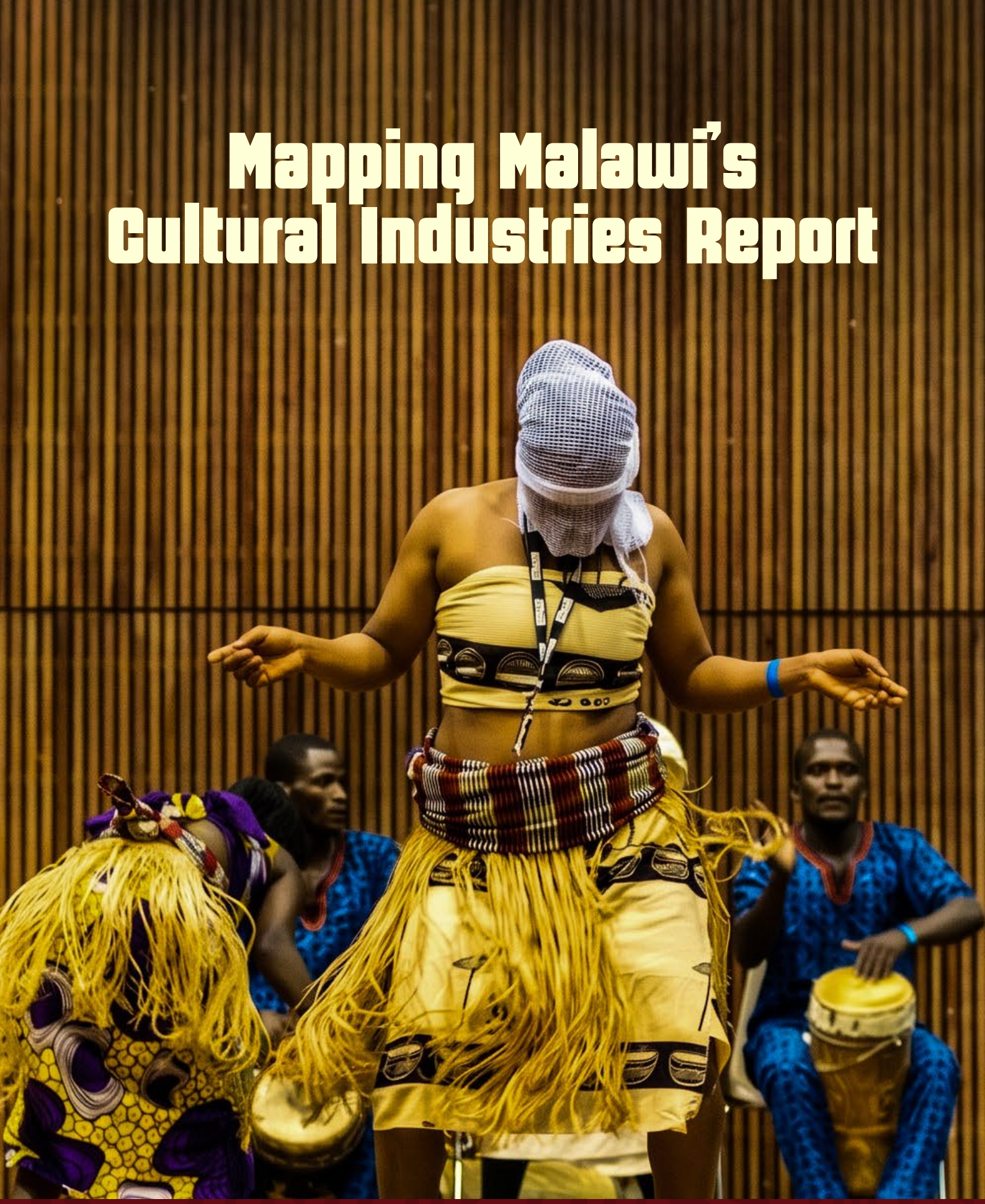
Mapping Malawi's Cultural Industries Report



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September, 2026

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Executive Summary

In 2023, the School of Arts, Communication and Design at the University of Malawi's, in collaboration with Rei Foundation Limited and the Malawi National Commission for UNESCO, under the ambit of the Malawian Art and Culture Research Grants, was commissioned to conduct a sector and situational analysis of Malawi's cultural industries. This report presents the findings of a mapping exercise of the cultural industries in Malawi, detailing the current status of the sector and identifying challenges to its growth and development. The findings are based on nationwide research conducted in 2024, focusing on five primary sectors: performing arts, visual arts, media arts, cultural heritage, and fashion.
Malawi has a range of regulatory, legal, and policy frameworks aimed at supporting its cultural industries. Key frameworks include:

- The Censorship and Control of Entertainment Act (1968): Regulates and controls the creation and exhibition of artistic works, including cinematographic films, as well as the importation, production, and dissemination of undesirable publications, pictures, statues, and recordings. It further regulates public performances and the operation of performance venues in the interest of public safety.
- The Copyright Act (2016): Provides a legal framework that ensures the protection of folklore, literary, dramatic, musical, and artistic works, audiovisual works, sound recordings, and broadcasts. It also protects the rights of creators of artistic works.
- The Cultural Policy (2015): Aims to identify, preserve, protect, and promote Malawian arts and culture as a means of fostering national identity, posterity, and sustainable socio-economic development.
- Malawi 2063: A national development framework aimed at transforming Malawi into a wealthy and self-reliant industrialised nation by 2063. Within this framework, the cultural industries are recognised as key drivers of national development, with a focus on expanding the production of cultural products for local, regional, and international markets.
- The National Arts and Heritage Act (2024): Provides a comprehensive legal framework for the development and promotion of Malawi's creative and heritage industries. Once fully operationalised, it will establish the National Arts and Heritage Council of Malawi and the National Arts and Heritage Promotion Fund.
- Companies, Registration and Intellectual Property Centre Bill (2025): Provides for the creation of a semi-autonomous government agency that will regulate the administration of intellectual property rights.

In 2013, the first known mapping exercise of Malawi's cultural sector was conducted with training support from UNESCO and research support by the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO). That study focused on the economic contribution of copyright-based industries in Malawi and highlighted challenges such as a lack of investment, piracy, and inadequate infrastructure. Over the past 12 years, Malawi's cultural industry landscape has

evolved significantly in terms of policy, funding, infrastructure, training and programming. Key developments include: the adoption of the Cultural Policy in 2015; the review of the Copyright Act in 2016, which established the Copyright Fund (2021); the introduction of the blank media levy by the Copyright Society of Malawi (COSOMA) in 2019; the implementation of the 'Strengthening the Institutional Capacities in Implementing the Malawi Cultural Policy' project in 2021, supported by the UNESCO Regional office for Southern Africa (ROSA); the enactment of the National Arts and Heritage Act of 2024; the drafting of regulations for the National Arts and Heritage Promotion Fund under the UNESCO-Aschberg project (2024); and the introduction of specialised degree programmes in drama, filmmaking, creative arts, music, fashion, and design at the University of Malawi in 2024.

Despite these developments, the current status of the sector remained unclear, providing impetus for this study. The objectives of the study were to:

- Raise the profile of Malawi's cultural industries;
- Identify key challenges affecting growth and development;
- Determine how many people work in the sector, the nature of their employment, and their levels of income;
- Estimate the economic contribution of the sector to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP); and
- Make recommendations on structural and policy changes to support growth and development.

The study's methodology was developed in a participatory manner in collaboration with key stakeholders––arts associations, arts entities, academics, cultural practitioners, governmental agencies and departments––from Malawi's cultural sector. It comprised a literature review, stakeholder engagement, co-design workshops, over 40 key informant interviews, and a survey of more than 300 creative industry participants. With guidance from the National Statistics Office, the study examined sector-specific financial data to assess the economic contribution of the cultural industries to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Fieldwork was completed in 2024.

Findings from the Survey

The survey data reveals several key insights into Malawi's cultural industries:
The arts sector is predominantly male-dominated, with a higher participation rate among men than women.

- Average monthly incomes vary across sectors: Performing Arts reports MWK 428,051.28; Visual Arts MWK 522,141.03; Cultural Heritage MWK 503,965.52; and Fashion reports the lowest at MWK 316,363.64. Media Arts leads with the highest average income of MWK 715,407.41. The overall average across all sectors is MWK 479,231.58.
- Across all art sectors, males earn more than females, highlighting a persistent gender income gap.
- The majority of artists have not received formal training in their respective trades. Among those who have, most are involved in Media Arts.

- Many respondents engage in multiple art forms, with Performing Arts and Visual Arts being the most common combination.
- The sector is largely youth-driven, with a significant proportion of participants under the age of 30, indicating strong potential for growth and innovation.
- Most artists are unregistered, although registration is more common within the Media Arts sector.
- Common challenges that were indicated by the respondents across all sectors include lack of government support, financial constraints, inadequate infrastructure, and economic shocks.
- The economic contribution of the sector is estimated at approximately MWK 28 billion, which accounts for nearly 0.4% of national GDP.

Opportunities

Malawi's cultural industries hold untapped potential that, if leveraged, can contribute significantly to national economic and cultural development. The study reveals the following opportunities:

- The sector has the potential to enhance revenue generation for the country. This can be achieved through VAT exemptions on art supplies and the introduction of a sales tax on art products.
- Although Malawi has copyright and licensing frameworks in place, strengthening these systems can create opportunities for artists to earn sustainable incomes while enabling the government to generate additional revenue.
- Promoting Malawi's cultural and heritage industries locally, regionally and internationally has the potential to boost tourism and support local economies.
- Expanding access to international markets for Malawian arts and cultural goods can elevate the country's global cultural profile while increasing foreign exchange earnings.
- The provision of strategic financing mechanism for Malawian artists and cultural organisations can stimulate growth, create jobs and facilitate sustainable creative economies.
- The cultural industries in Malawi are predominantly youth-driven, meaning they are largely powered by the most productive segment of the population. Leveraging this potential through mentorship, training, and financial investment can unlock innovation, boost employment, and position the creative industries as key drivers for sustainable economic growth.
- Collaborations between the arts and other sectors such as tourism, hospitality and media can increase visibility, funding and market opportunities within the cultural industries.
- The cultural industries in Malawi have the potential to become key contributors to the country's broader development agenda by driving GDP growth, creating jobs, stimulating tourism, and generating income for those working within–and, by extension, outside–the sector.

Recommendations

Building upon the identified opportunities, this mapping of Malawi's cultural industries has yielded key insights and the following strategic recommendations aimed at advancing the country's creative sector. These strategic recommendations provide a framework for

- Increase government-led financing by allocating direct government budgetary support to the cultural sector, focusing on the creation of cultural products, the development of infrastructure (venues, arts spaces, galleries, cultural villages, and festival arenas), and the creation of an enabling environment for job creation as well as the preservation and promotion of Malawi's culture.
- Strengthen institutional and policy frameworks by operationalising institutions, such as the National Arts and Heritage Council (NAHEC), to provide strategic leadership and support sectoral growth. Furthermore, review and align national policies with Malawi's cultural goals, recognising the cultural industries as vital contributors to national development.
- Expand research and data-driven policy development by fostering collaborations between government, academia, arts organisations and artists to conduct comprehensive assessment of the sector's economic contribution, growth opportunities, gaps and needs, thereby supporting evidence-based policymaking and investment.
- Enhance access to financial support to the cultural sector by developing tailor-made, sector-specific funding mechanisms, such as grants, loans and credit facilities, to significantly improve access to financing and facilitate growth.
- Encourage private sector involvement and public-private partnership to diversify funding sources and broaden the support network for Malawi's cultural industries.
- Build capacities of the sector through skills and professional development programmes to raise industry standards, equipping artists and cultural practitioners with skills to produce high-quality cultural products for both local and global markets.
- Develop a national framework to guarantee fair compensation and remuneration within the cultural industries, ensuring that artists' intellectual property rights are respected and protected.

