



Summary Report on the 3rd Edition of the Pan-African Network for Artistic Freedom (PANAF) Summit

February 6th - 8th 2026

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

FREE TO CREATE:

Power, Pressure, and Possibilities within
Digital and Economic Landscapes



Organized by:



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Foreword

This year's PANAF Summit marked a turning point for our network. The Pan-African Network for Artistic Freedom exists to connect artists, lawyers, researchers, and policymakers across the continent in defense of a shared cause, and the summit is the moment each year when that network gathers in one room — but it is one part of a much longer effort that continues between editions, in the relationships and work delegates carry forward long after they leave. In Zanzibar in 2025, we built shared understanding — we named the pressures artists across the continent face and began to imagine what we might do about them together. In Addis Ababa, we moved from naming the problem to building the architecture of a solution. Across three days structured around Pressures, Power, and Possibilities, delegates moved deliberately from diagnosis to design, arriving at Day Three equipped to do more than discuss artistic freedom in the abstract.

Four working groups — on Residencies and Relocation, Legislative Reform, Research, and Digital and Physical Mobility — emerged from that process, and what struck me most was not any single proposal but how tightly they depend on one another. A repository for artists in danger needs the legal groundwork to make relocation possible. A research institute matters only if its evidence reaches the people designing policy and the people designing programs alike. None of these groups can succeed in isolation, which is exactly why we asked them to work as one network rather than four separate conversations.

I want to be honest about what this summit was not. It was not a celebration, and it was not a conclusion. The proposals captured in this report are not yet programs. They are commitments — made by people who will now have to carry them home, into ministries, courtrooms, festivals, and studios, often without the resources or recognition the work deserves. What gives me confidence is that some of this work is already moving, quietly, in the months since Addis Ababa — a reminder that sustained commitment, even without fanfare, can shift institutions that once seemed immovable.

I am grateful to every delegate, panellist, and working group lead who gave their expertise and their candour to these three days, and to our partners — the Swedish Arts Council, the Swedish Institute, ARC, Connect for Culture Africa, and OHCHR — whose support makes this network possible. Artistic freedom is not a luxury we grant when conditions allow. It is a condition for the kind of societies we are trying to build. This report is an invitation to keep building them, together.



Teshome Wondimu
Founder and Executive Director, Selam



Day 2 (today)

20 mins	Cross Pollinate
20 mins	Commit to Working Group – Idea Generation

Day 3

11:10 AM – 01:00 PM	Develop project/idea
02:10 – 02:40 PM	Prepare for sharing
02:40 – 03:10 PM	Present to collective

Program Committee

The 2026 PANAF Summit was shaped by a dedicated Program Committee. The Committee was responsible for designing the summit's thematic architecture, curating panellists, and guiding the working group model that defined this edition of the summit.

The program committee was comprised of Sara Maali (Tunisia), Lisa Sidambe (Zimbabwe), Dr. Tilahun Bejitual (Ethiopia), Attaher Maiga (Mali), Michael Owino (Kenya), and Sam Brakarsh (Zimbabwe-Committee Chair).

GHION HOTEL

Introduction

The Pan-African Network for Artistic Freedom (PANAF) Summit is one of Selam's flagship annual convenings under the PANAF Programme, bringing together stakeholders from across Africa's arts, culture, and creative industries ecosystem.

Since its inception, the summit has steadily grown into a recognized space for advancing continental conversations on freedom of artistic expression, cultural rights, and the role of the creative sector in democratic and social transformation. Over the years, the summit has not only witnessed increased participation and regional representation, but has also contributed to policy discussions, advocacy initiatives, and collaborative actions aimed at strengthening enabling environments for artists and cultural practitioners across the continent.

The PANAF Summit 2026 was held from February 6 to 8 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, convening 72 participants representing 17 countries. Organized by Selam through the PANAF Network in collaboration with ARC—Artists at Risk Connection and Selam's Connect For Culture Africa (CFCA) program, and supported by the Swedish Arts Council and the Swedish Institute and the OHCHR, this third annual summit focused on the theme Free to Create: Pressure, Power, and Possibilities within Digital and Economic Landscapes.

The summit was honoured by the presence of distinguished guests whose remarks set the tone for three days of substantive deliberation. H.E. Ambassador Magnus Lennartsson, Sweden's Ambassador to



Ethiopia, underscored the importance of enabling legal, digital, and economic environments for artistic freedom to be realized in practice, noting the mutual reinforcement between the AU's Agenda 2063 and UNESCO's 2005 Convention, and stressing that creative freedom and economic sustainability must go hand in hand. The Honourable Ourveena Geereesha Topsy Sonno, AU Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information, addressed growing threats to artistic freedom across the continent and highlighted the African Commission's instruments as key tools for protection, urging reporting of violations and sustained cross-border knowledge-



sharing. Dr. Sabelo Mbokazi, representing AU Commissioner Amma Twum-Amoah, reaffirmed the AU's commitment to culture and creativity as central pillars of inclusive growth and democratic participation, highlighting the Charter for African Cultural Renaissance and the AU Digital Transformation Strategy as the continental frameworks most relevant to the summit's theme.

Building directly on the outcomes of the 2025 Zanzibar summit (which produced a shared problem and action framework through the Two Trees methodology) the 2026 edition was designed to move from diagnosis to actionable outcomes. Where the 2025 summit mapped the root causes of creative repression and identified priority action areas, 2026 was structured to translate those priorities into concrete programs, institutional proposals, and collaborative commitments.

