

# Supporting culture and creativity in ACP countries

## Harnessing the mid-term evaluation of the ACP-EU Culture Programme



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**Comic books in East Africa, calypso and jazz in the Caribbean, digital resources for diaspora Pacific Islanders, and feature films in Central Africa are a few of the ACP-EU supported projects that demonstrate the power and breadth of cultural and creative industries in the 79 Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. The ACP-EU Culture programme recognises the cultural and creative industries as a vital source of economic growth and social inclusion. From 2020 to end 2022 this ambitious and innovative funding scheme has supported cultural and creative industry projects and film and audio-visual grants in nearly 40 countries.**

Covering the period 2019-2024 with a budget of €40 million, the ACP-EU Culture programme is dedicated to enhancing the competitiveness and sustainability of cultural and creative industries in ACP countries. It aims to foster entrepreneurship, assist artists and cultural organisations in their professional development, promote high-quality cultural productions and innovation, and facilitate access to both national and international markets. ACP-EU

Culture embodies a bold concept that operates in regions with diverse geographies, histories, demographics, and socio-economic conditions, but share the common thread of tremendous creative talent and energy. The programme's openness to support a wide range of cultural forms, from traditional to cutting edge, spanning intangible cultural heritage to digital – is a key characteristic.



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The programme's mid-term evaluation, carried out between January and August 2023, assessed more than 140 cultural projects that received financial support from a cascading grant system implemented within selected consortia of international, regional, and national organisations in each of the 6 ACP regions. It also included 150 feature films, documentaries, and series projects benefitting from an ACP bonus/top-up grant allocated by the international coproduction funds partners of the programme. As an independent assessment, the evaluation identified good practices and provided recommendations to improve and inform current and possible future interventions. The overall assessment is positive, with some notable achievements in each of the regions. The programme has been welcomed by the beneficiaries for addressing critical needs through its tripartite approach, combining financing, capacity development, and regional networking and cooperation.

The main target beneficiaries for the programme are:

- Creative and cultural organisations and businesses,
- Cultural associations, collectives, industry bodies and advocacy groups,
- Producers and co-producers, filmmakers, and film industry professionals,
- Educational and training institutions,
- Digital hubs and incubators, digital content, and platform developers,
- Public organisations and local authorities.

The evaluation identified elements of positive change in the supported projects. Organisational growth and upskilling is a consistent feature of the intervention, both for the organisations cooperating within the six Regional Hubs and the audiovisual coproduction funds as well the grantees and laureates. The programme's provision of equipment, infrastructure and learning opportunities has enabled ACP operators to boost the quality of their products and expand their activities. This has resulted in a

significant increase in audience reach and brand recognition, both of which are crucial elements for their financial viability. Regional contacts and networking have encouraged the exchange of ideas, promoted mobility and the circulation of actors and goods, and enabled broader market reach, as illustrated by some inspiring stories from the ACP-EU Culture programme at mid-term. These are projects selected by some of the decentralised regional hubs in Eastern Africa (Ignite Culture), Central Africa (Creating in Central Africa), the Caribbean (Creative Caribbean), and the Pacific (Cultural and Creative Industries in the Pacific).



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## Reviving Kenya's cultural heritage through visual storytelling

This East Africa "Ignite Culture" project involves the production of a comic book series titled "Wana wa Magere." This series follows two descendants of the legendary Luanda Magere and their friends as they embark on a quest to recover Kenya's lost artifacts, aiming to confront an ancient evil. The project's primary objective is to improve the visual literacy of audiences by reviving both tangible and intangible cultural heritage from Kenya through visual storytelling in the form of comic books.

