

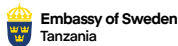


**Summary Report on the 2nd Edition
of the Pan-African Network for
Artistic Freedom (PANAF) Summit
Zanzibar, February 14–16, 2025**

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Foreword

In the heart of Zanzibar between February 14-16, we gathered for the second edition of the Pan-African Network for Artistic Freedom (PANAF) Summit. This summit unfolded at a moment when many artists across Africa continue to create in the shadow of fear - navigating censorship, economic hardship, digital surveillance, and shrinking civic spaces. Yet, the summit brought together 51 delegates from 17 countries who all demonstrated a strong will to resist, imagine and innovate to create a more equal and just society for all - united by the conviction that artistic freedom is not a luxury, but a necessity for any democratic society.

PANAF was founded on the belief that we are stronger when we move together. What this summit reaffirmed is that artists are not only cultural creators but civic actors, truth-tellers, and architects of change.

Whether advocating policy reform in Lusaka, running emergency support systems in Kampala, building collectives in Harare, or digitizing rights-based campaigns in Addis Ababa, our partners and participants showed that artistic expression can be a force that unsettles the status quo, inspires solidarity, and catalyzes justice.

This report is more than a record of discussions. It is a strategy, a roadmap, and a collective commitment to advance Artistic Freedom across Africa. Through a participatory methodology, delegates mapped both the root causes of repression and the concrete actions needed to protect and nurture artistic freedom.

I am deeply proud of what we have built together under the PANAF umbrella - thanks to our partners, our regional allies, and our funders, the Swedish Arts Council and the Swedish Institute. Yet, I am also mindful that the work ahead remains vast. As this report illustrates, we are ready and we are many who want to carry on the work to ensure artists are free to create without fear or repression. Let us continue to speak, create, and organize - not in isolation, but together.



Teshome Wondimu

Executive Director, Selam



Introduction

The Pan-African Network for Artistic Freedom (PANAF) Summit 2025 was held from February 14–16 in Zanzibar, Tanzania, convening 51 participants representing 17 countries. Organized by Selam in collaboration with Artists at Risk Connection (ARC) and supported by the Swedish Arts Council and the Swedish Institute, this second annual summit focused on the theme *Art, Civic Engagement, and Movement Building*.

The summit brought together artists, cultural practitioners, policymakers, legal experts, civil society organizations, funders, and regional and international bodies to explore systemic challenges and opportunities in Africa's culture and creative sectors. The summit aimed to advance regional collaboration, strengthen legal and policy frameworks, and equip artists to navigate complex political and socio-economic environments.

It was a unique environment where the many facets of artistic freedom came together to break down barriers between government, civil society, and artists. Through a participatory process, the summit generated a collective

“The pivot point in artistic freedom has to do with the relationship between citizens and the state. There are three fundamental pillars in this connection. The first pillar has to do with what a state is doing. The second pillar has to do with what we permit the state to do as citizens. And the third pillar has to do with the things that we hold the state to account on.”

~ Extract from keynote speech by Lisa Sidambe

understanding of the challenges facing artistic freedom as well as the actionable strategies.

This report summarizes the summit's key insights, strategic recommendations, and commitments, orienting our sector towards collectively developed goals for advocacy, policy engagement, and regional cooperation.

Summit Methodology – Two Trees

The summit aimed to maximise inter-regional and inter-disciplinary discussion. In doing so, the summit was structured to channel ideas into a collective understanding of the challenges facing artistic freedom and to develop a Pan-African strategy for the sector moving forward.

The participatory method centred on “two trees” that were drawn on large flipchart paper at the front of the room. The first tree focused on the “problems/challenges” in artistic freedom. Each part of the tree represented a different component of the problem. The roots represented the *underlying causes* of the problem (eg: language exclusion, colonialism, economic oppression); the branches represented the *categories of problems/challenges* (eg: self-censorship, lack of legal and policy protection, market censorship), and the leaves represented the *concrete manifestations* of those problems (eg: threat of violence, limited networking opportunities).

The second tree focused on the “Actions/Commitments” for artistic freedom that the participants were developing. On this tree, the roots represented the *community assets and ‘resources’* available to us in this work (eg: artist residencies, fundraising guidance, art and advocacy); the branches





represented the collectively agreed upon *goals and priorities* (eg: improve emergency response, policy/legislative reform, strengthen creative collectives); and the leaves represented the *concrete commitments/actions* that the delegates were making towards the relevant goals (eg: develop a Tanzanian house of arts and culture, participate in policy making, run a creative accelerator).