The summit brought together artists, cultural practitioners, legal experts, policymakers, government officials, civil society organizations, funders, and regional and international bodies. Over three days, it examined the legal, economic, and gender dimensions of artistic freedom; engaged with questions of power, institutional change, and judicial and parliamentary strategy; and concluded with four thematic working groups that developed structured proposals for implementation. These working groups — on 1) Residencies and Relocation, 2) Legislative Reform, 3) Research, and 4) Digital and Physical Mobility — represent the summit's most substantive output and form the centrepiece of this report.



Summit Methodology – Two Trees to Four Working Groups

Building on the PANAFA Summit 2025

The program committee believed it was important to build on – rather than repeat – the foundational work that took place at the 2025 summit in Zanzibar. As a result, the insights from 2025 were intentionally woven through the discussions in 2026.

The 2025 PANAFA Summit focused on channeling ideas towards a collective understanding of the problems facing artists and inhibiting artistic freedom in Africa, as well as identifying the architecture of focus areas we need to invest in and how we can begin laying the foundation for this work.

The 2025 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

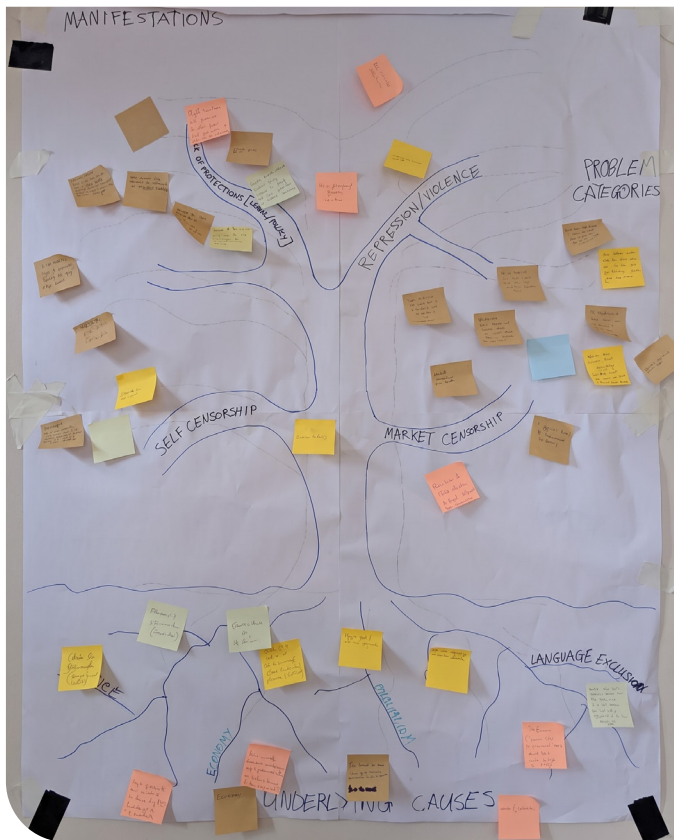
tree focused on the “Actions/Commitments” for artistic freedom that the participants were developing. On this tree, the roots represented the community assets and ‘resources’ available to us in this work (eg: artist residencies, fundraising guidance, art and advocacy); the branches represented the collectively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

The process of populating the trees culminated in the final session of the summit. All delegates deliberated on the structure of the trees, and discussed if any branches (categories of problems or goals) needed to be reframed, added, or removed. 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.

It was on the foundation of this process in 2025 that the 2026 summit began with the assertion of the four fundamental working groups:

1. Residencies and Relocation
2. Legislative Reform for Artistic Freedom
3. Research on Artistic Freedom
4. Digital and Physical Mobility





The "Two Tree" from PANAF 2025



Summit Outline



The three-day summit followed a structured progression from analysis to action.



Day One, themed Pressure, examined the forces that constrain artistic freedom across the continent, beginning with the legal landscape and moving through economic pressures and gender-specific challenges. Through two panel discussions and a fireside chat, participants built a shared understanding of the systemic barriers facing African artists — legal gaps, economic precarity, digital surveillance, and structural exclusion — and heard from artists about how those barriers are experienced in practice.





Day Two, themed Power, explored the institutional structures that shape artistic freedom and the strategies available to navigate them. A panel on judicial activism and parliamentary agency examined how legal reform happens in practice — from strategic litigation to parliamentary lobbying — and what it costs those who pursue it. A fireside chat using Zambia as a case study offered a grounded example of how democratic gains in the arts sector can be won and sustained, and what the relationship between government, civil society, and artists looks like when it is functioning well.

Day Three, themed Possibilities, opened with a panel on innovative financing pathways for the arts before transitioning into the summit's core output: the four thematic working groups. Each group had been developing its proposals across the preceding two days and used Day Three to consolidate, present, and refine them in response to plenary feedback.

Each day began with an artist performance and included an artist story to bridge system conversations with artist insight and experience.

Day One:

Pressure

Panel: Between Justice and Control — The Law and Artistic Freedom in Africa

PANELLISTS

Ayodele Ganiu — Executive Director, Unchained Vibes Africa, Nigeria

Meamande Wamukwamba — Advocate, Zambia

Njeri Mwangi — Executive Director, PAWA 254, Kenya

Boniface Sagbohan — Executive Secretary, CNOA, Benin

Moderator: **Muleta Kapatiso** — Advocate, Zambia





This panel examined the dual role of law in relation to artistic expression: as a mechanism of control that constrains creativity, and as a framework that, when well-designed and properly implemented, can protect it. The discussion opened by challenging participants to think about justice for artists not only as the right to express themselves freely but as the economic and institutional conditions necessary for their survival and growth. Panellists questioned whether the control of artistic expression is principally about restricting speech, or equally about the systematic failure to build structures that allow artists to thrive.