INTRODUCTION



1. INTRODUCTION

It is generally accepted that culture plays an integral part in society's fabric globally. It serves various purposes, such as reinforcing national cultural identity, rallying the masses during political struggles, or acting as a tool for disseminating critical information during social or health crises, and promoting positive social behaviour change.[i] In Malawi, culture has always held a central place. During the colonial period, indigenous cultural expressions, such as the Gule Wamkulu, were used to challenge British colonial rule (1891-1964).[ii] In the 1950s, nationalist leaders harnessed local songs to rally ordinary people against British colonial rule.[iii] Following independence, the new government led by Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda established a one-party system, which continued to appropriate traditional cultural forms— such as women's songs and traditional dances—for political reasons.[iv] During this period, state support for the arts was limited to cultural entities that supported the ruling party's hegemony. Groups such as the Mbumba za Kamuzu (Kamuzu's Women) and the Kwacha Cultural Troupe were financially supported and used to propagate the government's political agenda under the guise of promoting a national cultural identity. [v]

Under this one-party system, and through the Censorship Board, the government exercised extensive control over the creation, dissemination, and consumption of artistic expression in Malawi.[vi] For instance, there was only one state-controlled radio station, and television broadcasting was not introduced until 1998—four years after President Banda lost Malawi's first multiparty election in 1994. Chisiza and Bonsall[vii], Magalasi[viii], and Kerr[ix] have noted that while certain art forms, such as music, continued to thrive under President Banda's rule, this success was often attributed to artists' avoidance of political commentary or subversion, lest their work be censored or banned from being played on the state-controlled national radio. In contrast, theatre and literature were more tightly controlled, as they were perceived to pose a greater threat to Banda's authoritarian rule.[x]

Until 1981, government support for the arts was minimal and sporadic, benefiting only a select few cultural entities aligned with the regime's ideological agenda. The situation worsened with the imposition of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the 1980s, which led countries like Malawi to implement austerity measures—including drastic cuts in public spending on arts and cultural programmes. Chisiza and Bonsall argue that the combination of state censorship and the withdrawal of financial support significantly stifled the growth and development of Malawi's cultural sector, especially when compared to other countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, where more liberal policies enabled greater cultural expression and institutional support.[xi]

In 1994, Malawi became a multiparty state, bringing with it greater political openness and the emergence of civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).[xii] In the early 1990s, amid the government's limited financial capacity—particularly in the wake of SAP-induced austerity—NGOs began to engage artists, such as theatre practitioners, musicians, and radio producers, to raise awareness about a range of social issues, such as HIV/AIDS prevention.[xiii] These arts-based initiatives marked one of the earliest donor-driven funding mechanisms for the cultural sector in Malawi. Today, NGOs and government agencies remain key players in supporting Malawi's cultural industries through a variety of programmes and interventions that combine creative expression with development goals. However, due to the absence of a robust state coordinating mechanisms such as a National Arts Council, coupled with limited government financial support, the sector has largely depended on NGO and donor funding as its primary source of financing, further entrenching a pattern of dependency that has stifled the sector's ability to grow independently.

In 2010, Malawi ratified the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, paving the way for the recognition of the need for a national cultural policy. Notably, efforts towards a policy development date back as early as 1981, when UNESCO commissioned a study to assist the Malawian government in formulating a cultural development policy framework.[xiv] Among its recommendations was the creation of the Department of Museums and the Department of Fine and Performing Arts at Chancellor College, then a constituent college of the University of Malawi. Since ratifying the Convention, the government of Malawi has taken various steps to support the growth and development of the country's cultural industries, recognizing the arts and cultural sector as a vital component of national development.[xv]

Efforts to understand the economic value of Malawi's arts sector began as early as 2010, when UNESCO trained a research team, which then went on to carry out an initial study commissioned by the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) in 2013. This study sought to determine the contribution of the copyright-based creative industries to the national economy. While the findings highlighted the sector's economic potential, they did not lead to significant policy changes or increased government investment. As a result, Malawian cultural practitioners have continued to call for comprehensive data collection to better understand the sector's impact on GDP and to inform evidence-based policy-making. Without formal recognition and sustained support, the sector's contribution to Malawi's economy remains undervalued and its growth is hindered.

The recent enactment of the National Arts and Heritage Act (2024) has raised renewed hopes that government-led support will lead to significant shifts in Malawi's cultural industries and will spur growth. However, this optimism has been somewhat dampened among stakeholders by the meagre budgetary allocation for the sector in the 2025/26 national budget. Despite this setback, the Act, once operationalised, will establish the National Arts and Heritage Council (NAHEC). This will be a positive step towards creating an institutional framework capable of driving long-term development and investment in Malawi's cultural sector. Moreover, NAHEC will set up the National Arts and Heritage Promotion Fund, which will provide the sector with much-needed financial support for sector growth.

This present study builds on the foundation laid out by the 2013 WIPO study to present an updated analysis of the current status, emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities within Malawi's cultural industries. It aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the sector's potential and actual economic output by establishing a baseline for the sector contribution to the Malawian economy. It further seeks to provide the evidence needed to support the sectoral growth and development as a major driver of national development.

1.1 A Timeline of Malawi's Cultural Industries

1957 — Nyasaland Museum established.
1963 — Ordinance Number 17 on Sport and Culture enacted subsequently repealed by Act 13 of 1967.
1964 — 1912 British Copyright Law inherited.
1965 — Association of Teaching of English in Malawi (ATEM) School Drama Festival established with support from the British Council.
1966 — Chichiri Museum opened in Chichiri, Blantyre.
1968 — Censorship and Control of Entertainment Act enacted.
1970 — Chancellor College Travelling Theatre formed at the University of Malawi.
1981 — Department of Fine and Performing Arts established at the University of Malawi's Chancellor College campus.
1983 — Association Malawienne Des Enseignants De Français (AMEF) formed.
1983 — National Meeting on Copyright convened by the Department of Cultural Affairs and UNESCO Copyright Committee.
1984 — National Workshop on Copyright and Neighbouring Rights held at Chancellor College.
1987 — Copyright Law reviewed.
1987 — Wakhumbata Ensemble Theatre established by Du Chisiza Jnr.
1988 — Drama Association of Malawi established.
1989 — Kwacha Cultural Troupe formed.
1989 — Museum Act enacted.
1990 — Monuments and Relics Act enacted.
1994 — Theatre Association of Malawi established.
1990 — Department of Arts and Crafts established.
1992 — Copyright Society of Malawi (COSOMA) established.
1992 — Choral Music Workshop conducted at the University of Malawi.
1995 — Musician Union of Malawi formed.
1995 — Malawi Writers Union established.
1995 — Kwacha Cultural Troupe transitioned into Malawi National Dance Troupe.
2002 — Visual Arts Association of Malawi formed.
2004 — Cultural & Museum Centre Karonga established.

2004 — Lake of Stars Festival established.
2006 — Blantyre Arts Festival established.
2011 — French Cultural Centre acquired by the Government of Malawi and transitioned into the Blantyre Cultural Centre.
2012 — Foundation for Arts and Culture (FoAC) formed.
2013 — WIPO-commissioned study on the *Economic Contribution of the Copyright-Based Industries to the Economy of Malawi* conducted.
2014 — Tumaini Arts Festival established.
2014 — Sand Music Festival established.
2015 — Department of Culture reorganised into the Department of Arts, the Department of Museums and Monuments, and the National Records and Archives Services Department.
2015 — National Cultural Policy adopted.
2015 — Easter Theatre Festival established.
2016 — Copyright Act of Malawi enacted.
2018 — Culturindaba Workshop on Indigenous Knowledge, Performing and Fine Art Practice conducted at the University of Malawi.
2019 — Blank Media Levy launched by the Copyright Society of Malawi.
2021 — Zomba City Festival launched.
2021 — 'Strengthening of the Institutional Capacities in Implementing the Malawi Cultural Policy' project launched.
2021 — Copyright Fund established by the COSOMA.
2022 — Malawi Film Festival launched.
2023 — University of Malawi Theatre Festival launched.
2024 — National Arts and Heritage Act (2024) enacted.
2024 — Companies, Registrations and Intellectual Property Centre Bill passed by the National Assembly.

1.2 Malawi's Cultural Industries Mapping

Cultural mapping is a systematic methodology employed to collect and analyse data on the range, scope, and structure of cultural and creative industries (CCIs).[xvi] This approach is particularly pertinent in emerging economies like Malawi, where the full potential of these sectors may not be fully recognised. The objectives of mapping of Malawi's cultural industries were:

- To raise the profile of the cultural and creative industries;
- To identify key challenges affecting growth;
- To determine how many people work in the sector, what type of work they are involved in, and how much they are paid for their work;
- To estimate the financial contribution of the sector and its impact on GDP, job creation and wealth creation in Malawi; and
- To make recommendations on the type of changes required to make the sector more viable to fast-track growth and development.

1.3 Classification of Malawi's Cultural Industries

The mapping of Malawi's arts and culture adopted the 2025 UNESCO[xvii] framework for conducting mapping exercises for the creative and cultural industries, with certain adjustments made to better fit the local Malawian context. Specifically, this study excluded architecture, industrial design and urban planning from the mapping exercise, as consultations with stakeholders revealed that these fields are often more typically aligned with engineering and technical disciplines in Malawi.

The study categorises Malawi's cultural industries into eight major sectors, namely performing arts; visual arts; cultural heritage; media arts; publishing; design, fashion, and marketing and advertising. These definitions adhere to UNESCO's guidelines and seek to capture the full spectrum of Malawi's cultural industries. However, to align the study with the classification used by the National Statistics Office of Malawi for GDP calculation, media arts encompass radio, television, film, digital content creation, publishing, design and marketing and advertising. Consequently, throughout this report, we refer to five sectors: performing arts, cultural heritage, media arts, visual arts and fashion. While we are aware that this may cause some confusion, this approach has been intentionally adopted to ensure the accurate calculation of GDP within the existing framework.

Table 1: Framework for Defining Cultural Industries in Malawi

Sectors	Sub-sectors	Characteristics
Performing Arts	Theatre, Dance, Music, Artistic Festivals	Live, performance-based arts; includes traditional, contemporary, and community-based performances
Visual Arts	Painting, Sculpture, Photography, Crafts	Primarily visual, material-based creations; often showcased in galleries or public spaces
Cultural Heritage	Cultural Festivals, Traditional Ceremonies, Art and antiques, Museums	Celebrates cultural identity; includes practices, objects, and sites of cultural significance
Media Arts	Radio, Television, Film, Digital Content Creation	Mass media and entertainment-focused, often involves arts and cultural storytelling
Publishing	Book Publishing, Magazine Publishing, Journalism	Involves literary and information-based publications, including digital and print media
Design	Graphic Design, Interior Design, Product Design	Visual and functional design for commercial, personal, or industrial use
Fashion	Apparel Design, Textile Arts, Fashion Shows	Involves the creation of clothing and accessories; includes traditional and modern fashion practices
Marketing and Advertising	Arts Marketing, Public Relations, Event Promotion	Promotes arts and culture through various media; connects artists and audiences

Stakeholders in Malawi's Cultural Industries

Malawi's cultural industries are made up of a broad range of stakeholders that comprise artists, employees, freelancers, creative entrepreneurs, associations, education, and government departments and agencies.

The Government provides an oversight role through its ministries and departments, especially the Ministry responsible for Culture, Department of Arts (including the Malawi Censorship Board), Department of Museums and Monuments, Department of National Records and Archives, and the Office of the Special Adviser to the President on culture matters. These entities play critical roles in the regulation, financing, exposure and promotion of Malawi's cultural industries.