Throughout the summit, the facilitators and participants would add ideas and information to the trees: writing an underlying cause on the problem/challenge tree that was

mentioned in a panel, or adding a leaf to the action/commitment tree because a new idea for a project arose in a group discussion.

Particular attention was paid to the leaves on both trees – which took the form of sticky notes that were widely available throughout the room. While the first day of the summit had a heavier influence on the problem/challenge tree, the second and third days focused heavily on the action/commitment tree since it is developing a strategy moving forward that was of primary importance.

The process of populating the trees culminated in the final session of the summit on day three. The entire summit deliberated on the structure of the trees, discussion if any branches (categories of problems or goals) needed to be reframed, added, or removed. We privileged the action/commitment tree in this discussion and carried out a group forum where everyone had space to express their thoughts and vote through live feedback on how the ideas of the summit were represented. This resulted in a final version of the trees that is backed by broad consensus of the delegates and can act as a roadmap for how to prioritise resources, identify focus areas, and connect the work taking place across Africa to strategically advance artistic freedom in the region. This report outlines these goals and the discussions that led to them.

Summit Outline

The three-day summit began by building a shared understanding of the artistic freedom landscape and the networks engaged in this work. This included presentations from PANAF partners showcasing national efforts to defend artistic freedom and expand civic space, offering generalizable insights into sector-wide challenges and lessons; moving into a panel that centred the insights from artists engaged in movement building; and the day concluded with a session examining the regional networks that are in place to connect with and support artists.

The second day moved away from examining grassroots work by artists and the networks that bind them, and turned to the role of national and regional institutions in the promotion of artistic freedom. It began with a technical dive into artistic regulation in digital media as a means to set the stage for some of the most pressing contemporary debates that institutions are wrestling with regards to artistic freedom. The day progressed to gain insights from both government officials and regional UNESCO representatives that were able to speak to the issue of norm setting, policy change, and institutional challenges on the continent.





The final day of the summit focused its attention on developing collective commitments based on the discussions leading to that point. In order to do so, the only panel of the day investigated creative strategies for resourcing the cultural and artistic freedom sector to generate a critical understanding of the resources available to us as we develop this work.

Day One: Landscape and Networks

Keynote Presentation

The keynote address, delivered by Lisa Sidambe, framed artistic freedom as a process of critical thinking—essential to reclaiming identity, advancing decolonization, and redefining freedom in Africa's post-colonial context. Rather than positioning artistic freedom solely within a human rights framework, she called for a deeper examination of why artistic expression remains so frequently contested across the continent.

Linking artistic restriction to enduring colonial legacies and state power, Lisa posed two urgent questions: What makes full cultural expression so threatening, and why is the collective shaping of identity through art perceived as a risk? She emphasised the roles of the state, citizens, and civic engagement in protecting artistic freedom; and she urged stakeholders to interrogate the systems that enable censorship, posing danger to democratic principles and practices. Her address concluded with a call to action: artistic freedom must be defended not just by artists, but through broad, coordinated effort across civil society, policy spaces, and the public sphere.



PANAF Partner Presentations

The four PANAF partner presentations — PAAGZ in Zambia, Pearlwood in Uganda, Nhimbe Trust in Zimbabwe, and Selam Ethiopia— provided concrete examples of national-level efforts to defend artistic freedom and expand civic space for the cultural sector that provided generalisable insights into challenges and lessons for the sector. Khazika Sakala of PAAGZ detailed the organization's strategy of combining advocacy with creative expression to influence policy and



empower marginalized communities. Their approach includes National Platforms for dialogue between artists and policymakers, hybrid symposiums, and multimedia advocacy campaigns leveraging satire, music, and digital tools to inform and mobilize. In Uganda, Mzee Bwanika Julius of Pearlwood described a similarly multi-pronged strategy, emphasizing collaborative roundtables (KIMEEZA), monthly hybrid events, and a growing digital infrastructure—including an online TV station—to promote cross-sectoral dialogue and awareness.

Pearlwood is also actively supporting the development of a regional ‘Declaration of Principles and Guidelines on Cultural Rights.’