The initiative was inspired by the International Inventories Programme (IIP), which conducted research leading to the development of a database cataloguing historical Kenyan artifacts held in museums and private collections worldwide. Nairobi-based Avandu Vosi Studios, by weaving Kenyan cultural myths into the modern medium of comics, educates young Africans about the existence of these artifacts and their historical significance. The grant support has facilitated the development of the first three chapters of the comic book series, helping the project to achieve some noteworthy successes. A book launch for the first chapter of Wana wa Magere was held at The Alliance Française, Nairobi in the summer of 2023, with brisk sales of the book. In collaboration with 'Book Bunk', another Ignite Culture beneficiary, books were distributed to libraries in the Eastlands Area of Nairobi. This partnership marked a notable collaboration amongst the cohort of beneficiaries, strengthening ties for broader community impact and audience outreach. The project also placed the first chapter of the series in various high school libraries, including both all-boys and mixed-gender schools. This placement has allowed them to connect with a key segment of their target audience – teenagers – and engage them on important themes.

## Celebrating Caribbean Culture of Calypso Jazz

In a bid to elevate calypso and jazz as prominent Caribbean musical art forms, this Creative Caribbean project funded the Dominant Seventh Calypso Jazz Band's participation in the 10th Jazz and Soul Emancipation Concert held in Georgetown, Guyana.

Fronted by the talented trumpeter, composer, and arranger Rellon Brown, the Trinidadian band took centre stage as the headlining act of the Jazz and Soul concert. Beyond the music performance, this opportunity forged important professional connections for the band with potential sponsors and fellow musicians. A true highlight of the experience was the invitation of the Dominant Seventh's horn section to perform alongside the renowned Fame Band, the official accompaniment ensemble for the Jazz and Soul concert. For Brown, the event represented more than a musical showcase; it was about building bridges across generations of musicians in Guyana. He emphasized, 'It was important for our band to establish connections with both seasoned musicians and audiences as well as the younger generation in Guyana, setting ourselves apart from other Caribbean musical styles.'

The band's visit to Guyana marked a significant cultural and musical engagement in a territory ripe for growth within the music industry and commercial sphere. Their performance not only raised the band's profile but also achieved its mission of tapping into regional music markets, attracting potential medium and long-term corporate investment, all while shining a spotlight on the richness of Calypso as a unique musical genre.

## Cultural and Ecological Preservation: 'The Rotuma Project' Chronicles Island Heritage

With the support of the Pacific Regional Hub, 'The Rotuma Project' has embarked on an innovative initiative to preserve and document the geographical and ecological heritage of Rotuma Island using 360-degree photography technology. This endeavour incorporates ecological information, historical narratives, and cultural elements which are presented in an interactive digital format.

Beyond its cultural preservation objectives, the project seeks to foster connection between Rotuman descendants scattered around the world and those living on the island. The goal is to nurture a sustainable sense of community that can serve as a foundation for mentoring opportunities for the youth of Rotuma. Additionally, the project envisions providing 'virtual' tours of the island to minimize any potential harm to the local environment.

The initial phases of the project have attracted attention in Fiji and Rotuma, where impressive presentations have been organised. As the project enters its final phase, Jonathan Fong of Motiv8 Productions, responsible for leading the efforts, had received numerous requests from diaspora communities in New Zealand and the United Kingdom for community showings and digital project sharing. The project is noteworthy for its use of digital content to record Rotuma heritage – tangible and intangible- and reinforce diaspora connections.



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### **Empowering Young Comedians in Central Africa: The Pan-African Stand-Up Academy**

The “Pan-African Stand-Up Academy”, operating in Cameroon and Chad, has embarked on a mission to train and support over 200 young comedians, with a special focus on disadvantaged youth living in priority education zones. Their goal is to transmit the art of humor, uncover the hidden talents of aspiring comedians, and professionalise the future careers.

The Stand-Up project stands out as a laudable example of an organisation progressing towards a sustainable business model. This model encourages a blend of economic and market development approaches while maintaining focus on socio-economic objectives such as talent scouting, training, and mentoring. Funding sources for this endeavour include sponsorship, grants, and commercial sales. Notably, Stand-Up has tapped into a thriving market for one-person show comedy within the local and African entertainment scene.

Thanks to the financial support and visibility provided by “Creating in Central Africa”, Stand-Up has doubled its production capacity. A significant milestone has been reached as Canal+ has now begun buying their content, acquiring twenty shows annually. This development benefits both the enterprise itself and the artists it nurtures. According to Valery Ndongo, Director of the Academy, ‘The EU grant has radically changed our capacity as we now have suitable facilities for training, rehearsal, and show recording. Stand-up comedy is emerging as a highly profitable industry in Central Africa... Our aspiration is to equip ourselves with the necessary audio-visual equipment, become autonomous and further increase our production capacity.’