The cultural industries in Malawi are further made up of various associations and societies that advance the interests of their respective constituencies at local, national and international platforms. These associations play critical roles in providing essential services ranging from training, networking, and advocacy.

Key Cultural Industries Stakeholders in Malawi

Enterprise & Individuals

- Individual artists and creatives
- Businesses and enterprises
- Non-governmental organisations

Government Department Agencies

- Censorship Board
- Ministry of Local Government, Unity and Culture
- Ministry of Youth and Sports
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Trade and Industry
- Copyright Society of Malawi
- Department of Arts
- Department of Tourism
- Department of Museums and Monuments
- Department of National Records and Archives
- National Statistics Office
- Malawi Revenue Authority
- National Library Services

Associations and Societies

- Book Publishers Association of Malawi (BPAM)
- Musicians Union of Malawi (MUM)
- National Theatre Association of Malawi (NTAM)
- Coalition of Arts and Culture Organisations in Malawi (CACOMA)
- Foundation for Arts and Culture (FoAC)
- Fashion Association
- Film Association of Malawi (FAM)
- Malawi Union of Academic and Non-Fiction Authors (MUANA)

- Malawi Folk Dance, Music and Song Society (MFOD-MAS)
- Poetry Association of Malawi (PAM)
- Visual Arts Association of Malawi (VAAM)
- Photographers Union of Malawi (PUM)
- Journalist Union of Malawi (JUM)
- Malawi Writers Union (MWU)
- Chewa Heritage Foundation (CHEFO)
- Chiwanja cha Yao
- Mulakho Wa Alomwe
- Mzimba Heritage Association (MZIHA)
- Cultural Heritage Association (CHA)
- Kungoni Cultural Centre
- Mdawuko wa a Tonga
- Mgumano Wa Asena na Mang'anja
- Karonga—Chitipa Heritage Association
- Tumbuka Heritage Association
- Maseko Ngoni Association
- Sungani Zakwathu Heritage Association

Education Institutions

- University of Malawi (UNIMA)
- Mzuzu University (MZUNI)
- Domasi College of Education
- Technical Entrepreneurship, Vocational Education and Training Authority (TEVETA)
- Music Crossroads Malawi (MCM)
- Malawi University of Science and Technology (MUST)
- The Music Centre of Lusubilo

International Partners

- British Council
- European Union
- Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)
- Rei Foundation Limited
- UNESCO
- UNDP
- American Embassy
- Norwegian Embassy
- World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), African Regional Intellectual Property Office (WIPO)

POLICY, LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS

2. Policy, Legal and Regulatory Frameworks

Malawi has developed and implemented a range of policies, legal and regulatory frameworks to preserve, protect and promote its cultural industries. These frameworks play a critical role in the growth and development of the cultural sector in Malawi.

- The National Arts and Heritage Act 2024 was enacted in September 2024 to provide a comprehensive legal framework for the development and promotion of Malawi's creative and heritage industries.[xviii] The Act establishes the National Arts and Heritage Council of Malawi (NAHEC), introduces a registration framework for stakeholders in the creative and heritage industry, and sets out the regulation of organisers of artistic and cultural events. It also establishes the National Arts and Heritage Promotion Fund, and provides for offences and penalties. Currently, efforts are underway to operationalise the Act.

- The Malawi 2063 (MW2063) is the successor to the Vision 2020.[xix] Launched in 2021, it is the country's development blueprint, aiming to transform Malawi into an inclusive, wealthy and self-reliant industrialised nation by the year 2063. Its key pillars are agricultural productivity and commercialisation, industrialisation and urbanisation. Within this framework, Malawi's cultural industries fall under the urbanisation pillar, specifically within the tourism sector. Tourism is recognised as a national development contributor, although its full potential is not realised due to a range of issues. The Malawi 2063 asserts that tourism development efforts shall prioritise creative industries, expanding them through the production of cultural products for local, regional and international markets. To achieve this the country will undertake to develop a world-class institutional, legal and regulatory framework that protects and supports the development of the creative industries.

- The Cultural Policy was adopted in 2015 with the aim of identifying, preserving, protecting and promoting Malawi's arts and culture for national identity, unity in diversity, posterity and sustainable socio-economic development.[xx] Although implementation has been slow, efforts such as the 'Strengthening the Institutional Capacities in Implementing the Malawi Cultural Policy' in 2021, supported by the UNESCO Regional office for Southern Africa (ROSA) with financial support from the Royal Norwegian Embassy have sought to build legislative, institutional and human resource capacities for effective implementation.[xxi]

- The Copyright Act of 2016 provides for the copyright of literary, dramatic, musical and artistic works, audio-visual works, sound recordings and broadcasts; protects the rights of performers, and establishes the Copyright Society of Malawi.[xxii]

- The Monuments and Relics Act of 1991 replaced the earlier Monuments Act.[xxiii] It provides for the conservation, preservation, and protection of Malawi's cultural heritage, including sites of distinctive natural beauty, as well as buildings, objects and locations of historical and cultural interest. The Act makes provisions for the declaration of protected monuments and relics, their acquisition by the Government of Malawi, and the government's ability to obtain rights and trusteeship over such properties. It also outlines procedures for entering into agreements with owners for the preservation of monuments and relics, minting official lists and registers of such sites and objects, and regulating the discovery, excavation, removal, sale and export and import of monuments, relics and collection of cultural heritage.

- The Censorship and Control of Entertainment Act of 1968 [xxiv] regulates and controls the making and the exhibition of cinematograph pictures, the importation, production, dissemination of undesirable publications, pictures, statues and records. It also regulates performances of stage plays and public entertainment, and the operation of theatres and similar venues, all in the interest of public safety.

- Blank Media Levy –also known as the private copy levy–was introduced in 2015 by the Government. A levy is imposed on all recordable media as a compensation to rights holders for incomes lost due to private copying of their works (such as music, drama, film). Each year COSOMA distributes royalties from these levies to a broad range of artists.[xxv]

- The Copyright Fund provided for in the 2016 Act was established in 2021 by the Copyright Society of Malawi for enforcement of copyright laws, promotion and improvement of creativity and artistic skills, promotion and preservation of work which depict the cultural identity of Malawi and civic education. It further seeks to support the growth and development of the cultural industries in Malawi by boosting creativity and artist productivity.

- Calls for proposals are released bi-annually with funding ranges from 5 million to 15 million Malawi kwacha per project, as of May 2025.

- National Conference on Arts and Culture was initiated in 2022 as a platform for the stakeholders in cultural industry to engage and share ideas on the policy framework, initiatives on cultural and creative industries, challenges being encountered, ideas, proposals and concrete actions to be undertaken to strengthen the implementation of the Malawi Cultural Policy as a tool for delivering on national, sub-regional, regional and sustainable development in line with the 2005 Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.[xxvi]

- Malawi National Public Sector Reform Programme (2015-present) is a government led initiative aimed at increasing efficiency and effectiveness across various government ministries, departments and agencies. As a result of the reform programme, the formerly amalgamated Department of Culture was restructured by an Act of Parliament into three departments: Museums and Monuments, Arts and the National Records and Archives Services. Prior to this, the three existed as divisions within the Department of Culture.[xxvii]

METHODOLOGY

3. Methodology

This study's methodology used a mixed methods approach that comprised literature review, stakeholder engagement, and a survey complemented by key informant interviews and focus group discussions with a broad range of stakeholders from the cultural industries. We used a convergent parallel approach, where all data were collected simultaneously. This allowed for minimisation of startup biases. By using the mixed approach, triangulation was enabled allowing quantitative findings to be corroborated with qualitative insights.

Literature Review
We undertook a review of key policy documents and reports, which formed the basis of the study's understanding of the Malawian cultural context. We also reviewed and consulted similar mapping study reports to establish a benchmark for best practice. This shaped how we framed the study's objectives and research questions.

Stakeholder Engagement
Stakeholders were engaged throughout the study to ensure that its objectives and research questions reflected their interests and concerns. These included representatives from theatre, dance, music, galleries, arts associations, fashion, design, film and television, festivals, and visual arts, who participated in a series of workshops. They were initially engaged through inception meetings to secure stakeholder buy-in. Following this, these representatives took part in co-design workshops to shape the study's research direction and identify areas of critical concern. Finally, the same representatives validated the report before its wider dissemination to ensure ownership and confirm that the findings accurately reflect the current status of the sector.

Fieldwork
Fieldwork was essential in order to feed into Objectives ii, iii, and iv. Data collection was undertaken across the three regions of Malawi in 2024, specifically in Blantyre, Lilongwe, and Mzuzu. Malawi is divided into three regions –North, Centre, and South. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Malawi Research Ethics Committee (UNIMAREC), protocol number P.04/23/234. All survey procedures followed the Declaration Helsinki 1968. These study sites are the three major cities in Malawi, with Lilongwe being the capital. Consequently, the study's respondents were limited to those residing and working within these cities. The assessment of GDP contribution relies on data derived from tax registration records. As rural areas and small towns do not have comprehensive lists of registered taxpayers, these areas are not captured in the administrative data. Consequently, the estimates are not subject to selection bias arising from incomplete registration, but rather reflect the scope of available tax-based records.

The fieldwork involved key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and individual interviews, and data collection at the National Statistics Office (NSO) and the Malawi Revenue Authority (MRA). However, in accordance with the National Statistics Act of 2014[xxviii] and the Malawi Revenue Authority Act [xxix] only the NSO can physically inspect the data files and collect data within the MRA premises.

Ethical Considerations
Local ethical approval was obtained through the University of Malawi Research Ethics Committee (UNIMAREC) under Protocol No. P.04/23/234. To ensure the protection of all participants, the following protocols were implemented:

Informed Consent: All respondents (KIIs, survey and FDGs) were provided with the study's purpose. Participation was voluntary, and verbal informed consent was obtained from all respondents in the study. Participants were free to withdraw from the study at any point.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: Personal identifiers were removed during data entry.

Key Informant Interviews
A total of 30 key informant interviews with government officials, arts practitioners, arts associations, festival and event organisations, and venue owners were conducted to provide critical insights into the status of Malawi's cultural sector. The interviews used a semi-structured framework and a thematic guide designed to bridge the gap between high level policy and grassroots creative practice. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling to target key industry players, complemented by snowball sampling.

Focus Group Discussions
A total of 15 focus group discussions were conducted with a broad range of arts practitioners to gain further insights and inform the study's findings. Each group comprised 10 individuals, organised by sector (performing arts, visual arts, cultural heritage, publishing, media arts, fashion, and design). One research assistant took notes while the other facilitated.

Survey Instrument and Administration
One questionnaire was used for this study. The questionnaire was developed to gain an understanding of the current status of the sector, focusing on key challenges, opportunities and policy priorities. This questionnaire was administered to a sample of 308 respondents including artists, entrepreneurs, educators, government officials, and cultural organisations. Data were collected through a hybrid approach that included in-person and telephonic interviews. The survey collected data on key challenges, opportunities, and policy priorities within the sector. Enumerators conducted interviews in Chichewa in the Central and Southern regions, Chitumbuka in the Northern region, and English based on respondent preference.

THE STATUS, TRENDS AND CHALLENGES OF MALAWI'S CULTURAL INDUSTRIES



4. The Status, Trends and Challenges of Malawi's Cultural Industries

This section presents the findings from the survey conducted to gain an understanding on the current status of the sector, focusing on key challenges, opportunities and policy priorities. We start by describing the characteristics of the sample that was interviewed to provide a background and context to the issues raised.