The panel addressed the question of why artists are subjected to forms of regulation — censorship board approval, content review, administrative control — that other professions are not. The discussion drew a direct line between government censorship and fear of artistic influence: it is precisely because art is powerful, because it can mobilize communities and shape political consciousness, that it is controlled.

Legal literacy emerged as a significant practical concern. The panel observed that many artists encounter legal difficulties not because of deliberately repressive laws but because of limited understanding of the frameworks that govern expression, distribution, and public communication. Strengthening legal knowledge within the artistic sector was identified as of significant importance alongside reforming the laws themselves.

The discussion also addressed the growing threat posed by digital regulation. Outdated or vaguely drafted laws are increasingly applied to suppress digital content, while Big Tech platforms exercise their own forms of censorship through account removals and content restrictions, operating beyond the reach of national law. The panel identified this as a compounding challenge: even where domestic advocacy produces legislative gains, enforcement in digital spaces may be inconsistent or inaccessible, and African artists' voices can be silenced through mechanisms that no national court can easily address. The panel concluded with a call for collective organization, legal capacity-building, and the removal of vague legal provisions — such as those referencing “public morals” — that invite selective and discriminatory application.

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“The absence of clear legislation protecting artistic freedom creates significant legal gaps. These gaps place artists in a position of uncertainty, often leading them to self-censor in order to avoid potential legal or political repercussions.” ~

Muleta Kapatiso





Panel: The Price of Expression — The Economic Pressure on Artistic Freedom

PANELLISTS

Tewodros Teferra — Novelist, Ethiopia

Kagiso Lesego Molope — Board Chair, Safe Havens Trust,
South Africa

Limam Monza — Director, Asseloukum Festival, Mauritania

Minjae Lee — Human Rights Officer, OHCHR, South Korea

Moderator: **Muleta Kapatiso** — Advocate, Zambia

This panel examined economic precarity as one of the most pervasive and underacknowledged threats to artistic freedom. The discussion reframed financial vulnerability not as a personal or professional misfortune but as a structural condition; one that functions as effectively as formal censorship in silencing artistic voices, limiting what can be said, and determining whose creativity can be sustained over time.

A key argument developed across the panel was that economic pressure and censorship are not separate phenomena. When artists depend on institutional support, commercial relationships, or political goodwill to survive, they become vulnerable to forms of coercion that do not require direct prohibition. The panel explored how literary gatekeepers, cultural funders, and public institutions can effectively determine which stories are told and which voices are heard through financial inclusion and exclusion, rewarding conformity and penalizing work that challenges prevailing narratives.

The panel situated economic pressure within an international human rights framework, arguing that most African states are legally obligated — through their ratification of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights — not only to protect creative expression but to guarantee just and favorable working conditions and social security for all artists, including those in freelance or project-based arrangements. The failure to fulfill these obligations was framed not as a policy gap but as a human rights violation.

The structural inadequacy of existing financing models was a recurring concern. International donors frequently work through rigid frameworks ill-suited to the realities of artistic production on the continent, rarely consult local organizations about their actual needs, and are not designed to support long-term financial independence. Government funding, where it exists, can function as an instrument of control, with selective support tied to political alignment effectively serving as a form of censorship. And laws often hold back flourishing local creative industries through high taxes and licensing fees. Artists face clear structural barriers to financial freedom.



The panel pointed toward alternative models rooted in local ownership, collective infrastructure, and long-term investment. Rather than scaling up existing funding mechanisms, participants argued for building ecosystem-level structures: community-rooted cultural institutions, peer support networks, pooled resources, and financing models that reflect how creative production actually works across the continent. The session closed with a strong argument that sustainable funding for the arts is fundamentally a question of artistic freedom, that economic autonomy and creative freedom are inseparable, and that any serious effort to protect the latter must address the former.

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“Economic pressure is not just a hardship. It is a human rights violation. When an artist's livelihood is threatened, their freedom of expression is inherently compromised. Cultural rights and labor rights are indivisible.” ~

Minjae Lee, Human Rights Officer, OHCHR





Fireside Chat: Gender and Artistic Freedom

PANELLISTS

Lisa Sidambe — Researcher and Policy Advocate, Zimbabwe

Islam Elbeiti — Musician and Activist, Sudan

The conversation opened by framing access to the cultural workforce as a fundamental right from which women and gender-diverse individuals are systematically excluded, often long before questions of fair remuneration or creative autonomy arise. The panel explored a significant and underacknowledged shift in enforcement patterns: while decency laws have historically been applied against women, recent cases across the continent show men being targeted for gender non-conforming expression. The discussion framed these enforcement patterns not as genuine responses to cultural values but as instruments of fear; ways in which governments use social anxiety around gender and sexuality to assert control over bodies and expression more broadly.

Financial independence and collective resilience were central themes throughout. The session drew on the tradition of community savings circles — rotating funds used across generations to pool resources for shared benefit — as a model that could be adapted to provide artists with health insurance, emergency funds, and family support outside formal institutional structures, thereby creating economic havens that shield some of the gendered pressures on artists.



Day Two:

Power

Panel: Control and Power — The Regulation of Art and Artists in Digital Spaces

PANELLISTS

Ezekiel Onyango — Executive Director, PAIPEC, Kenya

Khalid Albaih — Artist and Activist, Sudan

Kofi Sika Latzoo — Founder, 360 Gaming Agency, Senegal

Dominique Alonga — Author and Gender Relations Expert,
Rwanda

Moderator: Dr. Tilahun Bejjitua, Ethiopia





This panel examined how digital spaces have transformed the landscape of artistic production and distribution across Africa. Digital infrastructure have expanded reach and visibility for some, while introducing new and often opaque systems of control that constrain creative freedom in ways that existing legal and policy frameworks have struggled to address.

