

RESEARCH ARTICLE

## City Diplomacy: The Role of the Creative Economy in Urban Development in Africa

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### ABSTRACT

Through the lens of city diplomacy, this study examines the role of the creative economy in urban development within African cities. With urbanization rapidly transforming African cities into dynamic economic hubs, they face challenges such as unemployment, infrastructure deficits and social inequality. City diplomacy, the active engagement of cities in international partnerships, allows these urban centres to address local issues while positioning themselves as influential players on the global stage. This study employs urban informality and city diplomacy theories to explore how African cities harness the creative economy — including sectors such as arts, media, design, and culture — as a panacea to sustainable growth, social cohesion and cultural revitalization. Through thematic analysis of case studies, the research demonstrates the creative economy's impact on economic diversification, job creation, and tourism. Findings reveal that city diplomacy, when integrated with creative industries, not only strengthens international collaborations but also promotes cultural exchange, technological innovation and resilience in African cities. The study concludes that there is a need for strategic city diplomacy to elevate African cities as key cultural and economic hubs that can contribute more meaningfully to the global economy while advancing sustainable urban development. It is recommended that African city governments should implement supportive policy frameworks, invest in creative infrastructure and foster public-private partnerships to maximize the creative economy's potential. Additionally, digital platforms and cultural exchanges are essential for boosting the global visibility of African cities and the sustainability of the creative industries.

**Keywords:** City diplomacy, Creative economy, Urban development, Urban informality, Sustainable development

### 1.0 Introduction

This study seeks to examine the role of the creative economy (CE) in urban development within African cities. It highlights the potential of CE to drive sustainable development in Africa and enhance global interconnectedness. While existing literature stresses the importance of the burgeoning creative economy in Africa as a panacea to economic growth

and human development (Figueira, Franco, Martins, Fortez, Henderson, Pegado, & Quintana, 2023; Kajiita & Kang'ethe, 2024; Hazzan, 2024; Patel, 2024), there is a gap in the literature regarding how the creative economy, through city diplomacy, can facilitate sustainable development in African and global interconnectedness, hence the need for this study.

Globalizing is fast entrenching itself in the current order. As such, cities are gradually emerging as powerful actors on the international stage, engaging in what is known as city diplomacy. City diplomacy involves the direct engagement of cities with each other and with international organisations to address global challenges, foster cross-border collaboration and advance local development agendas (Grandi, 2020; Marchetti, 2021). Traditionally, foreign policy, relations, and diplomacy was the domain of national governments (Bojang, 2018; Britannica, 2024); however, in recent decades, other actors have emerged who equally participate in activities that shape countries' foreign relations by tackling transnational issues like climate change, public health crises, migration, and economic inequality (Birn, Pillay, & Holtz, 2024). Nation-states are becoming interested in undertaking international interactions through means other than power politics, preferring to utilize soft means in engaging at international levels to tackle some national or local issues of interest. An example is the recent Subnational Diplomacy Unit established by the United States' Department of State with the aim of helping cities and other local administrative actors to engage in global affairs (Sevin, 2024:1). The global acceleration of urbanization, particularly across Africa, encourages cities to become key drivers of socio-economic transformation, with their ability to form international partnerships being crucial for achieving sustainable development (Aliyu & Amadu, 2017; Tekalign, 2023; Alanda, Kamana, & Radoine, 2024).

Urbanization rates in Africa are among the fastest in the world, with cities like Lagos, Nairobi, Johannesburg, and Dakar evolving into important economic hubs at an unprecedented pace. However, this rapid urban growth comes with significant challenges, including poverty, inequality, infrastructure deficits, and environmental degradation (Aliyu & Amadu, 2017; Kuddus, Tynan, & McBryde, 2020). City diplomacy offers a platform through which African cities can not only learn from global best practices but also project their own unique solutions to international audiences. This diplomatic engagement has profound implications for urban development, allowing cities to exchange ideas, attract foreign investment and collaborate on innovations that address local and global issues.