Lisa Sidambe of Nhimbe Trust in Zimbabwe framed artistic freedom as a cultural right grounded in the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, and emphasized its protection during crises and austerity. She presented Nhimbe’s multi-layered strategy of legal interpretation, policy guidance, alliance-building, and engagement with AU bodies to promote state obligations and strengthen the role of Cultural Human Rights Defenders. Finally, Selam Ethiopia’s Samuel Mulgeta presented a data-driven approach informed by nationwide research on barriers to artistic freedom, including lack of access to public space, political pressure, and fear of harassment. In response, Selam Ethiopia has launched platforms such as the PANAF Chat Room and plans a 2025 hybrid symposium and cultural advocacy campaign incorporating regional engagement and capacity-building. All four presentations reflected key shared priorities: closing the information gap on artistic rights, forging stronger ties between artists and policymakers, and building inclusive, sustainable platforms for artistic expression and advocacy. Despite differing national contexts, each initiative underscored the importance of coordinated regional action, policy influence, and the central role of the arts in defending democratic values.

Panel: The Role of Artists in Movement Building Across the Continent

Panellists: *Soheyb Kehal* (artist, Algeria), *Sharon Laura Ong'ayo* (artist, Kenya), *Omega Sawe* (artist, Tanzania), *Masoud Kibwana* (artist, Tanzania), *Javan Ofula* (artist, Kenya).

This opening panel examined the role of artists in movement-building across Africa, positioning them as frontline advocates for justice, inclusion, and social transformation. Speakers emphasized that African artists have historically played a revolutionary role—using their work to resist oppression and mobilize communities—and must continue to do so today amidst persistent political, social, and economic challenges. A key theme was the enduring power of art to confront injustice, whether through storytelling, photography, music, or visual art. Panellists underscored that art is more than personal expression—it is a vehicle for truth-telling, collective memory, and resistance.

Throughout the discussion, panellists surfaced both structural and internal challenges to movement-building. These included systemic censorship, marginalization of certain art forms (such as visual art), short-lived collaborations, and the emotional toll

of advocacy work. Several speakers called for sustainable, cross-sectoral partnerships rooted in shared values, rather than ad hoc engagements. They stressed that artists must be part of long-term coalitions—not only among themselves but with policymakers and human rights defenders—to amplify their impact. Regional collaboration was identified as essential for building unified strategies and increasing artists' influence at both national and continental levels.

The interactive session reinforced the urgency of building sustainable and regionally connected artistic movements. Panellists and participants highlighted the need for long-term collaboration rooted in shared principles, not just reactive alliances. They also emphasized the importance of collective care and creating safe, inclusive spaces where artists can work, heal, and organize. A strong consensus emerged that artists must move beyond individual expression to actively shape the systems and policies that affect their freedoms. Movement-building, the panel made clear, depends not only on solidarity among artists but also on their ability to engage with institutions, challenge narratives, and remain resilient in the face of risk.





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Panel: Strategies for Regional Solidarity – Residencies and Emergency Response

Panellists: **Ouafa Belgacem** (CEO – Culture Funding Watch, Tunisia), **Sara Maali** (Al Mawred, Tunisia), **Dee Werter** (Senior Program Officer – DefendDefenders, Uganda)

This panel addressed the strategic foundations needed to build effective regional solidarity among artists across Africa, emphasizing that true solidarity must extend beyond moral support to include tangible, sustainable systems. Panellists explored how financial instability, siloed efforts, and top-down emergency responses have undermined the resilience of artistic communities. A central theme was the inseparability of artistic freedom from economic freedom: without reliable income, infrastructure, or institutional backing, artists remain vulnerable to repression, self-censorship, and disconnection from broader movements. Speakers advocated for locally led, bottom-up approaches that prioritize resource-sharing, cross-border collaboration, and the development of artist-run spaces that serve as both cultural incubators and economic engines.

Financial sustainability emerged as both a barrier and a pathway to greater regional solidarity. Panellists critiqued

the competitive funding landscape that often pits cultural organizations against one another, weakening opportunities for collective advocacy. Instead, they called for a cultural shift toward collaboration and transparency, including more deliberate sharing of information, funding opportunities, and institutional support. Art spaces—rooted in local communities but connected to regional and international networks—were championed as essential infrastructure to reduce dependence on external donors and create long-term platforms for expression, safety, and professional growth.