### **Cultural Heritage Identification & Preservation (CHIP) Project, collaborative efforts across the Caribbean**

The multi-country CHIP Project, executed by Barbados’ Pinelands Creative Workshop, is one of the initial recipients of the “Creative Caribbean” Project grants. The project goal is the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and tradition bearers across the region, with the aim of enhancing cultural products, facilitating knowledge transfer, and fostering social cohesion.

Workshops held in Grenada, Barbados, and Tobago provided a platform for over 56 participants to collectively explore the identification and classification of ICH. These sessions also offered an opportunity to assess potential threats and opportunities to ICH, along with strategies for its documentation and safeguarding. The workshops served as a discussion forum for performing arts groups and individuals to examine their unique historical, social, and cultural contexts.

As result of the workshops stakeholders across the three countries attained a deeper understanding of ICH, how to identify it in their respective countries, and practical approaches to documentation, including photography, videos, and written formats. The workshops also provided networking opportunities, encouraging knowledge sharing and the potential for future coordination and collaboration. The CHIP project succeeded in initiating the documentation of tradition bearers in Grenada, Barbados, and Tobago. Moreover, it has highlighted gaps in existing legal and policy frameworks concerning ICH, emphasizing the need for improvement in these areas.

## Bright lights for Film and Audiovisual

In the realm of economic development, the film and audiovisual industry has emerged as a potent driver, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. The sector is witnessing significant growth, providing a platform for original talents to thrive. The ACP-EU Culture programme plays a pivotal role in supporting audiovisual co-productions through bonuses/top-up grants to established projects that are awarded on a competitive basis. The three partner co-production funds are CLAP ACP, DEENTAL ACP, and World Cinema Fund (WCF) ACP.

Success has been achieved in both more and less visible forms. Various films, series and documentaries supported by the programme have been selected and won prizes at prestigious festivals in Africa, Europe and around the world. The 76th Cannes Film Festival in 2023 served as a notable showcase for the cinematographic talent of the ACP countries and marked a significant milestone for the ACP-EU Culture programme. At Cannes, three films supported by the audiovisual support mechanism took the spotlight. 'Banel et Adama', directed by the young Franco-Senegalese filmmaker Ramata-Toulaye Sy, was a standout, particularly as it marked the director's debut in filmmaking. Equally impressive was 'Augure'

by the Belgian-Congolese director Baloji Tshiani, which won the New Voices Award '(Un certain regard)'. Tshiani's first film delved into the subject of witchcraft in Central Africa, exploring superstition, traditions, and family relationships through a poignant narrative enriched with elements of magic realism. A third film supported by the programme, 'Nome', by Guinea-Bissau's director Sana Na N'Hada, was included in the ACID (Association du cinéma indépendant pour sa diffusion) section. Also in 2023, 'Sira', by Apolline Traoré, was awarded the Berlinale Public Prize & the FESPACO 2023 Silver Stallion.

Beyond these headline successes, the programme's implementing partners have made significant contributions. They have provided co-producers with the opportunity to participate in major festivals, which are key marketplaces for the industry. As such, they have learned to maximise their presence, expand their professional networks, and navigate the path to completing their audiovisual projects safely.

At the sector level, the organisations have also been working to address some systemic obstacles hindering industry growth, and try strengthening support mechanisms for the film industry in regions where these are notoriously weak. The "FILMAC"

initiative, developed in partnership between the "Creating in Central Africa" regional hub and CLAP-ACP coproduction fund is currently striving to improve the financing of films and series in the 11 countries of Central Africa.

### Fostering positive change

The evaluation looked especially at the grantee experience. A grantee survey carried out as part of the evaluation discerned some encouraging outcomes. They include improvement in the competitiveness of the grantee organisations (84% of CCIs), entrance into the digital economy (59% of CCIs), enhanced professionalisation (90% of CCIs), creation of new jobs (76% of CCIs), increase in income (56% of CCIs), and access to new sources of funding (60% of CCIs).

