

“Equally important is to nurture a creative economy based on a sustainable developmental model that is not solely oriented to quantitative growth, but one that takes into consideration of the means to elevate the quality of livelihoods and lives.”

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Image Source: Casablanca new high-speed train station in Morocco. Image by courtesy of the Africa Innovation Network (AIN), 2022. All rights reserved ©.



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The makings of a people-centered creative economy

Are human civilizations at a better place in the world than before as societies future-proof the jobs of today and transforming them into higher order cognitive and creative jobs of tomorrow?

With repetitive and mundane tasks left to machines, the future of work is expanding people's choices and opportunities, and through technological changes, it is uplifting the qualities of livelihoods and lives. The creative jobs of tomorrow could play a crucial role toward building a new social contract that empowers individuals to reset and reimagine a brave new world

where jobs are not understood only in terms of economic growth, and an individual isn't a mere cog in the wheels. Rather, owing to the curative and creative benefits of the creative economy, it speaks to the greater realization of individuality, and fulfillment of our intellectual, and emotional existence. This may explain why the creative sector is appealing to the youth where more young people between 15 and 29 years of age work in this sector as compared with other sectors.

Of course, this promising sector is not without challenges. More than 60% of all economic activity globally are estimated to take place in the informal sector¹ and informal work is estimated to be significantly prevalent in the cultural and creative sectors.² To address such a sector that is fragile yet resilient,³ a paradigm shift in policymaking is needed to support the creative actors across the entire value chain of the creative economy. If done right, conducive policies and regulatory reforms could help the creative economy grow in a more resilient, equitable and sustainable way. As it is, the creative economy is invariably forecast to contribute to 10% of the global GDP by 2030.⁴

Such a paradigm shift would require innovative forms of governance. For instance, new models of bottom-up engagement between creative economy businesses and governments need to be explored. Take for example the United Nations Informal Economies Recovery Project with the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation (FCEF). Under this model, a creative council is being established to be the national voice of creative busi-

ness owners in participating in national policy discussions.⁵ Such engagements could bring to light the lack of social safety nets (not only traditional social protection access associated with being an employee, but protection from exploitation), for gig and informal workers in the creative sectors.

For creative jobs of tomorrow to thrive sustainably, it is imperative to frame the promotion and development of the creative economy in the wider context of a culture-centric approach, where cultural goods and services are not treated as mere commodities, but as vectors of identity, values and meaning as envisioned in the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. Doing so may ensure that creative jobs are not treated merely as means for wealth creation, but one to which well-being creation is being embedded.

Such an approach can re-orient our perspectives on the value of work. The importance of cultural and creative sectors lies in their capability to create a shared sense of cultural identity and values. The creative arts including films, crafts and visual arts reflect people's lived experiences, and by depicting customs, values, norms, and ideology, art can allow us to understand the self and society, and can affirm, confirm and influence change in people's identities and beliefs.

To acknowledge the role of the creative arts in well-being and society and to embed and harness it, there needs to be a change in perspective in what "valued" jobs are. There has been a general preference for STEM (Science, Technology,

Engineering, and Mathematics) degrees since the early 2000s. For instance, in a survey conducted among 6,594 prospective students in 156 countries in 2021, preference for STEM-certified programs has increased from 39% to 49% between 2019 and 2021.⁶ Respondents cited higher salary and better work opportunities abroad, specifically in the United States.⁷

Recently however, within the discourse of future-proofing employees and workers, we are seeing efforts to mainstream STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) that focuses on a more multi-disciplinary and creative approach to education systems. This recognizes that the Fourth Industrial Revolution would require a much more blended, comprehensive learning experience that incorporates specialized knowledge with creativity and design skills. While educational institutions are slowly incorporating STEAM in their curricula, governments would need to re-examine the bias towards STEM to accelerate it.

Equally important is to nurture a creative economy based on a sustainable developmental model that is not solely oriented to quantitative growth, but one that takes into consideration of the means to elevate the quality of livelihoods and lives. It is therefore useful if environmental, social and governance (ESG) metrics are incorporated into efforts to promote and develop the creative economy. Doing so aligns with the ESG that is identified as a key component of the Great Reset initiative that the World Economic Forum articulated last year.

As we anticipate exponential technology changes ahead, the cultural and creative industries may also have to embrace and incorporate exogenous factors such as greater human automation collaborations more intuitively into the redesign of cultural and creative jobs. Doing so would ensure that skills gap may be pre-emptively and adequately addressed so as to minimize the mismatch between the skills for the industries and those acquired by workers.

While incorporating the arts in STEM may help to address future workers, addressing the current skills gap would need expansion of traineeships, mentoring and alternative forms of education and vocational training to allow people to shift and adapt as some forms of work become obsolete and new forms of work are created. A study by the National Skills Academy of Britain in 2017 reports that business marketing and communication, problem solving, social media and fundraising skills are among the most reported skills gap(8). Better links between governments and stakeholders through regular engagements would help support the identification of skills gap, targeting of vulnerable sectors and development of appropriate policies and programs.

As we rethink and reimagine the future of work for the creative economy, it is crucial to ensure the orientation is inclusive and people-centric, and the discourse on the promotion and development of the creative economy amplify the critical and curative role that it plays in and for human and sustainable development.

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