The discussion opened by reframing the central question facing African artists in the digital era. The issue is no longer simply whether artists are free to create, but under whose conditions that freedom exists. Digital platforms have shifted regulatory power away from the state and toward private actors who wield algorithms, content moderation systems, and platform architectures to determine visibility, monetization, and reach without transparency or accountability. Artists' livelihoods are shaped not only by national law but by the commercial and political priorities of platform owners, whose systems can suppress or amplify content in ways that are invisible to those affected. Access to digital space, the panel stressed, does not guarantee meaningful presence within it.

The experience of Sudanese cartoonist and activist Khalid Albaih was a touchstone throughout the discussion. His account of founding Khartoon Magazine, an online residency and platform for displaced Sudanese cartoonists, illustrated both the possibilities and the limitations of digital tools: the internet had enabled his work to reach global audiences beyond Sudan's borders, yet platform controls on political content had consistently limited its reach. In addition, American digital sanctions imposed a compounding layer of exclusion that prevents Sudanese creators from monetizing their work on major

platforms at all. He described the situation frankly: for African artists working in contexts of conflict or sanctions, the digital space does not offer liberation so much as a more complex set of gatekeepers.

A recurring theme was the structural exclusion of African creators from the economic benefits of digital platforms they actively contribute to. Panellists noted that between 30 and 37 percent of recent growth in global music streaming revenues has come from sub-Saharan Africa, yet the commercial infrastructure to capture that value locally does not exist. Creators who go viral on platforms like TikTok cannot monetize their work due to geographical restrictions and absent banking infrastructure. Authors attempting to sell on global marketplaces like Amazon cannot access their earnings because they lack social security numbers or financial accounts in the regions where those platforms operate. The panel framed as a form of structural exclusion; a system built, in Dominique Alonga's words, with a systemic disregard for the African continent.

The panel explored the governance dimensions of this digital landscape in depth. Participants examined the emerging hybrid regulatory model in which national cybercrime laws intersect with private platform regulations, in a manner that suppresses creative expression. Governance of digital spaces, it was argued, must be understood not only as a freedom of expression issue but as an economic rights issue in how digital spaces stifle markets and the production and equitable monetisation of creative content. As such, it requires collaboration among creators, technologists, financial institutions, and continental bodies to build infrastructure that can balance participation, sovereignty, and economic inclusion.

The panel converged on questions of digital sovereignty and infrastructure as the foundation of any meaningful solution. It was noted that Africa does not control its own data centers, that foundational subsea cable infrastructure running through African territory is owned and managed by foreign entities, and that revenue generated by African creativity flows overwhelmingly to economies outside the continent. These are not abstract concerns: they mean that even where policy reform succeeds, the underlying infrastructure through which African creative work travels remains outside African control. Panellists argued that building local platforms, investing in data sovereignty, leveraging territorial rights over foreign-owned infrastructure, and developing African-owned commerce systems are prerequisites for the continent's creative economy to generate value for its own people.

The session closed with a call for deliberate, continent-wide convening of African technologists to design solutions tailored to local economic realities, and for a fundamental shift in mindset from passive adoption of foreign platforms to active innovation and infrastructure-building. As one panellist put it, the future of African arts in the digital space must be governed by a clear matrix of commerce that ensures the economic and creative value of African work remains within the continent.



"The issue is no longer whether artists are free to create, but under whose conditions that freedom exists." ~

Dr. Tilahun Bejitu, Panel Moderator





Panel: Checks, Balances, and Artistic Freedom — The Power of Judicial Activism and Parliamentary Agency

PANELLISTS

Oladipo Abiala (Jah Baba) — Founder, Africa Sound City, Benin

Wesley Mwafulirwa — Legal Scholar, Malawi

Muleta Kapatiso — Advocate and Artist, Zambia

Walter Mwambazi — Communications Specialist, Zambia

Moderator: Lisa Sidambe — Researcher and Policy Advocate, Zimbabwe

The discussion opened by mapping the role of parliament in shaping the legal environment for artistic expression. In governance systems structured around executive, legislative, and judicial arms, it is legislators who ultimately determine the frameworks within which artists operate, and it is parliament that provides a corrective mechanism when either the executive or judiciary fails to uphold rights. Where legislators lack awareness of artistic freedom as a human rights concern, restrictive provisions are enacted by default. Where informed and progressive legislators exist, international frameworks can be domesticated and protections strengthened. Cultivating legislative champions — individuals within parliament who understand the sector and are willing to carry reform — emerged as one of the most consistently effective strategies available to advocates of artistic freedom.

The panel explored a range of concrete legislative strategies. Targeted engagement with key parliamentarians, combined with the provision of technical drafting support to civil society, has produced successful outcomes including the repeal of provisions criminalizing criticism of the executive, the decriminalization of defamation, and the passage of legislation that had stalled under executive-led processes. The discussion also highlighted the frequently overlooked role of technocrats: bills are typically drafted not by elected representatives but by bureaucrats within ministries, and cultivating relationships with legislative drafters and policy advisors can embed reform language into policy before it reaches the floor.

This panel examined the institutional and strategic landscape for advancing artistic freedom through legal reform and judicial engagement. Its central concern was practical: not whether reform is desirable but how it actually happens.

Several structural challenges were identified that complicate advocacy within parliamentary systems. Executive or single-party dominance limits the scope for independent legislative action. Parliamentary research departments and committee staff are frequently underutilized as resources for reform. The economic vulnerability of most artists makes sustained political resistance difficult and renders them susceptible to co-option. And unregulated digital platforms, operating beyond national jurisdictions, can censor content even where domestic legislative advocacy has succeeded.