The evaluation also pointed to evidence of positive change, supported by the programme's training and capacity building measures:

- **Organisational learning demonstrated.** Many of the projects demonstrated improved organisational and project management capabilities. For several organisations, this marked their first experience with substantial donor support. Many were unfamiliar with the grant management system.
- **Partnerships expanded.** ACP-EU Culture is facilitating the development of longer-term partnerships with other institutions to foster a broader strategic vision.
- **Infrastructure improved.** Project investments in equipment and infrastructure have been essential in expanding capabilities, updating skills, and diversifying the portfolio of services and clients for many projects.



Banel e Adama

- **Credibility and recognition enhanced.** The audiovisual laureates have achieved a significant increase in visibility, audience reach, brand recognition, and international presence.
- **Ambition fortified.** The project grantees consider the ACP-EU Culture programme as an opportunity – and critical step – to expand their activities, ambitions, and embrace transnational or international work, as well as moving into the digital.
- **Towards sustainability.** A minority of projects has progressed towards a sustainable business model; diversifying income streams has been one route. Many organizations still grapple with the challenge of securing core funding. Multi-annual projects can be a step towards achieving financial stability.

Yet the design and delivery of the programme have brought into question certain assumptions which influence the sustainability of the intervention. Among these are the limits of the granting system, especially the bonus/top up mechanism for audiovisual co-production and its regional distribution; the question of multiplying small projects with very short implementing periods; the effectiveness of entrepreneurial skills training; and the steep learning curve for the Pacific and Caribbean regions which were newcomers to EU grants for culture.



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## Challenges on the road ahead

Despite the many positive aspects of the programme to date, serious challenges remain, especially when it comes to helping young people start businesses and find jobs in ACP regions where most of the population is under 18 years of age. Does the programme design provide the young people the right training and financial support they need to succeed? Is the entrepreneurial mindset of young people across the three regions adequately encouraged by equal access to economic opportunities, necessary training, and professional expertise?

A major challenge for the whole programme and its components is defining and measuring success. Each implementing partner has developed its own approach to monitoring and evaluating results. In East Africa, “Ignite Culture”, for example, has taken a grantee-centric and adaptive approach, assisting grantees in coming up with their own success indicators. Collaborating with external consultants, Ignite Culture refined its goals before creating frameworks and strategies for everyone involved and having project beneficiaries report on their progress and agree on the best ways to measure success. In West Africa, the “AWA” regional hub has also developed a toolkit for monitoring and evaluation. It will be up to the programme’s managing team in Brussels to ensure maximum consistency in data collection and to summarise the information also for communication purposes.

Introducing the ACP-EU Culture programme to regions less familiar with grant programmes and the EU, like the Pacific, posed another significant challenge. However, the Pacific region has made impressive progress in building its capacity,

considering it was the first time that creatives in the Pacific had the opportunity to submit proposals for an ACP-EU funded culture programme. The Pacific hub, led by the South Pacific Community (SPC), undertook a thorough three-tiered capacity-building approach consisting of pre-application and two phase of grantee support.

Creating an enabling environment for cultural entrepreneurs and the culture sector has yet to be achieved in ACP countries. While some countries like Rwanda have made progress in their film sector, many ACP nations still meet legal, administrative, and financial obstacles hindering their potential. The mid-term evaluation suggested the idea of forming an alliance for creative and cultural industries to generate greater interest and support in the sector.

Effective knowledge generation and management are also vital to inspire cultural professionals, decision-makers, and managers, and provide them with updated quality information and management and decision-making tools. In this respect, the ACP-EU Culture Technical Assistance in Brussels plays a crucial role in providing access to knowledge.

Perhaps the most rewarding challenge for the cultural and creative sector lies in building intra-ACP networks to share experiences and gain insights from countries that have introduced new policies and incentives in relevant sectors. The programme’s partner organisations are keen on fostering collaboration across language groups, such as Anglophone and Francophone, and encouraging cross-regional but also cross-continental partnerships. This demonstrates how culture can really make the world a smaller place.

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