At the heart of this urban development is the creative economy, otherwise known as the Orange Economy or Pop Culture, a sector that spans the arts, culture, media, design, and entertainment, particularly with regard to their contribution to economic growth. The creative economy has proven to be a powerful driver of economic growth, social cohesion and cultural revitalisation (Boccella & Salerno, 2016; Kalfas, Kalogiannidis, Ambas & Chatzitheodoridis, 2024). In the context of African cities, it plays a transformative role in diversifying local economies, generating employment opportunities and preserving cultural heritage (Lane, 2021). The vibrancy of African creative industries — ranging from the globally recognised Nigerian film industry (Nollywood) to the rich musical landscapes of cities like Accra and Johannesburg — demonstrates the potential of the creative economy to contribute to urban regeneration and innovation. With creative industries, the visibility of African cities on the global stage is enhanced, as the CE continues to grow beyond traditional geographic contexts (Madichie, 2021), thus enabling them to leverage their cultural assets for international partnerships and economic development.

The study employs urban informality and city diplomacy as theoretical frameworks to explain how African cities navigate global interconnectedness while addressing local challenges. Urban informality, stemming from the works of Keith Hart in the 1970s, is characterised by the unregulated or semi-regulated economic activities that are often prevalent in developing cities, invariably intersecting with formal creative industries and creating unique urban dynamics (Hart 1973; Oluwasanmi & Fagbadebo, 2025). The informal sector, which in many African cities is responsible for a significant portion of employment, often overlaps with the creative economy, particularly in areas like craft production, informal arts markets and grassroots music scenes. City diplomacy enables African cities to formalise these sectors, attract investment and integrate them into global cultural economies (Sambuli, 2024).

Through an exploration of case studies from major African cities such as Lagos, Cape Town, Dakar, and Nairobi, this study demonstrates how creative industries contribute to urban regeneration, foster

innovation and enhance the overall well-being of urban populations. Cities that embrace the creative economy as a central pillar of their development strategies are able to attract tourism, encourage entrepreneurship and foster social cohesion, even in the face of urban challenges such as inequality and resource scarcity (Alsayel, de Jong, & Fransen, 2022; Rodrigues, Franco, Filipova, Silva, Kazandzhieva, Nacheva, Koleva, Lyubenov, Oliveira, Borges, Braga, Ivanova, & Antonova, 2024). Moreover, African cities that engage in city diplomacy can effectively position themselves as vibrant players in the global economy, capable of attracting international partnerships and investments that support long-term sustainable development.

Despite the interconnectedness of city diplomacy and creative economies in relation to the global interdependence, however, little scholarly attention has been paid to how city diplomacy can foster creative economies, especially in the 21st century. To address the gap, therefore, this study highlights how city diplomacy, in connection with the creative economies, promotes global interconnectedness by facilitating cross-border cultural exchange, driving economic partnerships and promoting shared global goals such as sustainability and inclusivity. Specifically, the study answers the following research questions: What is the role of the creative economy in urban development within African cities? How does the creative economy drive sustainable development in Africa? And how does city diplomacy enhance global interconnectedness? This report has four sections: introduction, materials and methods, findings and discussion, and conclusion and recommendations.

## **2.0 Materials and Methods**

The study adopted a qualitative research approach to examine the role of the creative economy in urban development within selected African cities through the lens of city diplomacy. The study is grounded in urban informality and city diplomacy theories, which are used as frameworks to analyse how African cities engage in diplomatic efforts and leverage creative sectors to drive sustainable development. City diplomacy is applied as a framework to examine the role of cities as international actors, assessing how African cities

use their unique cultural and creative assets to foster global partnerships, attract investments and drive local economic development.

Deductions were drawn from the situation in African cities such as Lagos, Cape Town, Dakar, and Nairobi, etc. These African cities were chosen based on their active engagement in city diplomacy and their recognised creative economies. These cities serve as case studies, providing insights into the relationship that exists between creative industries and urban development.