The conversation also examined the complexities of emergency support for artists at risk, highlighting both gaps and opportunities for reform. A major concern raised was the challenge of verifying the legitimacy of support requests, particularly in contexts where resources are limited and misuse is possible. To address this, panellists advocated for closer collaboration with local partners who have contextual knowledge and can help assess claims more accurately. Importantly, the panel stressed that emergency response efforts must include emotional and professional reintegration, not just physical safety. Stronger coordination among

emergency support organizations was identified as a critical piece—without it, duplication of efforts, inconsistent vetting processes, and gaps in data protection persist. Panellists called for the development of shared verification systems, standardized protocols for safeguarding personal data, and more transparent communication between organizations. While there have been important initiatives towards this end – such as the AMANI Network – there is need for development. These measures, they argued, are essential to building a more accountable, responsive, and artist-centred protection ecosystem.





Day Two: Institutions

Panel: Artistic Freedom Regulation in an Era of Digital Media and Technology

Panellists: ***Sarah Balozi** (Program Officer – CDEA, Tanzania), **Lisa Sidambe** (Researcher – Nhimbe Trust, Zimbabwe), **Faith Shikanga** (Artist, Kenya), **Muleta Kapatiso** (Lawyer and Activist, Zambia).*

This panel explored how digital technologies have transformed artistic expression across Africa—expanding opportunities for global reach while introducing new regulatory, legal, and security challenges. Panellists agreed that digital spaces can amplify advocacy and democratise expression, but underscored that government regulations have not kept pace with technological change. Instead, outdated or hastily amended laws are increasingly used to monitor, censor, and suppress digital content. Artists face a growing threat of surveillance, cyber harassment, and legal retaliation, often



under the pretext of national security or public interest. Speakers emphasized that a digital landscape supportive of artistic freedom must include modernized legal protections, enforceable safeguards against online abuse, and transparency from both governments and digital platforms.



A recurring theme was the tension between the liberating potential of digital platforms and the growing constraints imposed through state-led regulation. Panellists outlined strategies used by governments to suppress online expression—including reinterpretation of existing laws,

partnerships with tech platforms to monitor content, and new legislation targeting digital creatives. Civil society representatives advocated for artist-led research, stronger legal frameworks, and context-sensitive policy advocacy that moves beyond symbolic gestures toward structural reform. Speakers also challenged the instrumentalization of “African culture” as a justification for censorship, noting that appeals to cultural identity are often selectively applied to suppress dissent. The rise of digital activism—particularly among youth—was presented as both a breakthrough and a vulnerability, necessitating digital rights education, protective alliances, and careful navigation of online spaces.

In the interactive session, the conversation expanded to questions of ethics, accountability, and artist compensation. Panellists called for clearer legal definitions of acceptable limitations on artistic expression—firmly grounded in international human rights standards—to prevent arbitrary censorship. They also emphasized that financial justice, including royalty systems, cannot be addressed without first establishing environments where artists are free to create and distribute their work without fear. Throughout the discussion, the importance of intergenerational engagement, regional solidarity, and artist-government dialogue was emphasized as essential for shaping a digital future that protects creative freedom and ensures that digital platforms remain tools for expression—not instruments of repression.

Panel: The Challenges and Role of Government in Advancing Artistic Freedom

Panellists: **Bakaye Lubega** (Assistant Commissioner Culture at Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development, Uganda), **P.S. Nicholas Moyo** (Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture, Zimbabwe), **Hon. Rachel Magoola** (Member of Parliament, Uganda), **Mrisho M. Mrisho** (BASATA, Tanzania), **Adrian Maanka Chipindi** (National Arts Council, Zambia).

This panel focused on the critical relationship between governments and the artistic community, examining how policy frameworks can support or hinder artistic freedom. The panellists discussed the need for a paradigm shift from adversarial stances to collaborative efforts between governments and artists. Permanent Secretary Moyo emphasized the importance of proactive collaboration, suggesting that artists should be integrated into the policy-making process from the outset, ensuring that regulations reflect contemporary needs while safeguarding artistic expression. He also pointed out that many laws, inherited from colonial times, are outdated and no longer address the challenges faced by today's artists, particularly in the digital

age. Updating these laws is essential to prevent censorship from stifling creativity and national development.