The panel addressed alternative channels of accountability in political contexts where conventional lobbying produces limited results. Traditional authorities such as community leaders, religious figures, and cultural custodians represent significant sources of normative power that operate independently of formal political structures, and can remind elected officials of their obligations to their communities regardless of their party alignments. The discussion also explored the value of demonstrating capability: independently organized cultural initiatives that surpass government-led efforts in scale or quality can shift the terms of engagement, generating acknowledgment and eventually support from officials who had previously shown little interest.

The judiciary received sustained attention as an underexplored arena for advancing artistic freedom. The panel drew on comparative experience from other rights sectors to argue that deliberate, sustained engagement with judicial actors over time can produce structural change: specialized courts, designated judicial officers, and a cadre of judges with genuine understanding of the constitutional, cultural, and

digital rights dimensions of artistic freedom cases. This requires patient relationship-building and targeted judicial education rather than reliance on individual landmark cases.

Strategic public interest litigation was examined in depth. The panel stressed that every stage of such litigation must be carefully considered: the choice of client and case, the timing of proceedings, the communication strategy adopted during litigation, and the security implications for those involved. The risk of poorly prepared cases generating negative precedents — which governments in other jurisdictions may cite to justify restrictive laws — was identified as a serious concern, underscoring the need for coordination across borders. The discussion closed with a reflection on the personal cost of sustained advocacy. Meaningful reform typically requires a willingness to absorb risk and sacrifice, and that this reality must be acknowledged and planned for rather than minimized.



“Laws should reflect social and cultural realities. Before drafting legislation, lawmakers and society must sit together and consider the lived realities of the people. The purpose of law is to enable communities to live well together and to protect everyone’s freedom equally.” ~

Oladiipo Abiala (Jah Baba)





Fireside Chat: A Turning Point in Zambia — Strategies to Preserve and Sustain Democratic Gains

PANELLISTS

Esther Ng'ambi — Director of Arts Development, Ministry of Youth Sports and Art, Zambia

Maanka Chipindi — Director, National Arts Council, Zambia

Mwanangwa Zombe — Artist, Zambia

Rebecca Mumba — Artist, Zambia

Moderator: **Walter Mwambazi**, Zambia

This session used Zambia as a detailed case study in the relationship between government, civil society, and artists in advancing democratic gains for the creative sector. It offered a grounded example of what enabling conditions for artistic freedom look like in practice.



The discussion examined the structural conditions that have allowed the arts sector in Zambia to begin a process of reform. The shift of the arts portfolio to a ministry with a stronger mandate for youth-driven economic development was identified as significant. The shift repositioned the creative sector as an economic contributor rather than a cultural expenditure, opening new conversations with government actors who might otherwise have been indifferent. At the same time, the discussion was candid about the limitations of political goodwill when it is not matched by institutional infrastructure when limited data on the sector, outdated legal frameworks, and administrative bottlenecks continue to slow progress even where political commitment exists.

The relationship between accurate data and policy change was a recurring theme. Without reliable information on how many artists are working, what they earn, how they are distributed across the country, and what barriers they face, it is difficult to make the case for public investment or to design policies that respond to actual needs. The discussion identified cultural statistics as a prerequisite for effective advocacy, and explored practical tools and platforms through which communities can contribute data and generate evidence for policy submissions.

The session explored what meaningful artist integration into formal social protection systems looks like in practice, including the complexities of enrolling artists in pension and health insurance schemes designed for salaried workers. It also addressed the broader cultural dimension of democratic gains. For generations, artistic expression in Africa has played a role in democratic deliberation with

music and performance contributing meaningfully to governance and critique. The session discussed how that tradition can be recovered and strengthened within contemporary institutional frameworks.

Additionally, questions of digital royalties, copyright management, and metadata gaps emerged as urgent practical concerns. African artists frequently generate revenue for platforms and distributors in other markets without receiving their share, often because the administrative infrastructure required to claim that revenue does not exist domestically. The discussion framed this not as a technical problem but as a structural injustice that requires both domestic legislative reform and engagement with international copyright frameworks.

The fireside chat concluded with a reflection on the role of critical voices within the sector. Even where government engagement is genuine and relationships are productive, independent civil society advocacy is essential to ensure that reform is inclusive, evidence-based, and responsive to the full range of artists' experiences, particularly those of emerging and marginalized voices who are least likely to be heard in formal consultation processes.



"Democracy requires both freedom and responsibility among all stakeholders." ~

*Esther Ng'ambi, Director of Arts Development,
Ministry of Youth Sports and Art, Zambia*





Day Three:

Possibilities

Panel: Sustaining Creativity — Innovative Pathways for Resourcing the Arts

PANELLISTS

Ama Ofeibea — Founder, Chapter 54, Ghana

Islam Elbeiti — Global Artivism Movement, Sudan

Judith Ogana — UNESCO Eastern Africa Representative, Kenya

Ruphus Matibe — Director, Department of Arts and Culture,
South Africa

Moderator: **Ouafa Belgacem** — Founder, Culture Funding
Watch, Tunisia





This final panel opened Day Three by building on the economic discussions of the preceding days to focus specifically on the question of how artistic and cultural production in Africa can be financed sustainably. It challenged dominant narratives around arts funding and asked whether it risks obscuring the continued need for robust public investment and government accountability.

A central argument running through the discussion was that the problem with current financing models is not primarily one of quantity but of design. International donors frequently work through rigid frameworks that are not tailored to the realities of artistic production, rarely consult local organizations about their actual needs, and are not structured to support long-term financial independence. The result is a sector shaped by external priorities rather than internal vision; one in which artists and cultural organizations feel pressure to align their language, framing, and activities with donor expectations in ways that compromise their voice and distort their work. The panel called for a decisive shift toward locally owned, locally designed, and locally governed financing structures.