Data for the research was gathered through an extensive review of existing literature, reports and case studies focusing on city diplomacy and the creative economy's influence on urban growth. Key sources included academic journals, industry reports, government publications and organisational documents, particularly those focusing on urbanization trends, creative industry growth and the economic impact of city diplomacy in Africa. Thematic analysis was employed to identify and interpret patterns within the collected data. This process involved coding and categorising data based on recurring themes, such as economic growth, social cohesion, cultural exchange and policy frameworks that promote the integration of creative industries into urban development strategies.

## **3.0 Findings and Discussion**

### **The role of the creative economy in urban development within African cities**

As noted in the introduction, the creative economy involves the interaction of human creativity, ideas, intellectual property, knowledge, and technology (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD], 2024). It involves a wide range of activities, including arts and crafts, video, photography, music, performing arts, advertising, architecture, design, fashion, film, publishing, research and development, software, computer games, electronic publishing, and television/radio production, along with emerging sectors (see Figure 1). These are rather regarded as a variant of the informal sector, which is the main concern of informality theorists. The creative economy falls within Keith Hart's distinction of the informal or self-employment, which arises as a result of surplus labour in urban centres (Hart, 1973).

According to Policy Circle (2024), the concept of the creative economy was first introduced in the 1960s. However, it gained significant attention in 2001, when John Howkins popularized the term in his book *The Creative Economy: How People Make Money from Ideas*. Since then, the creative economy has been positioned at the intersection of human endeavours such as economics, innovation and social values. It has made significant contributions

to GDP, promoted growth and competition in traditional sectors and stimulated knowledge and talent, relying primarily on the limitless potential of creativity and intellectual capital (Policy Circle, 2024). The creative economy enhances urban development within African cities by fostering economic growth, social cohesion and cultural revitalisation.



**Figure 1:** Creative and Cultural Economy  
**Source:** Adapted from Policy Circle, 2024

The creative economy facilitates economic growth and job creation by enhancing the activities of creative industries to drive the economy. African cities, particularly hubs like Lagos, Nairobi, and Johannesburg, are witnessing rapid growth in sectors such as film (Nollywood in Nigeria), music, fashion, and digital media. These industries generate significant revenue and provide employment opportunities, especially for the youth. The CE contributes immensely to economic growth in terms of GDP, being worth \$985 billion as at 2023 and projected to account for about 10% of the world's GDP by 2030 (Bogachev, 2024). Reports suggests that as at 2024 the creative industry was the employer of 4.2 million Nigerian youths, with another 2.7 million people expected to be added by

2025 (Umeh, 2024). Thus, the CE has become so lucrative in Nigeria that the Federal Government is expected to generate \$100 billion and create two million jobs yearly (Falaiye, 2024).

The CE has been a strong source of support for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). The creative economy fosters entrepreneurship by enabling SMEs to thrive (Matiza, 2020; Rodríguez-Insuasti, Montalván-Burbano, Suárez-Rodríguez, Yonfá-Medranda, & Parrales-Guerrero, 2022). As designers, artists, filmmakers and other creative professionals establish their own businesses, their contributions create a ripple effect across supply chains, including tourism, marketing and retail. The creative economy has also enhanced investment

opportunities across African cities. A vibrant creative sector can attract foreign direct investment (FDI) and local investments in infrastructure (Abisuga & Muchie, 2021; Kalfas, Kalogiannidis, Ambas, & Chatzitheodoridis, 2024), such as performance venues, art galleries and digital platforms, thus further boosting urban development.

In the same vein, creative economies have bolstered cultural and social identity, with the preservation and promotion of African culture gradually shifting to the creative economy. Indeed, the creative economy allows cities to reflect and promote their unique cultural heritage (Edeh, et al., 2023). Moreover, African culture and historical richness are being projected to the world through the production of world-class movies on Netflix, e.g., *Black Panther*, *Anikulapo*, and *Jagunjagun*, among others. Thus, urban spaces become platforms for artistic expression — from traditional crafts to contemporary art (Zbucnea, 2022), thereby strengthening local identity and helping to preserve cultural traditions in a rapidly globalizing world. Expectedly, social cohesion emanates from this. In diverse and multicultural urban settings, the creative economy encourages interactions between different ethnic and social groups (UNCTAD, 2022). Festivals, public art installations and cultural events create inclusive spaces where communities can connect and share experiences, thus contributing to social cohesion.

