go to the USA to tour, if Davido decided to tour West Africa for six months, if Wizkid decided to stay and tour Africa only for 12 months. If standard arenas, concert and festival grounds with the right professionals in place are available across Africa, imagine the billion-dollar business activations that will be unleashed, how small and medium businesses, business owners will benefit? Companies like Ckrowd.com are already participating heavily in training music industry professionals, helping them get professional verifications, helping them profile themselves for global opportunities and matching them with hirers from international markets. This helps these professionals earn more than four times what they earn in their local markets, without having to migrate to developed markets. Through their technology DJs are able to be booked for concerts and festivals globally, Social Media Managers, Graphic Designers, Video Editors, IT professionals, etc, that are all focused on growing in the music industry, get hired to the best, biggest music organisations and enterprises right from the African continent.

What unique characteristics of Gen Z and Gen Alpha make them particularly well-suited for positions in the music and creative industries?

For one, they are more tech savvy, they have more exposure to other cultures through their abilities around the internet. Due to their youth they dictate the listening taste of the market, especially for popular music. Their lifestyle allows them to easily belong to communities digitally through technology platforms, so they have strong abilities to share information faster than older generations. This aids music sharing, making them tastemakers in the music industry. They are able to create and share trends quickly. Determining what is cool or not, so they determine the economics of music, fashion, film, arts etc. All this affects music consumption or music preferences.

In your opinion, what are the specific challenges that Gen Z and Gen Alpha face when trying to find employment in the music and creative industry, and how can these challenges be addressed?

In Africa culturally, youth isn't exactly an advantage yet. This is because within most cultures, there is still the belief that a certain age group will have the necessary maturity to give great input, while younger people tend to still lack the necessary maturity to get things done properly, which isn't always the case. There are a lot of roles in the Music Industry that don't have anything to do with your musical abilities. There are the creative roles, the technical roles, business roles and the hybrid roles. For most of the time, while older experienced and more business savvy people are needed for the business roles, the younger talents are needed for the remaining sets of roles. I doubt if a strong and viable music industry can be formed without including Gen Zs, because they determine music consumption and trends. It's always better to have them in the creative, technical areas. It is also necessary to include them in hybrid roles and groom them through the business roles.

Companies like Ckrowd.com are very involved in talent training and education as it helps to develop a strong talent pipeline that helps feed the human resource needs of music industry enterprises from more developed markets that are trying to hire young African talents regularly. Training the next generation of African music and culture leaders have been the goals of international and Pan African networks like the Arts Connect Africa. For our music industry to grow it needs a steady supply of bright and young talents.

Considering Africa's growing reputation as a hub of talent and human resource in creative industries, how should companies change their recruitment strategies when hiring professionals across these industries?

First, investment in education and training is important. African talents need to be standardised, they need to have a clear understanding of how the Music Business works, either locally or globally. Then they need to see themselves as global talents and function as such. The world having become a global village, technology must enable how we project our African talents. Technology needs to affect the way people find and experience talent scouting. The way people engage, hire, reward and pay talents must be technologically enabled. There must be a deliberate need for talents and hirers to put their best foot forward in what they all bring to the table. Africa will become the youngest talent pool in the World by 2035, according to forecasters; and the earlier the global

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Q&A INSIGHTS FROM NIGERIAN AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS & CORPORATE LEADERS

Talent will become huge...

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market starts to invest in partnerships that helps them have access to talents, the better. The earlier the better too for Africa to start pouring value into their young human resource, as it would be her most valuable resource in a few years time. Investment must be now! Ckrowd.com now hires African skilled contractors from USA, Canada, UK, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Ghana etc to companies in about five countries in the developed market, processing payroll and project funds on behalf of their music industry clients from those markets.

How does Arts Connect Africa (ACA) ensure that the diverse voices and perspectives of African countries and the diaspora are represented and respected within the organisation and its initiatives?

The music industry professionals that are members of the ACA are top professionals from the disciplines and the markets that they operate in. These are Booking Agents, Festival Founders, Music Business Education Leaders, Technology Experts, Media Experts, etc. There is mutual respect among members. They are also aligned in their quest of supporting Africa in getting the best value from her music and culture, socially and economically. All members are spread across more than 15 countries on the globe and the diversity is fun, because it is able to present unique ideas and perspectives to every project. These members are doers, touching the grassroots in their initiatives. ACA has strong relationships in multiple developed and developing music markets, have very good work experience in most of the music markets in the world, they work with the public sector, private sector, academia and tourism boards. Their perspective on how music and culture can serve as a change agent, employer of labour, and economic catalyst is unique. ACA trains and helps leaders in the sector and industries see value in how to leverage music and culture for social and economic impact, while making these industries and sectors sustainable in her growth even beyond Africa. ACA is always open to help organisations, governments, high networth individuals implement their project vision on the continent, helping them to translate it into relatable concepts and programmes that are easily embraced by the local communities targeted.

In your experience working with over 30 cultural stakeholders, what specific challenges have you identified that are unique to the African music and cultural arts industry, and how has ACA addressed these challenges?

Africa has a big challenge in how her governments see and engage with music and culture. Due to these leaders over-dependence on old economy business models, they prefer tangible assets like banks, oil, land, solid minerals, etc. They are unable to see the power in the population and how that directly affects commerce and economics. They are unable to understand the size of the intangible assets worth trillions of dollars inherent in the culture and day to day lives of their people. This has led to the under-development of many African countries. It boils down to leadership and how these leaders see and analyse things. Their overview of what wealth is is still very archaic.