The conversation also tackled the delicate balance governments face in regulating artistic content while respecting freedom of expression. Panellists acknowledged that governments have a responsibility to preserve ethical and cultural values but warned against using these justifications to suppress artistic freedoms. Bakaya discussed how governments sometimes use regulations to maintain order, which can unintentionally infringe upon creative rights. In Uganda, for example, the National Media Council ensures content aligns with cultural values and national security, but the country still grapples with outdated regulations. The importance of dialogue between artists and governments was emphasized to co-create fair and relevant policies that respect both cultural norms and artistic freedom.

The discussion concluded with calls for more inclusive and participatory policy-making processes that center artists as active contributors, not passive stakeholders. Chipindi emphasized the need for clear regulatory frameworks and



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capacity-building to help artists understand and navigate the laws that govern their work. Hon. Magoola added that many artists are unaware of the policies that shape their work—not due to inaccessibility, but because of a broader disengagement with legal and political processes. She called for a mindset shift, encouraging artists to become informed advocates for their rights and to push back against societal norms that continue to undervalue the arts. Together, panellists affirmed that advancing artistic freedom requires both structural reform and a cultural revaluation of the arts across African societies.



Panel: UNESCO and Regional Bodies in Artistic Freedom

Panellists: **Thando Mlambo** (UNESCO ROSA, Zimbabwe),
Judith Ogana (UNESCO East Africa, Kenya)

This session explored the role of UNESCO as a standard-setting body for artistic freedom, highlighting both its contributions and limitations. UNESCO provides global policy frameworks, technical assistance, and limited funding to support cultural rights. The panel emphasized that UNESCO does not directly fund cultural projects and relies on national governments to implement its recommendations. A key challenge identified is the gap between global guidance and national action with many member states lacking the capacity or political will to translate UNESCO's frameworks into meaningful protections for artists. The session underscored the need for better information-sharing, as many cultural stakeholders remain unaware of available UNESCO mechanisms or miss opportunities to engage due to limited outreach and support.

In discussing regional efforts, the panel highlighted that African bodies such as the AU, ECOWAS, SADC, and the EAC have created cultural policy frameworks, but their implementation



is uneven. Political constraints, limited funding, and weak institutional infrastructure often prevent these bodies from effectively supporting artistic freedom. The conversation called for stronger collaboration between regional and international institutions, and for aligning national policies with broader frameworks to ensure consistency and accountability. There was also a strong emphasis on improving digital rights protections and ensuring fair economic conditions for artists in the digital space. Ultimately, the discussion underscored that while international and regional frameworks provide important scaffolding for protecting artistic freedom, their success depends on active, well-resourced, and inclusive implementation across all levels.



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Day Three: 'Resources' and Commitments

Panel: Strategies for Funding Arts and The Creative and Cultural Industry

Panellists: **Emma Emitslof** (Program Officer – Swedish Arts Council), **Ouafa Belgacem** (CEO – Culture Funding Watch, Tunisia), **Judith Ogana** (UNESCO East Africa, Kenya), **Attaher Maiga** (Secretary General – Fondation Festival sur le Niger, Mali), **Markus Gora** (Co-Founder – First Floor Gallery, Zimbabwe).

This session focused on reimagining how arts, culture, and creative industries in Africa can be sustainably financed by moving beyond conventional donor-driven approaches. Panellists shared experiences and strategies that prioritise



local ownership, collaboration, and mutual support. Examples included resource-sharing networks among cultural organisations, locally administered cultural funds, and the creation of supportive ecosystems where knowledge, tools, and infrastructure are distributed within communities. The conversation also highlighted the importance of educating and mentoring emerging fundraisers and cultural leaders,



embedding resource mobilization as a long-term investment in the sector's resilience.

A central theme was the need for a mindset shift away from dependency on international and government funding, toward the deliberate development of local, self-sustaining ecosystems. Panellists emphasized that international donors

often work through rigid, one-size-fits-all frameworks that are not designed to respond to local realities. They rarely ask local organizations what they truly need and are not structured to support long-term financial independence. This disconnect not only limits the effectiveness of funding but can distort the vision and voice of artists who feel pressured to align with donor language and priorities. Participants called for an ecosystem approach that supports financial autonomy, fosters locally relevant innovation, and invests in the professional discipline of fundraising across the continent.

The conversation also surfaced how both donor frameworks and government funding can serve as instruments of control. When governments fail to directly invest in the sector, they may fill the vacuum by offering selective funding tied to political agendas, effectively using financial support as a form of censorship. For young and emerging artists, access remains a critical issue—not only due to resource scarcity, but also because of barriers in language, process, and alignment with institutional norms. The session closed with a strong call to recognize that sustainable funding for the arts is not just about securing more money, but about building systems that protect artistic freedom, nurture creativity, and reflect the values and visions of Africa's cultural communities.