In urban revitalisation and tourism, the creative economy has helped in transforming public spaces and has driven the regeneration of urban spaces. Initiatives such as street art, music festivals and pop-up markets have transformed rundown areas into vibrant cultural hubs, making cities more liveable and attractive to both residents and visitors. The creative economies have also helped in boosting cultural tourism (Nusraningrum, 2019; OECD, 2024), with African cities increasingly promoting themselves as cultural tourism destinations. Cities like Cape Town and Dakar host art biennales, music festivals and design weeks, thereby attracting tourists and enhancing the global profile of the city. This influx of tourists contributes to local businesses and the overall urban economy.

Activities in creative economies have as well aided technology and innovation (UNCTAD, 2022),

following growing digitization of the creative sector as technology revolutionizes the creative economy in African cities. Platforms like streaming services, online marketplaces and digital exhibitions provide artists and creators with broader audiences and new revenue streams, thus enhancing the visibility of African urban centres on the global stage (Yieke, 2024). Smart cities and innovative solutions are gaining significant attention globally. In Africa, some cities are advancing towards smartness through developments in infrastructure, Artificial Intelligence (AI), robotics, biomedical informatics, sustainable energy, and more. In Nigeria, Lagos State is actively pursuing this transformation, with the government taking steps to modernize the city in these areas (*Lachance, 2021*). Urban planners are increasingly incorporating creative and innovative solutions into city design. From smart public art installations to digital tools for cultural heritage preservation, creative professionals have been contributing to building more sustainable and interactive urban environments.

Regarding empowerment, the youth are now more meaningfully engaged through skill development. The creative economy empowers young people, especially in African cities where a large percentage of the population is under 30 (Udeh, Daraojimba, Odulaja, Afolabi, Ogedengbe, & James, 2024). Skills development in fields such as graphic design, music production, film and animation helps drive innovation and reduce youth unemployment (CheedzArt Studio, 2024; Caribou Digital, 2023). This creates pathways to global networking, creativity and entrepreneurship. Thus, the creative economy connects young Africans to global networks, opening opportunities for collaboration, knowledge exchange and participation in international cultural markets.

Creative economy also opens opportunities for sustainability and inclusivity, as evident in the promotion of sustainable urban growth. Indeed, the creative industries have been playing a crucial role in promoting sustainability (Manioudis and Angelakis, 2023; Khussainova, Kankulov, Petrova, Assanova, Zhartay, Atabayeva, & Bektleyeva, 2024). Initiatives like eco-friendly fashion, upcycled art and sustainable design practices contribute to the broader goals of environmental conservation and green urban development.

Moreover, inclusive development has been a trending phase, with the creative economy often serving as a platform for marginalized voices, including those of women, minorities and people with disabilities. Given these contributions, the creative industries have been playing a significant role equitable urban development. Above all, the creative economy is integral to shaping the future of African cities, fostering economic growth, enhancing cultural identity, revitalising urban spaces and embracing innovation. It also supports sustainable and inclusive urban development as it addresses both social and economic challenges.

### **Creative Economies and Sustainable Development in Africa**

The creative economy or pop culture (Madichie, 2021) plays a significant role in driving sustainable development in Africa. It has been a catalyst in promoting economic growth, social inclusivity, environmental sustainability and cultural preservation (Manioudis, 2023; UNCTAD, 2022). The creative economy provides developing countries with a promising opportunity to diversify their economies and enter high-growth sectors of the global economy. It promotes innovation, generates employment and enhances cultural diversity, all of which contribute to sustainable development.

One of the ways in which the creative economy promotes sustainable development in Africa is by diversifying the economy (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2022). Many developing economies rely heavily on a single sector, e.g., petroleum, agriculture or mining, making them vulnerable to fluctuations in global markets (Singh, Sharma, Radulescu, Balsalobre-Lorente, & Bansal, 2024). However, with the emergence of the CE, the economic base of cities in developing countries has been diversified, thus offering new opportunities for growth. The creative economy includes industries such as fashion, film, music, arts and digital media, meaning that more people can move away from traditional sectors. This diversification not only reduces economic vulnerability but also enhances resilience, enabling economies to adapt to global changes and explore new high-growth sectors.