Table 2 - Characteristics of the Sample

Demographic/Socio-Economic Indicator	Number of Respondents	Value
Age		
Mean age (years)	308	35
Sex of Respondent		
Female	308	28%
Male	308	71%
Education Level		
None	308	3.9%
Primary	308	15%
Secondary	308	45.8%
Tertiary	308	34.9%
Formal Registration Status	.	.
Not registered	308	54%
Registered	308	45%
Formal Arts Training/Education	.	.
No formal training received	308	72.1%
Formal training received	308	27.9%

Artistic Income Reliance		
Arts is secondary income source	308	89.6%
Arts is primary income source	308	10.4%
Mean Earnings (MWK)		
Annual income	308	4,653,305.20
Monthly income	308	487,113.64
Weekly income	308	81,965.67
Annual sales revenue	308	4,851,776.60

[1]When collecting information on income, it is important to ask questions at multiple levels of detail, as respondents may not recall all income sources accurately. In addition, due to the seasonal nature of incomes, capturing this information in a more granular manner is essential for improving data accuracy.

Annual business expenditure	**308**	**2,220,164.80**
District	**.**	**.**
Blantyre	**308**	**37.3%**
Lilongwe	**308**	**38.3%**
Mzuzu	**308**	**24.4%**
Formal Employment Status	**.**	**.**
Employed	**308**	**27.9%**
Not employed	**308**	**72.1%**
Dependency on Employment for Income	**.**	**.**
Secondary source of income	**308**	**33.4%**
Primary source of income	**308**	**66.6%**

The study drew its sample from individuals working across various arts sectors. A minority of respondents were formally registered with recognized bodies—defined here as organizations registered for tax purposes—and this low registration rate likely reflects practitioners avoiding registration mainly to sidestep tax obligations.

The sample was distributed across three urban centers, offering representation from Malawi's Central, Southern, and Northern regions, with the largest shares coming from Lilongwe and

Blantyre and a somewhat smaller share from Mzuzu. Women made up a distinct minority of respondents, suggesting the sector is male-dominated.

Because the respondents were drawn from these urban centers, the sample skews toward a well-educated demographic, many of whom rely on arts work as their primary source of income. Most respondents had completed at least secondary education, with a substantial share also holding tertiary qualifications, while only a small fraction had no formal education at all— a reflection of the study's urban focus rather than a broader rural sample.

Limited funding access is a key challenge identified in the sector; only 10% of respondents had secured financial support. Capacity-building also emerged as a constraint, with just 27% of artists receiving formal training to enhance their skills. Furthermore, 66% indicated that art was their primary income source, and a majority of 72% were not formally employed outside the sector.

Characterisation of the Sample per Art Sector

The 308 respondents were asked about their participation in the various activities. The results from Table 3 indicate a high level of participation in artistic activities across various sectors. A majority of respondents reported involvement in performing arts, visual arts, and fashion. Significant participation was also observed in cultural heritage and media arts. Overall, 95.09% of respondents reported participating in at least one form of artistic activity. The data suggests that many individuals are involved in multiple artistic disciplines.

Art Sector Category	No (4.91%)	Yes (95.09%)	Number of Respondents
Performing Arts	2.56	97.44	78
Visual Arts	1.28	98.72	78
Cultural Heritage	12.07	87.93	58
Media Arts	7.41	92.59	27
Fashion	4.55	95.45	44

Table 3- Participation in Artistic Activities by Art Sector

Association in Art sector

It was also imperative to assess how frequently respondents engaged in their respective art activities. Many respondents were involved in multiple activities confirming what was established during the initial stakeholder meetings, that artists do multitask across disciplines. While only 61.54% of those in performing arts report frequent engagement, much higher proportions are observed in other sectors such as visual arts (88.46%), cultural heritage (89.66%), and media arts (88.89%).

Art Sector Category	No (19.65%)	Yes (80.35%)	N
Performing Arts	38.46	61.54	78
Visual Arts	11.54	88.46	78
Cultural Heritage	10.34	89.66	58
Media Arts	11.11	88.89	27
Fashion	18.18	81.82	44

Table 4 - Engagement of respondents in the various Arts Sector categories

Training Participation by Art Sector

Given the limited availability of professional training in the sector, it was important to assess whether respondents had received any training related to their specific artistic fields. The results in Table 5 reveal varying levels of training participation across different art sectors. Performing arts and visual arts recorded relatively low training rates, with 30.77% and 26.92% of respondents reporting having received training, respectively. Higher participation was observed in the media arts (40.74%) and fashion (36.36%) sectors. Cultural heritage

Art Sector Category	No (72.63%)	Yes (27.37%)	N
Performing Arts	69.23	**30.77**	78
Visual Arts	73.08	**26.92**	78
Cultural Heritage	89.66	**10.34**	58
Media Arts	59.26	**40.74**	27
Fashion	63.64	**36.36**	44

Table 6 - Training Participation by Art Sector

Funding Participation by Art Sector

In addition to training, it was also important to assess the respondents' opinions regarding the funding situation in the sector. Table 7, shows that the Visual arts (96.15%) and cultural heritage (93.10%) have the highest percentages of respondents not receiving funding, while media arts (22.22%) and fashion (13.64%) show higher percentages of respondents with funding. Performing arts also has a low funding rate, with only 11.54% of respondents receiving funding. Overall, 9.82% of the total respondents have received funding for their artistic activities.

Art Sector Category	No (90.18%)	Yes (9.82%)	N
Performing Arts	88.46	11.54	78
Visual Arts	96.15	3.85	78
Cultural Heritage	93.10	6.90	58
Media Arts	77.78	22.22	27
Fashion	86.36	13.64	44

Table 7 - Funding Participation by Art Sector

Income Earnings from the Sector

Another issue of concern was assessing the earnings disparities within the sector. This was essential since earnings are crucial to attract individuals to venture into the sector. As observed from Table 8, the average(mean) monthly income across the different art sectors varies significantly. Performing Arts has an average monthly income of MWK 428,051.28, while Visual Arts sees a slightly higher average of MWK 522,141.03. Cultural Heritage follows with an average of MWK 503,965.52, and Media Arts has the highest mean income at MWK 715,407.41. Fashion reports the lowest average monthly income at MWK 316,363.64. Overall, the mean monthly income across all sectors is MWK 479,231.58 with Media Arts standing out as the highest-earning subsector.

Table 8: Monthly Mean Income Earnings by Art Sector

Art Sector Category	Mean (MWK)	N
1. Performing Arts	428,051.28	78
2. Visual Arts	522,141.03	78
3. Cultural Heritage	503,965.52	58
4. Media Arts	715,407.41	27
5. Fashion	316,363.64	44
Total	479,231.58	285

In addition to the above, we also employed regression analysis to identify the factors determining the variation in the earnings. The table below, explains the issues.

Table 9 - Multiple Linear Regression

Monthly income	Coef.	SD	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf	Interval]	Sig
Gender	0.388	0.181	2.14	0.033	0.031	0.744	**
Education							
Primary	-0.438	0.481	-0.91	0.363	-1.384	0.509	
Secondary	0.036	0.451	0.08	0.936	-0.852	0.925	
Tertiary	0.547	0.456	1.20	0.231	-0.35	1.445	
Age	0.001	0.007	0.13	0.897	-0.013	0.015	
Received training	-0.103	0.16	-0.64	0.52	-0.418	0.212	
Employed	-0.137	0.16	-0.86	0.392	-0.451	0.178	
Frequently engages	0.414	0.167	2.48	0.014	0.086	0.742	**
Is primary income	0.904	0.185	4.90	0.00	0.541	1.267	***
Registration	0.436	0.145	3.00	0.003	0.150	0.723	***
Constant	10.2	0.56	18.20	0.000	9.097	11.303	***

Mean dependent var	12.185	SD dependent var	1.335
R-squared	0.259	Number of obs	287
F-test	11.659	Prob > F	0.000
Akaike crit. (AIC)	915.121	Bayesian crit. (BIC)	955.375

***** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1**

The multiple regression indicates gender disparities in earnings, supporting the descriptive analysis that male practitioners earn slightly higher. Furthermore, the key significant predictors include frequency of engagement in activities ($\beta = 0.414$, $p = 0.014$), arts being the primary income source ($\beta = 0.904$, $p < 0.01$), and whether the artist is registered ($\beta = 0.436$, $p = 0.003$). The higher R^2 (0.259) suggests that these variables collectively explain more income variation than gender alone.

One potential explanation for these disparities stems from the way the public values the arts. There is a perceived lack of value and appreciation, such that the earnings from the sector vary substantially. Respondents' perceptions across the various sectors support this point. As a gallery owner observed:
"Malawians do not appreciate the value of art... there isn't a lot of domestic demand." (Respondent, Gallery Owner, 2025).

This was further confirmed by a respondent from the Department of Museums and Monuments, who stated: "People take old things as primitive... they lack appreciation of our culture and traditions, even our history." (Respondent, Museums Department, 2025).

Registration Status by Art Sector

One of the issues that has stifled the sector is the low level of formal registration, specifically whether an artist is registered with any arts related body. This has implications for potential government taxes. As indicated in Table 10, performing arts have the highest percentage of registered practitioners at 67.95%, with 32.05% not registered. Visual arts show a lower registration rate of 41.03%, with a majority of 58.97% not registered. Cultural heritage has the lowest registration rate, with 81.03% of practitioners not registered, while media arts have a higher registration rate of 70.37%. Fashion shows that 36.36% of practitioners are registered and 63.64% are not registered. Overall, 45.96% of practitioners across all sectors are registered.

Table 10 - Registration Status by Art Sector

Art Sector Category	No (54.04%)	Yes (45.96%)	Number of observations
1. Performing Arts	32.05	67.95	78
2. Visual Arts	58.97	41.03	78
3. Cultural Heritage	81.03	18.97	58
4. Media Arts	29.63	70.37	27
5. Fashion	63.64	36.36	44

Registration Body Distribution by Art Sector

In addition to overall registration rates, this study sought to identify the specific recognised entities with which the registered practitioners are aligned with. Table 11 presents the distribution of registration bodies types across various art sectors

Art Sector Category	MRA (%)	Local Council (%)	Association (%)	COSOMA (%)	Other (%)
1. Performing Arts	12.64	10.34	35.63	28.74	12.64
2. Visual Arts	20.45	38.64	22.73	11.36	6.82
3. Cultural Heritage	11.76	29.41	29.41	11.76	17.65
4. Media Arts	14.81	25.93	33.33	18.52	7.41
5. Fashion	20.83	50.00	25.00	0.00	4.17
N	53	32	11	19	16

Gender Disparities in Artistic Industries

An understanding of the gender divide in participation and earnings is important to gauge gender balance within the sector. In the next section, we undertake the analysis to understand the extent of women's involvement. This is crucial for the evaluation of the SDGs, specifically SDG10 (Reduced inequalities).

Participation in Artistic Activities in the Past 12 Months

Before anything else, we assessed female participation in the sector. Male respondents showed a slightly higher participation (206) compared to females (81). Meanwhile, 6.17% of females and 4.37% of males reported not taking part. Overall, the results show a male dominated industry.

Table 12 - Participation in Artistic Activities in the Past 12 Months by Gender

Gender	No (4.88%)	Yes (95.12%)	N
Female	6.17	93.83	81
Male	4.37	95.63	206
Total	**14**	**273**	**287**

Frequency of Engagement by Gender

The results indicate that a higher proportion of males, 84.47%, frequently engage in artistic activities compared to 69.14% of females. This indicates that males are more likely to be actively involved in artistic activities. For example, males may more frequently participate in art exhibitions, theatre performances, or music sessions, while females, although still significantly engaged, might face additional societal expectations or time constraints that reduce their opportunities to engage as frequently.
long the gender dimension, one of the issues that may have contributed to the gender difference is the fact that the perception regarding the arts is that it promotes immorality, which is generally against the expected ways females have to live in the country. Hence, reducing their participation and eventually incomes. The assertion is supported by the following sentiment from a respondent from Dusty Orange Project et al, a local NGO in the creative sector: "People criticise festivals as promoting immorality, not recognising their economic value. It is even worse for females. There are very few women in the sector; most artists are men" (Respondent, DOPE Malawi, 2025).