The question of infrastructure funding received particular attention. Physical and technical infrastructure (such as studios, performance spaces, equipment, and digital platforms) is a precondition for other forms of support to be effective, yet it is consistently underfunded in favor of project-based grants. The panel explored examples of creative infrastructure built outside conventional funding channels, including spaces established through crowdfunding, community contributions, in-kind support from international networks, and the strategic

reinvestment of individual grants into collective assets. These examples illustrate that African-driven infrastructure building is not only possible but is already happening.

The panel also explored the ways in which both donor frameworks and government funding can function as instruments of control. Governments that do not invest directly in the sector may fill the vacuum by offering selective funding tied to political agendas, effectively making financial support conditional on alignment with official positions. The panel argued that both individual and collective financial independence is therefore not only an economic goal but a condition for creative and political freedom.

The discussion addressed the particular barriers facing young and emerging artists, for whom access to funding is limited not only by resource scarcity but by language, process complexity, and the requirement to align with institutional norms that were not designed with them in mind. Financial education within the arts sector was identified as an area of urgent investment. This extends beyond proposal writing and budget management. The necessary education includes building the conceptual literacy to navigate funding landscapes, engage with investors, and advocate for structural change. Equally important, participants argued, is educating funders and investors about how creative processes actually work, so that financing instruments can be designed to reflect rather than distort artistic production.

The panel closed with a call to recognize that sustainable financing for the arts is ultimately a question of artistic freedom. Economic autonomy and creative freedom are indivisible: systems that protect artistic freedom, nurture creativity, and reflect the values of Africa's cultural communities are the goal, not simply securing larger volumes of funding through existing channels.



“The issue is not a lack of funding, but the absence of flexible funding vehicles that can respond to the complexity of the sector while preserving artistic autonomy.” ~

Ruphus Matibe, Director, Department of Arts and Culture, South Africa





Working Groups

The working groups were the defining feature of the 2026 PANAF Summit and its most substantive output. Seeded across the first two days of discussion, each group was formally convened on Day Three, with participants selecting their group based on expertise and interest. Groups were given time to consolidate proposals developed across the summit before presenting to the full assembly for plenary feedback.

The four working groups (Residencies and Relocation, Legislative Reform for Artistic Freedom, Research on Artistic Freedom, and Digital and Physical Mobility) were designed to be interdependent. Each group identified clear synergies with the others, and the plenary discussion facilitated the interconnection between the initiatives with some delegates having the opportunity to move between groups and crosspollinate, while others invested their full insight into deepening a single group.

NOTE: *The ideas generated by these working groups are not endorsed by any particular institution nor the PANAF Summit as a whole. Instead, the information below represents a summary of ideas and innovations that were generated by the remarkable groups, inspired by the panels and discussions at the summit. They offer proposals to be tested, projects to be explored, and ideas to be adapted (if necessary) and implemented through concrete action.*



Working Group 1 — Residencies and Relocation

(Led by Program Committee Member Sara Maali and Ahmed Khanfir)

This working group addressed one of the most urgent practical dimensions of artistic freedom: the need for structured, continent-centred mechanisms to support artists whose safety has been compromised, whether through political persecution, armed conflict, or targeted harassment. The group began by establishing an important conceptual distinction that shaped all of its subsequent proposals.

Residency and Relocation as Distinct Processes

The group clarified from the outset that residency and relocation are fundamentally different processes requiring different expertise, resources, and institutional structures. A residency is typically a short-term creative stay, often organized for professional development or community engagement. Relocation, by contrast, involves the movement of an artist in danger. It is a process that is rarely straightforward and that can transition from a temporary three-month arrangement into a multi-year situation. The group argued that conflating the two risks under-resourcing both: residency programs need to be built with emergency response capacity in mind, while relocation programs need long-term integration support from the moment an artist arrives.

The African Repository

The group's central proposal was the development of an African Repository: a mapped, centralized resource identifying safe spaces, residency programs, and support services available to artists across the continent. A primary goal of the repository is to facilitate relocation within Africa rather than defaulting to European or American destinations that are increasingly inaccessible and often impose significant cultural barriers. The group argued that African-led and Africa-centred responses better serve artists' cultural and professional needs, and reduce the distance (whether that be geographic, linguistic, or cultural) between artists and the communities they serve.

Zambia was identified as a potential pilot host country for an intra-African relocation program, given the government's demonstrated openness to new frameworks and the discussions already underway with the National Arts Council. The group acknowledged, however, that current entry requirements and administrative barriers would need to be addressed, an area where the Legislative Reform working group's model law proposals are directly relevant.

Holistic Support Services

The group identified a comprehensive set of services essential for successful residency and relocation programs, recognizing that security and creative space alone are insufficient. Support must address the full spectrum of an artist's needs, including health and well-being (with particular attention to mental health and psychosocial



support), digital security, legal assistance, adequate housing, and technical resources. Critically, the group argued that capacity building for hosts — not only for arriving artists — is essential. Host institutions and communities need structured preparation to handle the complexities of supporting artists at risk, including trauma-informed approaches, cultural sensitivity, and logistical know-how.

Long-Term Integration: The Exiled Artist

A significant portion of the group's discussion focused on artists whose relocation becomes indefinite: those who cannot return home due to ongoing persecution, conflict, or the absence of any meaningful prospect of safety. The group proposed the classification of "exiled artist" as a distinct category requiring a distinct set of supports, including pathways toward social enterprise development and economic self-sufficiency. Rather than positioning relocated artists as permanent recipients of hosted support, the group argued for investment in the conditions that allow exiled artists to rebuild autonomous creative and economic lives in their new contexts.