Creative industries are labour-intensive and offer numerous job opportunities, particularly for the youth. These sectors provide a platform for entrepreneurship and innovation (Nwankwo, 2018), enabling individuals to create businesses that can thrive both locally and globally. Many young people, who might otherwise face unemployment, are now gainfully employed by engaging in creative ventures such as fashion, music, film and digital media (Datta, Melchor, & Laclé, 2023). Through this, they contribute to economic growth while also fostering innovation. This engagement not only reduces youth unemployment but also empowers them to become key drivers of economic and social transformation.

The integration of technology with creative industries drives innovation, and African creatives are increasingly leveraging digital platforms for global outreach. Many young people are using social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to showcase their talents on the global stage (Umeh, 2024). These platforms offer numerous opportunities for young creatives to display their skills in comedy, skit-making, music, and art (Umeh, 2024). Through these digital channels, many are able to gain employment (Datta, Melchor, & Laclé, 2023) and even earn income in foreign currencies, with new markets opening up for their products and services. This global visibility not only boosts individual success but also enhances the continent's overall competitiveness in the global creative economy.

Creative industries also contribute to sustainable practices, particularly in areas like fashion, architecture and design (Zemite, Kunda, & Judrupa, 2022). Eco-friendly products, upcycled materials and green innovations contribute to environmental sustainability while aligning with global sustainability goals. Creative sectors foster the development of new skills in design, technology, digital media, and the arts (Kunda, Tjarve, & Eglite, 2021). This boosts human capital development, which is essential for long-term sustainable development.

The creative economy also promotes social inclusion by providing marginalized groups, such as youth and women, with opportunities to engage in economic activities (UNCTAD, 2022, Pilege,



Pilegis, & Plota, 2023). These groups have often been overlooked in traditional economic structures; however, with the rise of the creative economy, they can showcase their talents without relying on conventional labour channels. This fosters equitable growth and contributes to poverty reduction.

Given the above, the creative economy plays a significant role in fostering sustainable development in African cities. Its contributions to innovation, job creation and the enhancement of cultural diversity make it a pivotal element in driving sustainable growth across the continent. As this trend continues to grow, further support will be needed to nurture innovation and unlock latent skills, particularly among the younger generation, thereby ensuring a more secure future for Africa.

### **City Diplomacy and Global Interconnectedness**

City diplomacy refers to efforts by city governments to engage directly with their counterparts in other cities around the world (Chan, 2016; Stürner-Siovit, & Morthorst, 2024), as well as international organisations, in order to address global challenges, foster collaboration and advance local interests on the international stage (Stürner-Siovit, & Morthorst, 2024). City diplomacy enhances global interconnectedness by promoting cooperation across borders, addressing shared global issues and creating more inclusive forms of international governance. City collaborations within the global system present several challenges. One of the most significant concerns is the erosion of national sovereignty (McGrew, 2004; Agnew, 2005; Lopez-Claros, Dahl, & Groff, 2020). As cities increasingly engage in direct international relations, they sometimes bypass national governments, leading to conflicts in foreign policy (Sizoo and Musch 2008; Bouchet 2024). This can weaken the authority of national leaders and lead to fragmented governance, where city policies do not always align with national interests.

Also, the global interconnectedness of cities tends to widen economic disparities among them (Connor et al. 2025). Wealthier cities with stronger infrastructures and resources benefit more from international partnerships, while smaller or less-developed cities struggle to compete (Kookana et al. 2020; Kuddus, Tynan and McBryde 2020). This

creates an imbalance where only select urban centres thrive, with others left behind in terms of economic growth and opportunities.

Also affected is cultural identity, with cities facing the risk of cultural dilution as they integrate further into the global network (Ezeudu & Chukwudubem 2024). Traditional languages, customs and values may gradually fade away as dominant Western influences take precedence. This phenomenon can lead to an identity crisis, where younger generations feel disconnected from their local heritage.