Table 13 - Frequency of Engagement by Gender

Gender	Do Not Often Engage (19.86%)	Often Engage (80.14%)	N
Female	30.86	69.14	81
Male	15.53	84.47	206
Total	**57**	230	**287**

Weekly Earnings by Gender

Sector earnings are essential for attracting individuals across genders. The existence of a gender earnings gap represents a barrier to equitable sectoral development. The results in Table 14 reveal a consistent and notable gender gap in earnings across weekly, monthly, and overall income measures, despite similar levels of involvement in artistic activities. On average, males earned MWK 136,524.40 per week, while females earned significantly ($P<0.001$) less at MWK 89,643.26, with the overall weekly average standing at MWK123,425.30. Similarly, monthly earnings showed that females earned an average of MWK 401,333.30, whereas males earned MWK 507,393.20, indicating a difference of MWK 106,059.90 in favour of males.

Annually, the overall average income also demonstrated this disparity, with males earning MWK 5,133,930.00 compared to MWK 3,618,108.00 for females—a gap of approximately MWK 1,515,822.00. These earnings differences suggest that males may have greater access to higher-paying opportunities or roles within the sector, while females continue to face structural barriers such as unequal access to resources, networks, and recognition, all of which limit their earning potential and economic empowerment.

Table 14 – Mean Earnings by Gender (in MWK)

Gender	Weekly	Monthly	Annually	N
Female	89,643.26	401,333.30	3,618,108	81
Male	136,524.40	507,393.20	5,133,930	206
Total	**123,425.30**	**477,459.90**	**4,726,036**	**287**

Primary Income Consideration by Gender

The results indicate that a higher proportion of males (76.21%) consider art as their primary source of income, compared to 55.56% of females. The differences are statistically significant. This indicates that males are more likely to view art as their main source of income, while a significant number of females may not prioritise or depend on art as their primary economic activity. This disparity could reflect gendered differences in the stability or profitability of artistic careers for males and females, with males potentially having more opportunities or recognition in the art sector.

Table 15 - Primary Income Consideration by Gender

Gender	Do Not Consider (29.62%)	Consider (70.38%)	N
Female	44.44	**55.56**	81
Male	23.79	**76.21**	206
Total	85	**202**	**287**

Training Received by Gender

The results indicate that a higher proportion of females reported receiving training compared to males. This suggests that a greater percentage of females have access to training opportunities, though overall, both genders still report relatively low levels of training received. These findings highlight a potential gender difference in access to training, with females slightly more likely to have received training than males. However, the low overall participation rates point to a broader issue of limited training opportunities for both genders across the sector.

Table 16 - Training Received by Gender

Gender	No (72.82%)	Yes (27.18%)	N
Female	66.67	33.33	81
Male	75.24	24.76	206
Total	**209**	**78**	**287**

Formal Registration by Gender

The results indicate that a higher proportion of males reported being registered compared to females. This demonstrates a gender disparity in registration status, with males having a higher likelihood of being registered. The difference of nearly 9 percentage points suggests that males may have greater access to or face fewer barriers in the registration process compared to females.

Table 17 - Registration Status by Gender

Gender	Not Registered (54.01%)	Registered (45.99%)	Total (N)
Female	60.49	39.51	81
Male	51.46	48.54	206
Total	**155**	**132**	**287**

Understanding the Age Divide in the Art Sector

Age can play a pivotal role in shaping an artist's experiences, opportunities, and earnings within the creative economy. In Malawi's art sector, where formal structures and support systems are often limited, age may influence access to resources, networks, and visibility. Younger artists may face challenges in gaining recognition and establishing sustainable careers, while older artists might encounter barriers related to technological adaptation or evolving market preferences. This section explores the extent to which age affects participation in the arts, the nature of opportunities available across age groups, and how income levels vary accordingly. Through an age-based analysis, the study aims to uncover patterns of inequality and identify potential areas for policy intervention to foster a more inclusive and supportive artistic environment. We apply age-group classifications based on the Beresford Research framework.[2]

[2]We use the framework since it's the universal definition of the age group categorisation. For more see; https://www.beresfordresearch.com/age-range-by-generation/

Table 18 - Age Groups and Categories

Generation Name	Birth Years	Current Age (as	Key Characteristics of 2025)
Baby Boomers	1946–1964	61–79 years	Post-war economic boom, civil rights movement
Generation X	1965–1980	45–60 years	Rise of technology, independent mindset
Millennials (Gen Y)	1981–1996	29–44 years	Digital age, student debt, delayed milestones
Generation Z (Gen Z)	1997–2012	13–28 years	Social media native, diversity-focused
Generation Alpha	2013–2025	0–12 years	AI and digital learning, global pandemic experiences

The results from Table 19 indicate that a high proportion of respondents across all age groups reported frequently engaging in artistic activities, with overall sector participation at 79.55%. While Baby Boomers had the highest reported frequency (100%), the small sample size for this group (eight individuals) limits the reliability of that figure. Generation Z followed with 82.86%, then Millennials at 78.10%, and Generation X at 74.14%.

Participation in Artistic Activities

Table 19 - Participation in Artistic Activities

Age group	No (20.45 %)	Yes (79.55%)	N
Generation Z	17.14	82.86	105
Millennials	21.90	78.10	137
Generation X	25.86	74.14	58
Baby Boomers	0.00	100.00	8
Total			**308**

In addition to frequency of engagement, we also evaluated overall participation in artistic activities over the preceeding 12 months. The results in ***Table 20*** indicate that the vast majority of respondents across all age groups engaging in artistic activities in the past 12 months, with an overall participation rate of 95.45%. Engagement was highest among Baby Boomers (100%), followed closely by Generation X (98.28%), Millennials (94.89%), and Generation Z (94.29%).

Table 20 - Participation in Artistic Activities in the Past 12 Months

Age group	No (4.55%)	Yes (95.45%)	Total
Generation Z	5.71	94.29	105
Millennials	5.11	94.89	137
Generation X	1.72	98.28	58
Baby Boomers	0.00	100.00	8
Total			**308**

Table 21 - Sector of Artistic Engagement by Age Group

Sector of Artistic Activity	Generation Z	Millennials	Generation X	Baby Boomers	Total
Cultural Heritage Activities	**0.00**	**0.74**	**1.72**	**12.50**	**0.98**
Designer Fashion	**15.24**	**13.97**	**10.34**	**25.00**	**14.01**
Intangible Cultural Heritage	**19.05**	**22.06**	**17.24**	**37.50**	**20.52**
Media Arts (Radio, TV, etc.)	**9.52**	**11.76**	**5.17**	**0.00**	**9.45**
Performing Arts (Cultural)	**0.00**	**3.68**	**1.72**	**0.00**	**1.95**
Performing Arts (Music)	**25.71**	**25.00**	**27.59**	**12.50**	**25.41**
Visual Arts (Painting, Sculpture)	**29.52**	**21.32**	**32.76**	**12.50**	**26.06**
Other	**0.95**	**1.47**	**3.45**	**0.00**	**1.63**
Total					

In complementing the analysis from the preceding tables, the qualitative findings also highlighted that significant involvement of the youth presents a key opportunity for the country. A respondent from the Blantyre Arts Festival explained: "Malawi's youth demographic is an opportunity; creative hubs can reduce unemployment. The youth are talented and creative; they just need proper mentorship and a sustainable environment" (Respondent, BAF, 2025).

Perceptions and Challenges in the Art Sector

This section explores the perceptions and challenges faced within Malawi's art sector, drawing insights from both qualitative and quantitative data. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted to capture diverse perspectives across different artistic disciplines. The responses from these engagements were systematically coded and analysed using NVIVO to identify key themes and recurring issues. In addition to the qualitative analysis, quantitative data from the same survey were used to deepen the understanding of the challenges faced by individual artists. The findings reveal that the art sector is confronted with a range of structural and personal challenges.

Challenges Faced by Art Sectors

The creative sectors, including visual arts, cultural heritage, media arts, fashion, and performing arts, play a vital role in Malawi's cultural and economic landscape. These sectors contribute to national identity, social cohesion, and economic growth by providing employment, promoting tourism, and fostering innovation. However, despite their importance, they face numerous challenges that hinder their full potential.

Performing Arts Sector

In the performing arts sector, a lack of government support (16.05%) and financial constraints (16.05%) are two of the most significant challenges faced by practitioners. These issues hinder the growth and sustainability of the sector. Economic shocks (11.11%) also pose a substantial challenge, affecting the financial stability of performers and organisations. Additionally, insufficient training opportunities (9.57%) and a lack of investment (9.26%) limit the potential for skill development and long-term investment in the sector. Lack of infrastructure (8.64%) and lack of international exposure (8.95%) are other barriers, restricting performers' ability to reach larger audiences and collaborate globally. Lack of credit support (6.17%) and climate change issues (0.93%) further contribute to the challenges, although they are less prominent compared to the financial and structural issues. Technological changes (2.47%) also impact the sector, as performers need to adapt to new technologies in both production and distribution. See Figure 1.

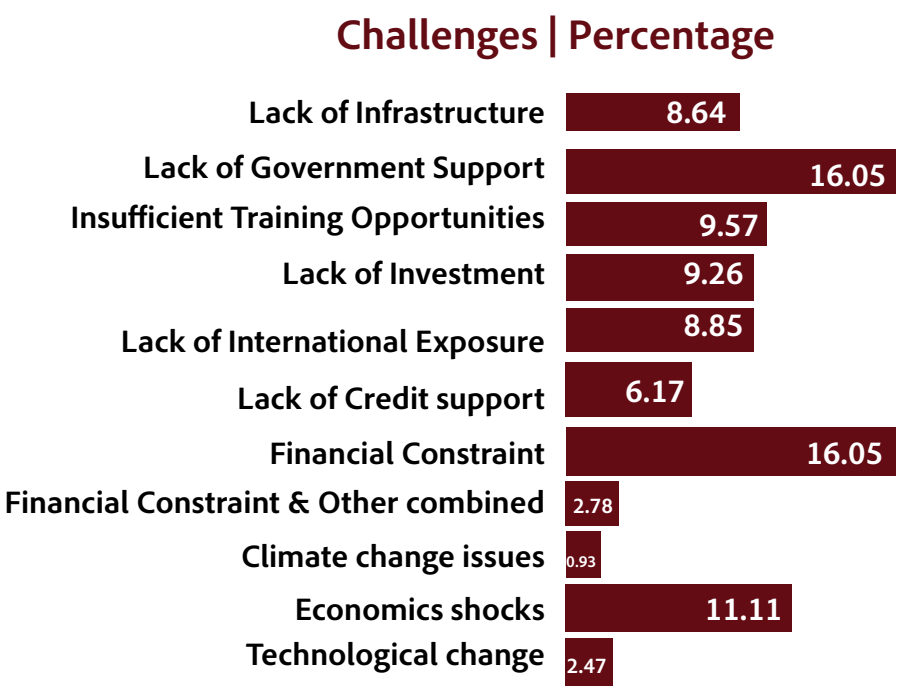


Figure 1: Challenges Faced by Performing Arts Sector

Fashion Sector

In the fashion sector, financial constraints (15.87%) and economic shocks (19.05%) are the most pressing challenges. These issues are exacerbated by a lack of government support (7.94%) and a lack of investment (7.94%), which restrict growth opportunities for fashion entrepreneurs. Similar to the other creative sub-sectors, insufficient training opportunities (7.14%) and a lack of infrastructure (7.14%) limit the ability of professionals to develop their craft and reach broader markets. Additionally, technological changes (1.59%) and climate change issues (0.79%) also present emerging challenges, though these are less pronounced compared to financial and economic constraints.