Synergies and Governance

The Residencies and Relocation group was explicit that its work cannot proceed in isolation. It identified the Research Working Group as essential for building and maintaining the repository platform, and the Legislative Reform Working Group's model law as critical to addressing the legal barriers to intra-African relocation, including visa frameworks and entry requirements. A call was made for more solid continental

integration across existing support organizations to ensure consistency, reduce duplication, and make the life of both artists and support organizations easier.

The group concluded that by leveraging African networks and continental resources, it is possible to move away from external dependency and provide holistic, dignified support for artists at risk — support that centres the artist's humanity and long-term flourishing rather than their immediate extraction from danger.





Working Group 2 — Legislative Reform for Artistic Freedom

(Led by Program Committee Member Sam Brakarsch)

This working group addressed the legal and institutional architecture needed to protect artistic freedom across the continent. Its proposals represent a significant move from general advocacy for legal reform toward the development of a specific, implementable legal instrument and the institutional infrastructure required to support it.

The Model Law on Artistic Freedom and the Creative Economy

The group's core proposal is the development of a Model Law on Artistic Freedom and the Creative Economy, intended as a regional reference framework that individual African states can adopt and adapt to their national contexts. The proposed law is aligned with the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, and national constitutional traditions across the continent.

The group framed the model law as a shift from normative debate to enforceable legal architecture. The group emphasized that the law is intended not as a symbolic document but as a practical instrument that moves through AU policy channels toward national implementation.

Zambia as Pilot Country

With representation from the Zambian Ministry of Youth, Sports, and Art present in the working group, Zambia was identified as a possible pilot country for the implementation and testing of the legal framework. The outcomes of the Zambian pilot will serve as a comparative and learning reference for other African member states, providing an evidence base that reinforces the model law's credibility and relevance.

Technical Architecture of the Proposed Act

The group provided a detailed technical overview of the proposed statute's key components. The Act will include preliminary provisions and definitions that specifically define "artist" and "creative" as the intended beneficiaries. This functions as an important corrective to existing intellectual property law frameworks that tend to favour commercial entities and cooperatives over individual creators.

On the question of institutional design, the group proposed a "split" model that separates the implementing body from the regulatory function. The implementing body would ideally be government-led (such as a National Arts Council) to ensure the statute is grounded within a state institution and carries legislative authority. The regulator, by contrast, was proposed to be an independent committee with direct representation from the creative industry, responsible for advocating for responsive regulations, handling complaints, and ensuring accountability. This separation is designed to prevent the concentration of power in ways that could lead to capture or abuse.



Additional technical components include provisions for reforming censorship boards, addressing digital freedoms, and harmonizing the responsibilities of different ministries to ensure a unified and coherent approach to the creative sector. The Act was also proposed to include clear procedural guarantees such as defined dispute resolution steps, accountability mechanisms, and transparent schedules of fees to ensure that artists understand their rights and can navigate the system without legal expertise.

Interlock with Research, Technology, and Participation

The group emphasized that a legal framework without evidence risks becoming symbolic. The model law's credibility and political durability depend on its being grounded in data about the economic contribution of the creative sector and the documented impact of censorship on artists' livelihoods. The group committed to interlocking with the Research Working Group to ensure that evidence generation and legal reform proceed in tandem, with research outputs feeding directly into advocacy for the law's adoption at national and AU levels.

Model Law Post-Summit Update

At the time of writing this report three months post summit, there has been significant progress in the development of the Model Law. Thanks to discussions between working group members and the AU Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information, the AU Commission on Human and Peoples Rights passed

the landmark Resolution LXXXVI on the Promotion and Protection of Artistic Freedom in Africa and development of a Model Law on Artistic Freedom in Africa. Since then, ARC has convened a seven-person expert group currently engaged in drafting the model law.





Working Group 3 — Research on Artistic Freedom

(Led by Program Committee Member Lisa Sidambe)

This working group addressed one of the issues that are often under-represented in Africa's artistic freedom landscape: the status of research and visibility of researchers. It proposed the establishment of a virtual Research Institute that is rooted in cultural nuance, collaboration and technology, whose core function will be to act as an open authority on sector data and available research expertise.

The Functions of the Proposed Research Institute

The group proposed the creation of a virtual infrastructure from which the work of the Institute will be centralised. This infrastructure will:

- a. Map and centralise available research on artistic freedom, and cultural and creative industries on the continent, including research published by academic institutions, cultural institutions such as museums, and other specialist organisations working in arts and culture sectors.
- b. Profile the expertise of artistic freedom and CCI researchers whose work focuses on Africa, for the promotion of their visibility and the enhancement of their access to consultancy opportunities.

- c. Profile the collective expertise and research capacity of the research working group, to position it as an expert facility that can be consulted by various stakeholders, including governments, in processes of policy design, targeted capacity building and legislative reform.

Outputs of the Research Institute

Beyond the exercise of mapping research and profiling researchers, the Institute will undertake to deliver tangible outputs which include:

A toolkit: As a means of guiding the standardisation of artistic freedom and CCI research, the Institute will develop a toolkit on best-practice approaches as they relate to data collection tools, data protection, research methodologies and ethics, resource mobilisation for research projects, and the tailoring of research and report designs in relation to the needs and expectations of a 'client.'

Research analysis resource: The working group will develop a resource that consolidates and analyses available research outputs on the continent, with the aim of providing information about research areas that are currently saturated, under-represented or not explored. This resource will propose areas of possible research which may expand / diversify the knowledge base of Africa's artistic freedom and CCI landscape further, and will also broadly serve as a living resource for researchers seeking new areas of exploration or funders seeking guidance on research areas they can potentially support.