Growing Trees: Participatory Development of Goals and Commitments for Artistic Freedom

The goals (branches) of artistic freedom were collectively proposed, debated, and agreed upon and is a valuable resource to prioritise resources and identify focus areas to

strategically advance artistic freedom in the region. Below we outline the goals and categorise the key commitments (leaves) the delegates made within them.



Education and Knowledge

There is an information gap in the artistic freedom sector. We need to both produce knowledge on artistic freedom through research and strategically disseminate this information to artists and those whose work affects artistic freedom.

Short Term Actions

- Establish feedback-driven research and consultation mechanisms to ensure artist-informed advocacy.
- Conduct structured participatory methodologies to surface and document community knowledge and sector insights.
- Collect, organise, and disseminate relevant existing research on artistic freedom.
- Conduct research on the impact of censorship on the creative economy.
- Strengthen and coordinate structures that monitor infringements on artistic freedom.
- Organize discussions to share national or regional best practices in data protection specific to the arts and cultural sector.

Long Term Actions

- Strengthen inter-organizational knowledge-sharing platforms to reduce duplication and improve coordination.
- Promote collaboration between academic institutions and cultural organizations to train the next generation in cultural governance and artistic rights.

- Strengthen evidence generation through robust research and data systems to better inform cultural policy and advocacy.
- Increase investment in digital literacy and rights education to empower artists with knowledge of legal protections.

Artistic Mobility

The mobility of art and the people that make it is central to the creative industry, yet this mobility is currently restricted by political and socio-economic forces. We need to employ policies, programs, investment, and relationships to improve artistic mobility for African artists on the continent and in the diaspora.

Short Term Actions

- Continue to develop mechanisms such as Art&Stay that allows artists to share access to artistic facilities and accommodation while traveling

Long Term Actions

- Facilitate regional knowledge-sharing among artistic communities to promote mobility and cross-border solidarity.
- Strengthen cross-border exchange programs to connect artists and cultural workers within and beyond Africa.
- Encourage artist residencies that support collaborative movement and learning across geographies.
- Integrate artistic mobility as a key pillar in regional cultural strategies developed with continental institutions like the AU or ECOWAS.

Emergency Response

Artists are prosecuted and harassed for their work or find themselves in the throes of war. We need to improve and develop emergency response structures for artists and culture workers at risk.

Short Term Actions

- Strengthen mechanisms that provide legal and emergency protection for artists facing persecution.
- Improve verification procedures for artists at risk by building trust-based local partnerships.
- Coordinate emergency relief efforts across organizations to avoid duplication and increase reach.
- Expand emergency relocation partnerships with artistic institutions to ensure continued creative production in safe environments.
- Build trust-based local support systems for timely identification and protection of at-risk artists.
- Integrate mental health and psychosocial support systems into emergency response programs

Long Term Actions

- Develop standardized monitoring and evaluation tools to ensure emergency support reaches artists in genuine need.
- Design early warning systems for digital and physical threats faced by artists, modelled on humanitarian sector tools.

Policy and Legislation Landscape

Predominant arts and culture policy in Africa is built on frameworks that restrict and control artists and their work. We need to better understand and reform policy and legislation in the creative and cultural sector to promote artistic freedom and opening up opportunities for economic growth and mobility.

Short Term Actions

- Promote inclusive policy co-creation processes that involve consultations with artists, not just legal or technical experts.
- Provide mentorship and capacity-building for artists interested in transitioning into leadership roles within policy and governance sectors.
- Improve policy dialogue on the role of digital platforms in preserving or suppressing artistic freedom.
- Continue research mapping censorship laws in the region (process underway).

Long Term Actions

- Advocate for policies that protect and enhance the economic rights of artists, ensuring sustainable livelihoods.
- Align digital regulations with international human rights standards to prevent censorship.
- Use AU advocacy platforms to push for continent-wide cultural rights protections and shared legal standards.

- Develop national-level legal reforms rooted in contemporary cultural needs rather than outdated or colonial-era frameworks.
- Use improved data systems to support cultural rights in legislative processes.
- Seek partnerships with Regional Economic Blocs such as the AU, EAC, SADC, and ECOWAS to address laws and policies that stifle artistic freedom.
- Governments should establish clear, transparent regulations to guide artists and empower them to create without fear of retribution while ensuring protection from abuse of power.