Figure 1: Challenges Faced by Performing Arts Sector

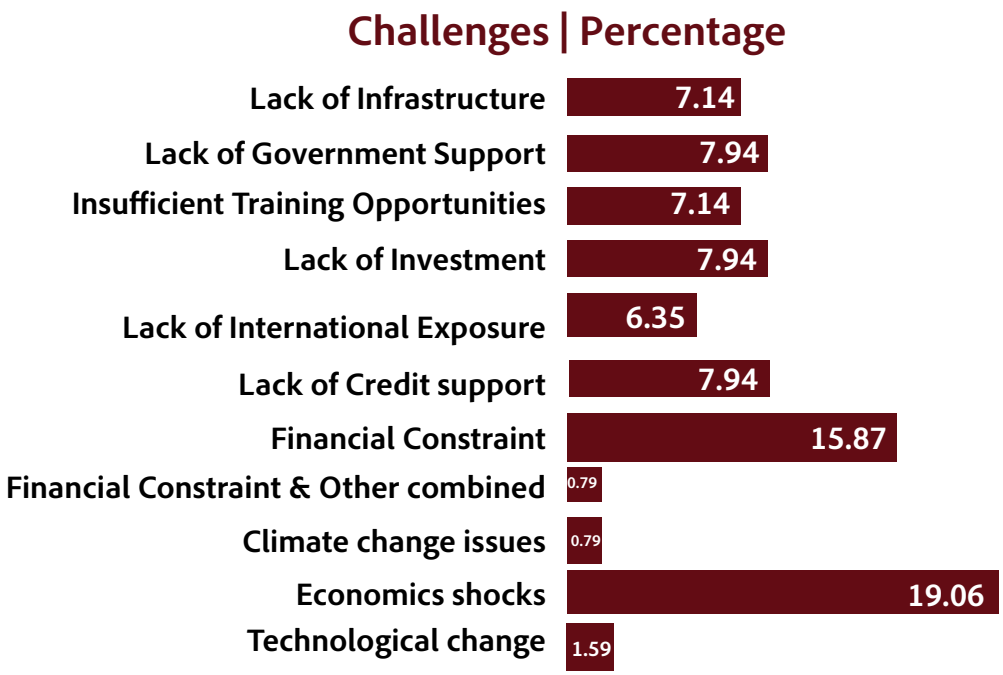
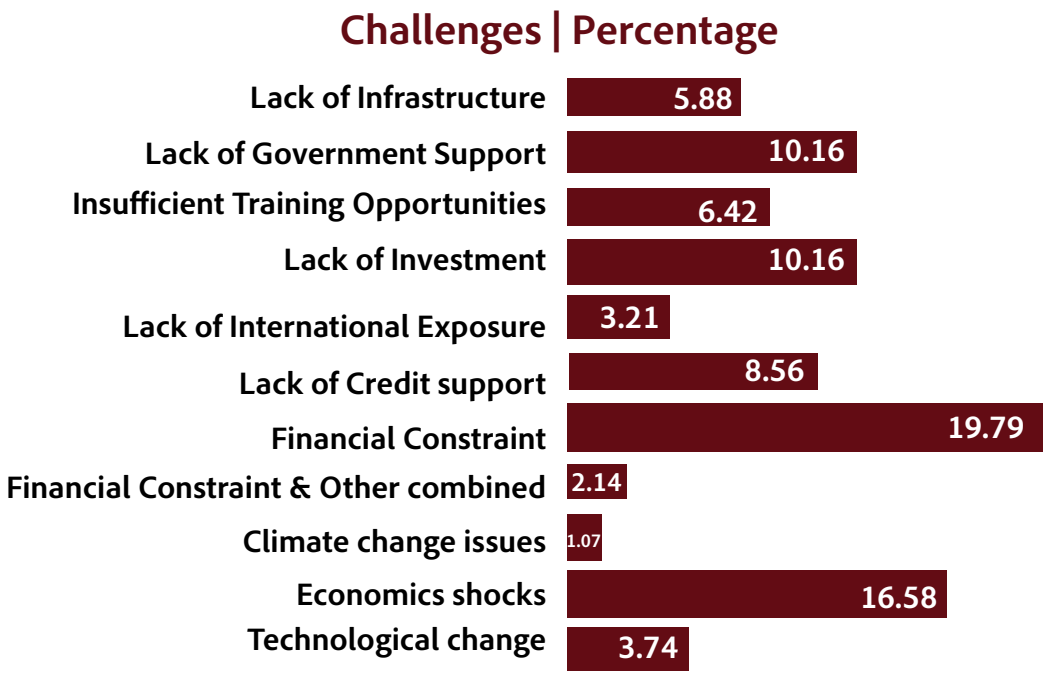


Figure 2 – Challenges Faced by Fashion Sector

Cultural Heritage Sector

In the cultural heritage sector, financial constraints remain a major challenge, reported by 19.79% of respondents. Economic shocks (16.58%) similarly affect this sector, as they impact both preservation efforts and the livelihoods of those working in the field. The sector also struggles with a lack of government support (10.16%) and a lack of investment (10.16%), which limit funding for cultural heritage initiatives. Additionally, insufficient training opportunities (6.42%) and a lack of infrastructure (5.88%) create barriers for professionals working in this area. Finally, a lack of international exposure (3.21%) also limits opportunities for cultural exchange and sectoral growth.

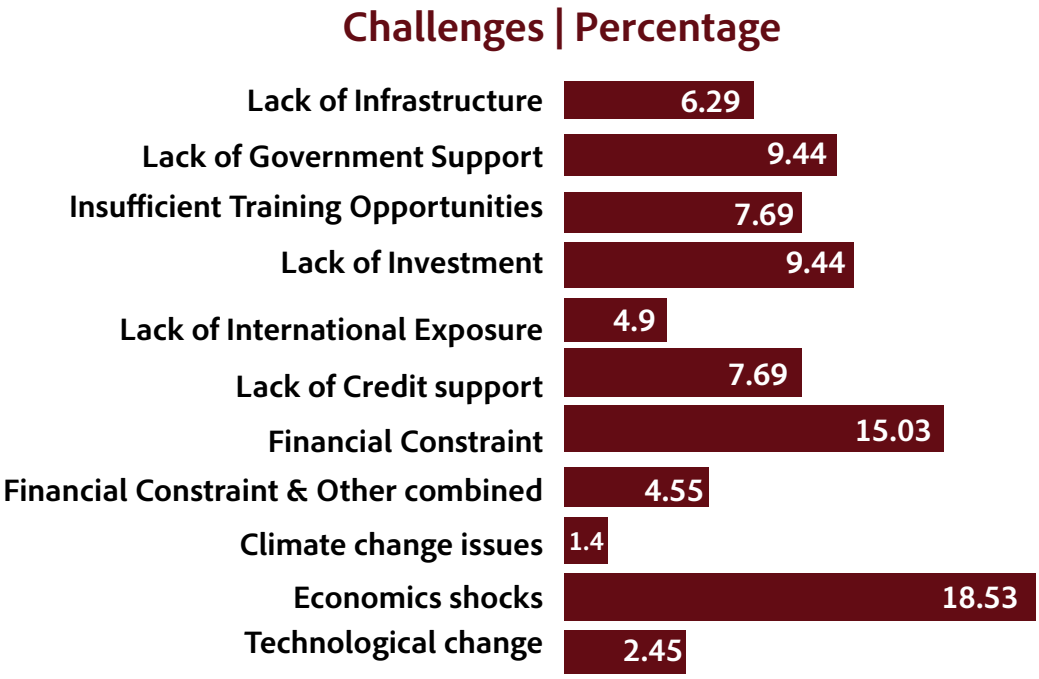
Figure 3 - Challenges Faced by Cultural Heritage Sector



Visual Arts Sector

One of the major challenges in the visual arts sector is financial constraints, with 15.03% of respondents highlighting this issue. Another significant challenge is economic shocks (18.53%), which reflects the sector's vulnerability to broader economic conditions. The sector also faces challenges such as a lack of government support (9.44%) and a lack of investment (9.44%), both of which hinder the growth and sustainability of visual arts. Furthermore, insufficient training opportunities (7.69%) and a lack of infrastructure (6.29%) continue to be barriers for visual artists, preventing them from fully developing their skills and accessing necessary resources.

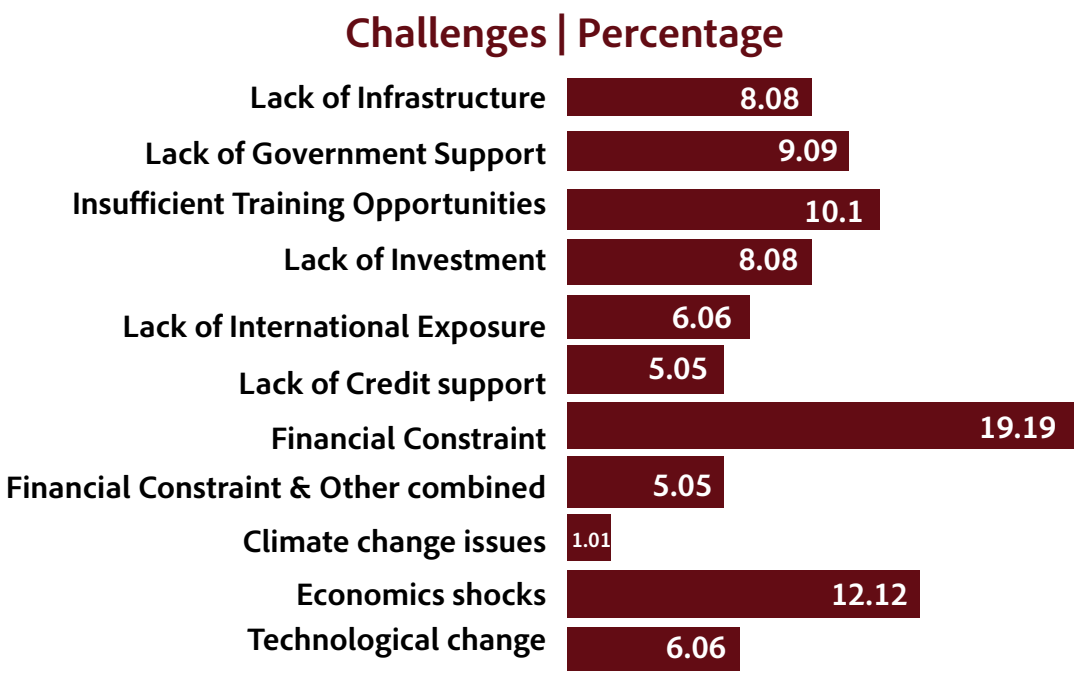
Figure 4 - Challenges Faced by Visual Arts Sector



Media Arts Sector

In the media arts sector, financial constraints (19.19%) and economic shocks (12.12%) are significant challenges, affecting both the production and distribution of media content. A lack of government support (9.09%) and a lack of investment (8.08%) further contribute to the sector's struggles, as do insufficient training opportunities (10.1%), which limit the skill development of media artists. Technological changes (6.06%) present both challenges and opportunities, requiring professionals to adapt to new tools and platforms. Finally, the sector faces additional challenges, such as a lack of international exposure (6.06%) and climate change issues (1.01%).

Figure 5 - Challenges Faced by Media Arts Sector



Apart from the issues highlighted in the tables, the qualitative findings revealed challenges that were common across all sectors. For example, respondents cited a lack of sponsorship, insufficient government support, poor and limited infrastructure, and various negative public perceptions. The verbatim responses regarding support presented below underscore these points.