Moreover, interconnected cities face heightened security risks. Cyberattacks, espionage and international terrorism become more pronounced threats as cities exchange vast amounts of digital information and establish global partnerships (De Bruijn & Janssen, 2017). Dependence on foreign technology and infrastructure also increases the risk of external manipulation or disruption. There is also the likely emergence of overreliance on foreign relations. Cities that depend too heavily on international trade, foreign investments or diplomatic ties may face severe economic and political instability if such partnerships are disrupted (Whitten et al., 2020). Economic downturns in one part of the world can have ripple effects, causing financial hardships for interconnected cities.

Furthermore, issues of environmental concern arise as urban centres expand and integrate into global markets (Rondinelli, Johnson Jr & Kasarda, 1998). Increased urbanization leads to higher pollution levels, resource depletion and greater carbon footprints, making it more difficult to achieve sustainability goals (Ahmed et al., 2020). The demand for industrial growth and infrastructure development often comes at the cost of environmental degradation. However, climate change and other environmental issues are being addressed via city interconnectedness, with many cities taking direct action through partnerships and initiatives (Stürner-Siovit, & Morthorst, 2024). For instance, the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group or the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy and other networks allow cities to share strategies, set targets and collaborate on solutions, thus creating a globally interconnected framework to fight climate change (C40 Cities, 2024). The C40

Cities network, comprised by close to a hundred of the world's largest cities, collaborates on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, promoting green infrastructure and enhancing climate resilience. Through these collaborations, cities from different continents share best practices and innovative solutions.

As earlier mentioned, city diplomacy fosters economic cooperation through trade partnerships, business collaborations and investment. City governments work directly with counterparts in other cities to promote business exchanges, attract foreign direct investment (FDI) and create opportunities for local or grassroots entrepreneurs in the global market (Wells & Wint, 2000; National League of Cities, 2011). Cities engage in diplomacy to share knowledge and technology in fields like smart city development, digital innovation, transportation and urban planning. Such exchanges lead to the global dissemination of ideas, creating a network of interconnected urban centres that benefit from each other's advancements.

City diplomacy encourages cultural exchanges through festivals, art and tourism. No doubt, cultural diplomacy helps break down stereotypes, foster mutual understanding and build relationships between citizens of different cities, enhancing the cultural interconnectedness of the global community (Saaïda, 2023a). Cities often use their historical and cultural significance to exercise soft power on the global stage (Ukonne, 2022; Sevin, 2024). Through this, they promote their culture, values and achievements, thereby enhancing their global presence and building relationships with international communities.

Cities, especially those with histories of conflict, can play a role in promoting peace through city diplomacy (Elfversson, Gusic & Rokem, 2023). This is done by engaging in peacebuilding projects, intercity dialogues and humanitarian initiatives. Cities can also help to mediate conflicts, contribute to reconciliation efforts and promote global stability (Saaïda, 2023b). City diplomacy is vital in addressing migration and refugee issues (Doğan, 2024). Cities hosting large populations of refugees or migrants collaborate through diplomatic channels to share strategies for integration, housing and

social services, thereby contributing to more humane global migration policies.

Through city diplomacy, cities advocate their local interests on international platforms such as the United Nations, World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Economic Forum (WEF) (World Economic Forum, 2019). This brings city-specific perspectives into global governance, ensuring that cities have a say in shaping policies that affect their populations. Cities are increasingly becoming active players in shaping global policy (Nganje & Tladi, 2023). This decentralization of diplomacy allows cities to work autonomously, sometimes bypassing national governments to engage directly with international organizations and other cities on issues of climate change, health and economic policy.

Indeed, cities are critical in achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with city diplomacy enabling collaboration on matters of clean energy, city sustainability and responsible consumption. Through sharing successful strategies and initiatives, cities support one another in making progress on global sustainability targets. With cities frequently facing the challenges of natural disasters, rapid urbanization and infrastructural strain, diplomatic networks can help them exchange solutions on how to build resilient cities that can better respond to crises. Indeed, city diplomacy is a powerful tool for enhancing global interconnectedness that can be enhanced through collaboration on climate change, public health, trade, cultural exchange, peacebuilding, and sustainable urban development. Through direct engagement with one another and international institutions, cities strengthen the ties that connect communities across the world, contributing to a more inclusive, sustainable and cooperative global future.