The 3D Methodology

The group introduced a core functional framework to ensure that research outputs remain grounded in the practical needs of the sector. The three Ds are:

- **Diagnosis**, which involves performing needs assessments and mapping existing infrastructure to understand what currently exists and what gaps require attention
- **Design**, which uses centralized data to support evidence-based project and policy design, ensuring that new initiatives are grounded in actual needs rather than assumptions; and
- **Deliver**, in which the institute acts as a continuous monitoring and evaluation unit for the various projects launched through the summit's working groups, tracking outcomes and informing iteration.

This methodology positions the research institute as a resource that the other working groups can draw on throughout their work rather than a separate entity that produces outputs primarily for external consumption.

Three-Phase Implementation Plan

The group proposed a structured three-phase approach to building the institute.

- **Phase One — Inception:** involves mapping all available research and expertise across the continent, consolidating existing needs assessments, building an expert panel of researchers, and securing stakeholder buy-in, with specific attention to incorporating African Union representation from the outset.
- **Phase Two — The Offering:** focuses on developing the two outputs toolkit and research analysis resources) described in the outputs section above.
- **Phase Three — Actualization:** involves developing a long-term strategic plan, securing long-term funding and publicly disseminating the contents of the developed virtual infrastructure, followed by actively engaging the AU and AU member states on any policy reforms which may benefit from the expertise of the Institute.





Working Group 4 — Digital and Physical Mobility

(Led by Program Committee Member Dr. Tilahun Bejital)

This working group addressed the structural barriers that limit the movement of African artists and their work, both physically across borders and digitally across platforms. Its proposals reframe mobility not as an individual travel challenge but as a systemic infrastructure question, and offer a set of interconnected strategies to build a continent-wide ecosystem that enables creative movement at scale.

Building a Distributed Mobility Infrastructure

The group's first and most foundational proposal is to activate community-hosted spaces and micro-venues (including homes, hotels, cultural centres, and municipal spaces) as the building blocks of a continent-wide artist mobility network. Central to this is the "Art and Stay" model currently being built by Ouafa Belgacem: a platform operating similarly to a hospitality exchange, using a simple open application system and flexible exchange models including direct payment, skills exchange, and onward donations. By decentralizing the infrastructure of artistic movement away from formal and elite institutions, the group aims to dramatically expand access for artists and cultural workers across the continent, particularly those operating outside major urban centres.

Developing Hybrid Digital and Physical Distribution

Recognizing that physical movement will always be constrained by visa regimes, financial barriers, and logistical challenges, the group proposed hybrid formats that allow artistic work to circulate digitally even when artists cannot travel in person. This includes digital stages and livestreaming as tools for expanding audience reach and revenue streams. The group also proposed a "satellite" model, in which a major festival or event in one location connects simultaneously with smaller satellite gatherings across other regions, all linked through digital platforms that can monetize content and generate income for participating artists. This model builds directly on the Day Three panel discussion about leveraging digital influence to build physical infrastructure. Relatedly, the group identified cross-border payments and banking access as structural barriers that are as significant as any policy or legal constraint. It argued that financial access should be treated as a fundamental infrastructure necessity rather than an administrative task.

Synergies and Implementation

The Digital and Physical Mobility group was explicit that its success depends on the work of the other groups. It identified the Research Working Group's African CCI Research Institute as the source of the needs assessment data required to identify where mobility infrastructure is most urgently needed. And it flagged the Legislative Reform group's model law as the legislative architecture needed to support free movement and cross-border copyright protection.



The group concluded with a call for skills exchange across organizations and a proposal to explore merging existing platforms into a self-sustaining social enterprise capable of funding African artistic mobility independently from external donors.



Conclusion

The 2026 PANAF Summit marked a decisive step in the evolution of the Pan-African Network for Artistic Freedom. Where previous editions built shared understanding and identified priorities, this edition moved to producing four structured working group proposals that together constitute a coherent framework for protecting and advancing artistic freedom across the continent.

The working groups on Residencies and Relocation, Legislative Reform, Research, and Digital and Physical Mobility are not parallel initiatives. They are deeply interdependent: the model law requires the evidence base that the research institute will generate; the residency and relocation framework requires the legal infrastructure that the model law provides; and the mobility ecosystem requires the financial, legal, and data infrastructure that all three other groups are working to build. The summit made this interdependence visible and established the relational foundations for sustained collaboration across the key frameworks.

Across three days of discussion, the summit also reaffirmed a set of convictions that have defined the PANAF network since its founding. That artistic freedom is not a cultural luxury but a democratic necessity. That it is shaped not only by law but by economic structures, digital systems, gender dynamics, and the distribution of power between citizens and states; that defending it requires not only artists but lawyers, researchers, policymakers, funders, and regional institutions working in coordination; and that African artists deserve support systems rooted in the continent's own resources, networks, and expertise.

The work ahead is substantial. The brilliant working groups do not constitute programs and organisations in and of themselves. They articulated the intersections between key dimensions of artistic freedom in Africa and presented the beginnings of a roadmap for how to operationalise progress, reform, and building. However, implementation still requires sustained administrative coordination, institutional anchoring, and the willingness of participants to carry commitments forward once they return home. This work should take place both directly and indirectly. And we invite anyone reading this report who may be invigorated by the ideas generated to connect and/or situate their work in this ecosystem approach to the promotion of artistic freedom in Africa.

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Finally, we acknowledge with admiration the artists, performers, poets, storytellers, and cultural practitioners whose work weaved through the three days of the summit and reminded every



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FREE TO CREATE.

Power, Pressure, and Possibilities within
Digital and Economic Landscapes

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