Regarding government support and infrastructure, respondents reported a persistent lack of state priotisation: As an Assistant Curator noted "Government doesn't perceive art as a priority... [leading to a] lack of investment in art" (Respondent, Assistant Curator, 2025). Expanding on this, a representative from the Visual Arts Association of Malawi stated that "Government should invest in rebuilding the infrastructure in the sector and offer support to all artists by promoting their talent both locally and internationally." (Respondent, VAAM, 2025) Negative public perceptions further compound these structural barriers. A stakeholder from UNESCO observed that "[t]he perception that the creative sector is non-developmental leads to limited investment" (Respondent, UNESCO, 2025), a sentiment echoed by a local gallery owner who explained that "Malawians do not appreciate the value of art... [so] there isn't a lot of domestic demand." (Respondent, Gallery Owner, 2025).

CULTURAL INDUSTRIES SUBSECTORS



5. Cultural Industries Subsectors

This section provides an overview of Malawi's cultural industries, focusing on the performing arts, visual arts, cultural heritage, media arts and fashion sectors. It examines their contribution to the economy, cultural identity and employment, while also addressing the challenges they face and the current status of development in each sector.

5.1 Performing Arts

The performing arts in Malawi encompass modern music and dance, traditional music and dance, gospel music, comedy and drama. The sector is home to several prominent arts festivals that contribute to the sector's vibrancy and potential for expansion, including the Lake of Stars, Sand Music Festival, Zomba City Festival, Urban Music Party, Blantyre Arts Festival, Easter Theatre Festival, Tumaini Festival, and the UNIMA Theatre Festival. These events serve as vital platforms for showcasing local and international talent, helping to raise the profile of Malawian arts both regionally and globally. The performing arts sector generates significant employment opportunities for a wide range of individuals, such as artists, managers, promoters, engineers, and event planners, including supporting a wide ecosystem within the cultural industry. Data obtained from the National Statistical Office (NSO) reveals that the sector alone generates MWK1.7 billion annually.

Among the performing arts subsectors, music is considered one of the most vibrant and well-organised. Recorded music in postcolonial Malawi can be traced to the 1960s with the establishment of the Nzeru Record Company (NRC), although earlier recordings from the colonial period exist.[xxx] In recent years, the music sub-sector has experienced significant growth and development, largely attributed to the rapid adoption of technology and consumption. A 2020 BBC report notes that technology has enabled the rise of small production studios, giving both emerging and established artists a quicker and more accessible means to create and distribute their work (online),[xxxi] while digital platforms like Spotify, YouTube and Apple Music have provided Malawian musicians with global exposure.

Despite these successes, the performing arts sector faces several significant challenges that hinder its ability to grow and achieve sustainability. According to the 'Strengthening Implementation of the Malawi Cultural Policy' (2021) project report, one of the major obstacles is a lack of adequate infrastructure. Malawi possesses only a handful of professional venues: the Great Hall at the University of Malawi in Zomba, as well as the Bingu International Conference Centre, Institute for Youth and Madsoc Theatre, in Lilongwe. This scarcity of venues limits artists' ability to generate income and revenue from their work.

Piracy remains another persistent challenge, particularly affecting the music and film subsectors. Efforts by the Copyright Society of Malawi (COSOMA) to address piracy through fines, levies and the introduction of holograms have had limited success, continuing to undermine the potential earnings of artists[xxxii]. The aforementioned UNESCO report further highlights additional barriers: insufficient training institutions and opportunities; low awareness of intellectual property rights—which often leads to artists not receiving fair compensation when their work is used without their authorisation—and limited funding opportunities for the creation and dissemination of artistic works. Furthermore, the low uptake of technology persists as an impediment. While some sectors like music and film have been earlier adopters of technology, gaps in legal and policy frameworks continue to limit artists' ability to fully take advantage of it for income and revenue generation.

5.2 Visual Arts

Malawi's visual arts encompass plastics arts –such as painting, sculpture, ceramics, graphic arts, handcraft, pottery, photography, printmaking and drawing, alongside a growing film subsector that includes actors, operators, movie houses, producers, directors, script writers, distributors. The sector features prominent art galleries including KwaHaraba Art Gallery, La Carvena Art Gallery, Kaliso Art Gallery, Kungoni Art Gallery, and Galleria Art. According to the President of the Visual Arts Association of Malawi, Gilbert Mpakule, the association has 160 registered members.[xxxiii] Meanwhile, filmmaker Ashukile Mwakisulu notes that the Film Association of Malawi has only 120 registered members.[xxxiv] This low membership exists despite the fact that many more visual artists and filmmakers are actively working across the country, indicating a large informal segment in the industry. According to the NSO data, the sector generates a combined revenue of MWK 101 million towards the country's GDP.

5.3 Cultural Heritage

The cultural heritage sector comprises tangible and intangible cultural heritage, encompassing cultural festivals, traditional ceremonies, practices, art and antiques, museums, and monuments. The sector includes 11 active cultural heritage foundations and associations, which play critical roles in the preservation and promotion of Malawi's cultural heritage. The country has seven museums: the Chichiri Museum, the Karonga Museum, Lake Malawi Museum, Mtengatenga Post Hut Museum, Mzuzu Regional Museum, Livingstonia Mission Stone House Museum, and Kungoni Museum. It also features key monuments such as the Zomba War Memoria, National Memorial Tower, St Peters Cathedral located on Likoma Island, Independence Arch and the Kamuzu Mausoleum. All museums in Malawi are run by the Department of Museums and Monuments.

The sector boasts key cultural festivals and celebrations. In the Northern Region, these include ***Gonapamuhanya*** in Rumphi, the Karonga-Chitipa Cultural Festival in Karonga, Chirimika Festival in Nkhatabay and the ***Umthetho*** Festival in Mzimba. The Central Region is home to the ***Umhlangano*** in Ntcheu and the Kulamba ceremony (primarily held in Zambia but significant for the Chewa people in Malawi). In the Southern Region, notable events include ***Mulhakho wa Alhomwe*** in Mulanje, ***Chiwanja cha aYao*** in Mangochi and ***M'gumano Wa Asena Na Amang'anja*** in Chikwawa. Annually, these cultural festivals play a vital role in promoting tourism, enhancing economic activities, fostering cultural exchanges and strengthening social cohesion.

Key cultural places include the Chongoni Rock Art-Area World Heritage Site in Dedza, Malape Pillars in Machinga, Fort Matete in Nkhatabay, Fort Mangochi in Mangochi, Zoa Falls in Thyolo, Fort Lister in Mulanje, Kapichira Falls in Chikwawa, Mandala Falls in Zomba, Nkula Falls in Neno, Kumbali Cultural Village in Lilongwe, Nguludi Slave House in Chiladzulu, Lake Malawi National Park World Heritage Site in Mangochi, Mount Mulanje Cultural Landscape World Heritage Site in Mulanje, Khulubvi Sacred Landscape and Associated M'bona Shrines in Nsanje, Karoo Fossil (Jurassic) Sediments in Karonga and Mua Mission (Kunogni Centre for Culture and Art) in Dedza.

Key developments in the sector include the documentation of folktales project implemented by the National Library Service and the Malawi National Commission for UNESCO supported by the Rei Foundation Limited, the documentation of folksongs project supported likewise by the Rei Foundation Limited, and led by the Music Crossroads Malawi in partnership with the Malawi National Commission for UNESCO, the several 'Community-based Inventorying of intangible cultural heritage' projects; and the resulting inventories of intangible cultural heritage of Malawi led by the Malawi National Commission for UNESCO and the Department of Museums and Monuments of Malawi. In 2024, a database of Malawi's intangible cultural heritage was launched supported by the Rei Foundation in collaboration with the Malawi National Commission for UNESCO (MNCU), the Malawi National Library Service (NLS), Sony and Music Crossroads Malawi. The repository houses hundreds of audio and video recordings, transcriptions and sheet music of folk stories and folk songs in Malawi's indigenous languages.

There have also been key developments to promote Malawi's intangible cultural heritage at the international and national levels through the nomination and inscription of various intangible cultural elements to the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Humanity by the National Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee (NICHC) between 2001 and 2022. These include: a) Nsima, the Culinary Tradition of Malawi (inscribed in 2017— a Malawian name for a form of thick porridge mainly prepared using a range of grain flours such as maize, cassava, millet and sorghum alongside their accompaniments; b) Mwinoghe, the Joyous Dance of the Sukwa People of Northern Malawi; c) Gule Wamkulu, the Great Dance of the Chewa People (a multinational inscription involving Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia); d) Vimbuza, the healing dance of the Tumbuka People of Northern Malawi, e) Tchopa, the Sacrificial Dance of the Lhomwe People and f) Mbira/Sansi music inscribed jointly with the Zimbabwe's Department of Culture. Mbira/Sansi involves a thumb piano performance and is predominatly found in the Central and Southern Regions of Malawi.

Despite these key developments and the diversity of cultural products, NSO financial data indicates that the sector contributes only MWK 12 million to the country's GDP. This suggests that there is significant under-promotion of Malawi's cultural heritage at both local and international levels, despite its potential to contribute significantly more. As outlined by various respondents, factors contributing to its underdevelopment include inadequate government support and limited private sector investment.

5.4 Media Arts

The media arts sector in Malawi comprises radio, television, film, digital content creation, publishing, design and marketing and advertising. According to the NSO financial data, it is one of the highest contributors to the national GDP, generating an estimated MWK 11 billion. The sector is made up of the following associations: the Film Association of Malawi, the Institute of Marketing of Malawi, the Fashion of Malawi, including other entities such as Media Council of Malawi, the Media Institute of Southern Malawi (MISA) that play critical roles in the sector.

From 1964 to 1994, Malawi had only one radio station. Following the introduction of multiparty politics in 1994, privately owned radio stations emerged, and the government established the country's first television station in 1998.[xxxv] The Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) was established in 1998 by the Communications Act, which empowered it with the responsibility to regulate the communications sector in Malawi, including telecommunications, broadcasting, and postal services. Today, MACRA issues out various licenses enabling telecommunications, broadcasting and postal services organisations to conduct business in Malawi. Currently, Malawi has a total of 57 radio stations (two public radio broadcasters; 33 private radio stations and 11 community radio stations) and 18 television stations (one public television station) operating in the country.[xxxvi] In recent years, the emergence of online publications has further transformed the communication landscape.

The film sector has been one of the early adopters of technology, with artists initially generating income through DVD sales and later by sharing content on platforms like YouTube. However, although many Malawian filmmakers distribute their films online, hence reaching a wider audience base, they struggle to earn revenue from these platforms due to gaps in the legal and policy framework, which limit their ability to monetise their content.[xxxvii] As a result, filmmakers largely rely on physical screenings to earn income. The subsector hosts several major arts and film events, including Art in the Park, the Malawi Film Festival and the EU Film Festival.

The sector faces a wide range of challenges, many of which are identified in the report on the "Strengthening the implementation of the cultural policy in Malawi" project. These include rampant piracy and weak intellectual property protection, lack of film houses, and high production costs —compounded by limited government financial investment and a shortage of training institutions. The University of Malawi only introduced the country's first Bachelor of Arts in Filmmaking in 2024. Other training programmes, such as the MultiChoice Talent Factory, have yet to make a broader impact, with only a few Malawians having accessed these opportunities. Consequently, most filmmakers in Malawi remain self-taught.