#### **4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study has highlighted the significant role of the creative economy in fostering urban development in African cities through the framework of city diplomacy. As African cities continue to urbanise rapidly, they face challenges of unemployment, infrastructure deficits and cultural preservation. The creative economy presents a powerful avenue for addressing these challenges by driving economic



growth, creating jobs, promoting social cohesion and enhancing cultural identity. By engaging in city diplomacy, African cities may be confronted with negative concerns such as erosion of national sovereignty, tendency to widen economic disparities among cities, risk of cultural dilution, security risks such as cyberattacks, espionage, and international terrorism, overreliance on foreign relations, and environmental degradation. However, they can leverage their unique cultural assets to build international partnerships, attract investments and gain visibility on the global stage. Such engagements enable cities in Africa to promote sustainable development goals, foster cross-cultural exchanges and contribute to a diversified and resilient urban economy. Accordingly, it is necessary to devise strategic city diplomacy to elevate African cities as key cultural and economic hubs, in line with the intention to enhance their role in the global economy and advance sustainable urban development. For the above benefits to be fully realised, the study offers a few recommendations.

African city governments should develop and implement *robust policies* that support the growth of the creative economy. These policies should aim to provide financial incentives, infrastructure support and legal protection for creative industries, ensuring they are integrated into urban development strategies.

African cities should deepen their engagement in city diplomacy by establishing *partnerships with other global cities*. Such alliances will facilitate knowledge exchange, resource sharing and collaboration on cultural projects, which are essential for showcasing African cultural assets on the international stage. To fully leverage the creative economy, cities should invest in infrastructure that supports creative industries, such as performance venues, art studios and digital media hubs. These facilities will foster innovation, attract tourism and create opportunities for local creatives to thrive.

*Collaborative efforts between the public and private sectors* are crucial to sustainably support the creative industries. Governments should encourage partnerships with private entities to fund and manage creative spaces, cultural events and training

programmes, thus ensuring long-term support for the creative economy. Given the high youth population in African cities, governments should prioritize skill development programmes that prepare young people for careers in creative industries. Initiatives in areas like digital media, music production and graphic design can reduce youth unemployment and empower the next generation of African creatives.

Cities should encourage the *use of digital platforms* to amplify the global visibility of African creatives. By supporting online marketplaces, streaming services and virtual exhibitions, African cities can showcase their creative talents to a broader audience and attract international collaborations. It is essential that creative industries adopt sustainable practices to align with global environmental goals.

African cities should promote *eco-friendly and sustainable approaches* within the creative economy, such as upcycled fashion and environmentally conscious art installations. African cities can enhance their global interconnectedness by hosting cultural exchange programmes, festivals and exhibitions that celebrate the African heritage. These initiatives foster international goodwill, attract tourism and promote cross-cultural understanding, all of which contribute to the cities' global image. Efforts should also be made to mitigate the negative effects of international collaborations as noted above.

African cities should *leverage the creative economy to diversify their economies and reduce reliance on traditional industries*. By incorporating creative sectors into their economic strategies, cities can create resilient urban economies that are better equipped to withstand global economic fluctuations. To ensure the effectiveness of these initiatives, African cities should implement monitoring and evaluation systems that will help track the impact of city diplomacy and the creative economy on urban development, thereby enabling continuous improvement and adjustment of policies. African city governments must establish supportive policies, invest in creative infrastructure and promote digital platforms that enhance global reach. Collaborative efforts across public and private sectors, alongside partnerships with other big cities, will be crucial in the process of

amplifying the impact of the creative economy. In short, with a strategic focus on city diplomacy and the creative economy, African cities can strengthen their roles as influential players in the international arena, positioning themselves as vibrant centres of culture, innovation and sustainable development.

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