Africa is unable to capture her cultural value within the continent, while those assets are shipped abroad and are converted to billions in dollars. Our talents are exported to Coachella, O2 Arena, Madison Square Garden, Tottenham Stadiums to deliver their music and enrich those economies. If Africa starts to see our culture as assets that needs to be refined and organised to bring out huge economic value, if government engagement with that sector is not just for political optics, if the right people are put in the right policy and implementation places, Africa will leapfrog to economic abundance. ACA has been interacting with government agencies and commissions in charge of the policies and economics of our culture, to educate and help put together projects that showcase the social and economic ideals that can economically and socially turn these African regions around quite dramatically.

Given the growth in Africa's working-age population and the demand for improved efforts from tech companies and stakeholders in the creator's economy and music industry, how should stakeholders approach skills development initiatives to support socio-economic advancement across the continent?

African leaders must be proactive in the area of technology. Especially in providing high speed internet on the continent and giving coverage to even rural areas. During COVID-19 lockdown, Africa witnessed 500 million people online for the purpose of communicating, work or entertainment. With satellite technology in distributing high speed internet like Starlink powered by Elon Musk, internet services can reach the most remote areas in Africa. When the aspect of affordability is properly catered to, education can be driven



virtually and the scalability of it can be huge. Training can be delivered and accessed by affordable devices across the continent, through leveraging affordable internet data service. The internet is able to provide information at a speed never seen before. Then innovative tools like AI and search engines like Google can become available and necessary for self-research and self-study. Platforms like YouTube, Udemy, etc become educational resource portals and testing platforms are also available to self-test your capacities per time. This will leapfrog Africa into becoming a massively literate and huge talent pool, useful not only to Africa, but to the global market.

Talent abundance is one thing, but talent renewal and specificity in talent growth are important. How can this understanding of the need for renewal and continuous growth be established?

Africa needs deliberate and consistent look into the type of curriculum that we have held onto and kept in use for youth education and development over decades. For Africa to really benefit from the coming demand for labour and the possible market share it can capture from the \$100 billion Global Outsourcing Business, curriculum must be adjusted to include innovation, technology, AI, languages (English, Spanish, Mandarin, French). This will allow sustainability in the continuous supply of marketable talents from Africa. Presently, a company like Ckrowd.com is not just building her own talent pipeline, but has started mutual partnerships with verified training institutions that regularly graduate young and talented music industry professionals. Ckrowd then provides them with technology tools to help them profile themselves as Global Talents, Ckrowd then amplifies these professionals to heighten their ability to attract quality

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hiring and career growth opportunities.

In your view, what are the key challenges faced by young people in Africa when it comes to accessing the opportunities and resources provided by these industries, and what can be done to address these challenges?

The major challenges facing young people in Africa are poor quality education and necessary infrastructure for day-to-day activities. This makes them assume that opportunities are lacking on the continent, thereby doing all they can to migrate to other developed economies to enjoy these basic amenities.

There must be deliberate willingness by the governments of Africa to provide and insist on quality education. Without technology and infrastructure like: access to good health-care; availability of food; access to funding, it will be hard for Africa's youth to meet her full potential.

To what extent do you believe that the growth of digital platforms and technologies, such as streaming services and social media, has contributed to the development of Africa's entertainment and media industries, and how can these technologies be leveraged to further support the mobility and success of young people in the creative economy?

These platforms have led to African creatives and youths creating content at a higher standard, to meet up to the taste of the international market. Now, we see cleaner videos, more structured and well produced.

These platforms have also become fantastic distribution tools. These platforms allow viewers from all over the world to find and enjoy content from African creators. African content is now enjoyed worldwide and has given the opportunity for African youths to share their stories, see their creativity and given them the opportunities to control their narrative about negative biases.

These platforms have also served African content creators in providing revenue for their work. Many content creators are able to monetise their work and earn using these platforms.

What specific examples of successful intra-continental collaboration or initiatives would you point to as models for the type of cohesive structures that you believe are necessary to address the fragmentation of Africa's entertainment and media industry?

There has been massive collaboration in the music industry, which has led to the breaking of African music artistes worldwide. These collaborations go beyond writing and performing music; many professionals across the industry and across markets, work together daily to see the music of Africa spread and get great rewards in monetary value – professionals like artiste managers, entertainment lawyers, technologists, publicists, social media managers, dancers, producers, media experts, etc. They put in the work to keep the culture growing beyond borders and beyond the continent.

The Film Industry collaborations across countries within Africa have been outstanding. Nigerian films feature Ghanaian, Cameroonian, South Africans, Kenyans, etc. This is to give these films a wide appeal across the continent and even the diaspora. This brings a lot of monetary rewards to the investors and talents that participate in these video masterpieces, value comes to the intellectual property captured in the process.

We can also say the same for fashion, creative arts, culinary arts, etc.

When you look into the future, what does your crystal ball tell you about how the business landscape of talents, economic rewards, and the economy of African entertainment and creative industry will be shaped?

The future for Africa is bright. Africa will enjoy a usual biological advantage, starting in the next 15 years with her young population. Africa will have the youngest skilled population in the world. With all things being equal, Africa will also have the most sizeable volume of buying youths in the nearest future. Africa's value will not only be what she has under the soil alone, but her real diamond and gold will be Africans themselves. They will contribute to the biggest and most important companies in the world and will become where the world looks to, in order to determine what is worth buying or selling due to her massive population. Africa will breed more technology unicorn start-ups. Most entertainment products and creations will fully be from Africa or will have a strong influence from Africa, if it's to have any commercial value.

That's the future I see for Africa and wise Africans should position properly for the windfall. That's why networks like Arts Connects Africa are important in getting Africa's youths and cultural leaders of the future ready. They are important in advising governments on decisions and policies that will put Africa in a place of advantage for the future. Technology like Ckrowd.com are necessary to help bring the rewards in talents, skills and professionalism of young Africans into the continent in foreign exchange earnings, to help give Africans the standard of life that they deserve.