Equitable Creative Economy

Promoting artistic freedom is also an economic project since markets and the lack of resources are tools used to silence creatives. We need to develop a creative economy that serves artists at all levels and stages in their careers.

Short Term Actions

- Promote artist-led innovation in income generation through shared service models and cooperative economic strategies.
- Develop programs that equip young artists with entrepreneurial skills without undermining artistic integrity.

- Educate and empower a new generation of African fundraisers to build more sustainable cultural sectors.
- Amplify the work of independent cultural institutions.

Long Term Actions

- Expand funding sources beyond traditional grants to include impact investment, cooperative financing, and self-sustaining creative hubs.
- Build partnerships between artists, CSOs, and private sector actors to unlock diversified funding pathways.
- Encourage financial independence models such as cooperative ownership of creative spaces.
- Advocate for equitable revenue-sharing between digital platforms and content creators.
- Support and develop regional investment vehicles like that offer loans and nontraditional financing.
- Mobilize public funding commitments, including advocacy for countries to dedicate 1% of national budgets to the cultural sector (AU target).
- Integrate cultural data systems that track the sector's economic contribution and inform public investment cases.

Strengthening Creative Collectives

We need to build collective power among artists through collectives that share ideas, opportunities, and resources on the local level.

Short Term Actions

- Artists come together to develop collectives of mutual-aid, resource sharing, and mentorship.
- Build mechanisms for transparent information exchange and solidarity across artist networks.
- Establish artistic programs and spaces that focus on mental health support for artists, especially for those working high-risk environments.
- Encourage interdisciplinary collaboration among artists from different sectors (music, visual arts, literature, film, etc.) to build stronger and more cohesive movements.

Long Term Actions

- Establish long-term artistic networks with clear governance and sustainability strategies.
- Invest in regional artist residencies and collaborative hubs to facilitate knowledge exchange and long-term partnerships.

Art Spaces

Spaces – both physical and social – are central to building collectives of mutual support. We need to develop more programs, residencies, training and performance spaces, and hubs for creatives to gather and produce work at all stages of their career; spaces that are also equipped to support artists in contexts of risk.

Short Term Actions

- Support hybrid spaces that merge exhibition, performance, training, and income generation to anchor local creative communities.
- Encourage infrastructure-sharing models to reduce operating costs and strengthen sustainability of physical art venues.

Long Term Actions

- Develop and expand physical and digital creative spaces such as galleries, theaters, and online platforms for expression.
- Secure protections (policy or financial) for artist-run spaces against displacement and underfunding.
- Promote local ownership and cooperative management of art spaces to reduce dependence on international funders.



Conclusion

The 2025 PANAF Summit marked a critical step forward in shaping a pan-African agenda for artistic freedom. Through participatory dialogue, cross-sectoral exchange, and collective visioning, the summit produced a shared understanding of the structural challenges facing artists and a roadmap of coordinated, actionable goals. Delegates affirmed that defending artistic freedom in Africa requires not only legal and policy reform, but also deeper investments in knowledge-sharing, emergency protection, creative mobility, equitable funding, and the cultivation of collective power. What emerged was more than a set of recommendations—it was a commitment to sustained collaboration, rooted in regional solidarity and a belief that artistic expression is central to democratic life and cultural resilience across the continent.

Acknowledgements

Selam extends heartfelt gratitude to all those who made the 2025 PANAF Summit possible. We thank our co-organizers, Artists at Risk Connection (ARC), and our generous donors, the Swedish Arts Council and the Swedish Institute, for their continued commitment to artistic freedom in Africa. We also thank UNESCO and the Swedish Embassy in Tanzania who supported the summit and contributed to making this year's edition a great success.

We are especially grateful to our partners, whose tireless advocacy and commitment to artistic freedom continue to drive the PANAF movement forward, and to the delegates who brought their expertise, lived experiences, and bold visions to the table. Their voices, ideas, and solidarity shaped every session and strengthened our shared resolve. We also want to appreciate Sam Brakarsh for his expert facilitation of the summit programme and also in his role as the Consultant Report Writer for this summary report.

Lastly, we acknowledge the artists, cultural practitioners, civil society leaders, and policymakers who contribute every day to the ongoing struggle for freedom of expression. This report is dedicated to you.