The publishing sector comprises writers, publishers, , magazines, newspapers, booksellers, illustrators, libraries, archives and producers of print edition books. According to the 2013 World Intellectual Property Organisation copyright-based mapping study,[xxxviii] the sector is largely driven by the education sector through the production and consumption of textbooks used across primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. Both the 2013 WIPO study and the 'Strengthening Implementation of the Malawi Cultural Policy' (2021)

project report highlighted several challenges hampering the sector, including weak intellectual property protection and piracy. It was noted that limited access to books often result in book piracy and photocopying. In terms of market share, private publishers are often constrained by state publishers such as the Malawi Institute of Education (MIE), which commands a dominant market shares, putting private publishers at a disadvantage.[xxxix] Other factors affecting the sector include the low demand for books due to low reading and book buying culture in Malawi, which severely depresses the market for non-academic books is significantly low.

Other significant components in the media arts sector are the design, marketing and advertising sub-sectors. There are over 60 advertising agencies in Malawi, with the most dominant being those working in partnership with multinational advertising agencies, representing significant revenue generation and employment opportunities.[xl] According to UNESCO's 2022 ***Assessment of Media Development*** in Malawi report, technology is contributing to significant shifts in the sector, leading to rapid migration to digital advertising and marketing. This transition has created new employment opportunities for Malawians in the digital economy.[xli]

5.5 Fashion

The fashion sector in Malawi encompasses the clothing, footwear and accessories subsectors. It is a major contributor to the national economy; according to the financial data provided to this study by the National Statistical Office (NSO), the sector contributes an estimated MWK15.1 billion, making it the largest creative industry contributor to the national GDP. A 2023 UNESCO report titled, ***The African Fashion Sector: Trends, Challenges and Opportunities for Growth***, indicates that Malawi's fashion sector exports (textile, clothing and footwear) amounted to USD 10.9 million ($10,902,460). [xlii]

The fashion sector has a vibrant history in Malawi, dating back to the 1950s. The first major textile manufacturer was the British company David Whitehead and Sons, which opened a state-run textile factory in 1957.[xliii] Initially, the company produced multi-coloured printed cotton cloth, famously known as chitenje, which is widely worn by women. The production of party chitenje cloths became a mainstay, particularly during the one-party rule of Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda, and continued after the introduction of multiparty politics. This historical demand, alongside contemporary needs, has sustained the demand for commissioned garments from religious bodies, non-government organisation (NGOs), and corporate entities. By 2000, the textile and clothing production sector accounted for 34% of the total manufacturing activity and employed 29,000 people.[xliv]

For many years, the sector has operated on two fronts: the established clothing manufacturing companies and individual fashion designers. Historically, the latter group has largely operated informally. However, recent events have begun to formalise and give greater prominence to fashion designers in Malawi. These include the establishment of the Malawi Fashion Week in 2013[xlv], Mzuzu Fashion Week in 2014 and the participation of Malawian fashion designer Lily Alfonso at African Fashion Week in London in 2012. [xlvi]

Despite its history and the steps toward formalisation, the clothing and textile sector faces several challenges. One major issue is the country's inability to grow sufficient cotton to meet the demand for garments, leading to a reliance on imports.[xlvii] This is compounded by the influx of cheap, often second-hand, clothes, which severely undercuts the ability of locally produced garments to compete on price.

The fashion sector holds significant potential due to a number of factors, partly driven by the growing demand for African fashion brands. However, this potential is hindered by the sector being largely self-driven and historically lacking consistent government investment and support. Despite these challenges and the sector's self-reliance, opportunities exist. Malawi, for instance, has been a beneficiary of the US African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA)– which provides duty-free access to the US market for eligible developing nations. Unfortunately, the country has not fully capitalised on this framework. This is evidenced by the significant decline in apparel exports to the US, falling from $26.8 million in 2004 to $0.3 million in 2022.[xlviii] Nevertheless, recent government-led efforts aim to promote locally made textiles and garments, including initiatives such as the 'Wear Malawi Fridays' or 'Buy Malawian' campaigns. [xlix]

OPPORTUNITIES

6. Opportunities

Malawi's arts and creative sector is brimming with untapped potential that, if harnessed effectively, can play a transformative role in the nation's economic and cultural development. The following areas represent key strategic opportunities for advancing and expanding the cultural sector.

Strengthening Royalties and Licensing Systems
Optimising revenue through copyright royalties and licensing offers a sustainable income stream for artists while protecting intellectual property. A well-regulated copyright and licensing system enables artists to earn fair compensation from the continued use and reproduction of their work. Moreover, fees for using public spaces for performances and exhibitions can generate income for local councils while encouraging more professionalised arts management across the country.

Promoting Cultural and Heritage Tourism
Malawi's cultural and heritage sector offers immense potential for cultural tourism. Tourists visiting Malawi can be drawn to local arts, performances, festivals and cultural events, thereby contributing to surrounding economies through spending on accommodation, food, and souvenirs. Promoting Malawi as a cultural destination can bring both economic and social benefits by highlighting its vibrant creative identity and cultural traditions.

Expanding Export Opportunities
Exporting Malawian art and cultural goods provides a significant pathway to increase foreign exchange earnings and boost the country's global profile. Tapping into regional and international markets for Malawian art, crafts, music and fashion can turn local talent into globally recognised commodities. Government support in trade facilitation and the removal of export barriers will ensure that the creative sector is competitive on the global stage.

Targeted Financing for Job Creation and Sustainable Creative Economies
Providing targeted financial support through grants, subsidies or public-private partnerships can catalyse sector growth. For instance, grants tied to job creation, cultural preservation, or innovation can result in measurable outcomes. Public investment in creative infrastructure, such as theatres, galleries, and cultural centres, can stimulate economic activity, provide opportunities for job creation across the value chain.

Youth Engagement
With a predominantly youthful population, Malawi's creative economy is driven by young people under the age of 30. Investing in mentorship, training, and exchange programmes has the potential to not only support the talent development, but also prevent loss of skilled individuals to other sectors or abroad. Moreover, promoting youth participation also ensures that Malawi retains its emerging talent, fostering home grown innovation that can lead to sustainable job creation and social development.

Collaboration with Other Sectors
Cross-sector collaboration with other industries such as tourism, hospitality, and media presents the cultural sector with valuable opportunities to expand market access and create new revenue streams. These partnerships can increase visibility, open new markets and attract investment. Strategic partnerships with international partners and private companies can further strengthen the ecosystem and elevate Malawi's cultural profile at a global level.

Taxation as a Growth Lever
A clear and efficient taxation system is crucial for both the government and the arts sector to benefit from the sector's growth. As the sector expands, artists and creative businesses will become significant contributors to the economy. Establishing transparent tax policies and efficient collection mechanisms will ensure mutual benefit. For instance, introducing sales tax on art and cultural products—particularly those purchased by tourists—can enhance revenue while integrating the arts into the nation's economic framework. At the same time, offering tax breaks or VAT exemptions on art supplies, equipment, and creative services can lower production costs and support business growth within the sector.

Economic Impact and Broader Development
The arts sector contributes to Malawi's economy through job creation, income generation, and the promotion of cultural tourism. Festivals and cultural events such as the Lake of Stars Festival, Sand Music Festival, Zomba City Festival, Easter Theatre Festival, UNIMA Theatre Festival and the Umthetho Cultural Festival, among others, have demonstrated the sector's potential to attract international audiences, thereby generating significant revenue for local economies. These events generate significant revenues for industries. With sustained investment and policy support, the arts can diversify Malawi's economy, contributing to GDP growth, improving foreign exchange earnings, and increasing employment opportunities.

CONTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL CROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT



7. Contribution to National Gross Domestic Product

The study evaluated the GDP contribution at market prices, based on data obtained from the Balance of Payments from the National Statistical Office (NSO) and the Malawi Revenue Authority. Data reveals that the sector contributes roughly MWK 28,338,719,805 (approximately MWK 28.34 billion), which accounts for 0.4% of the national GDP. The share of each component is split as below.

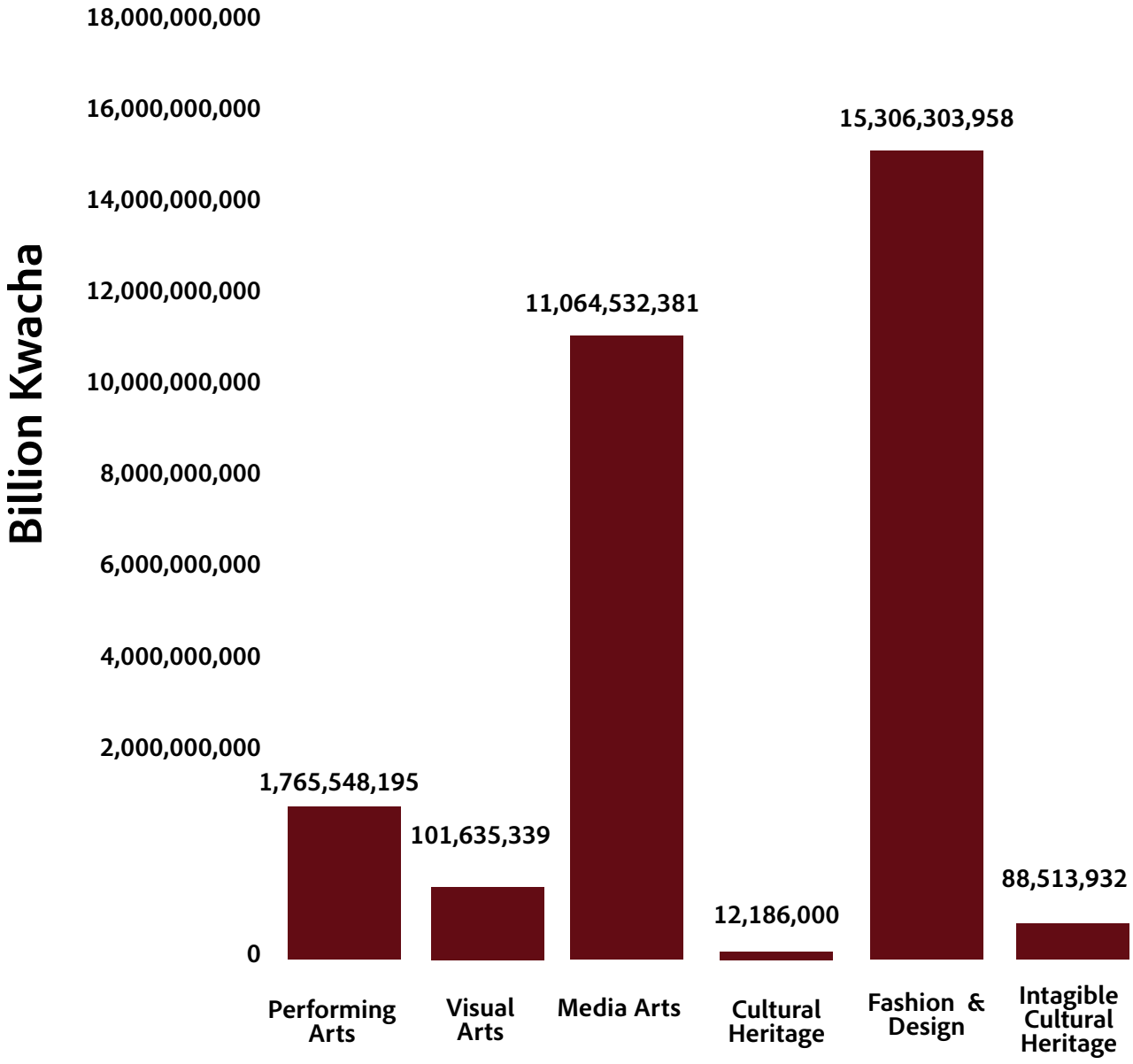


Figure 6 Subsector GDP Summary

The value of the contribution of the arts sector in Malawi aligns with global literature that emphasises the sector's growing importance in economic development. Worldwide, UNESCO estimates that cultural and creative industries (CCI) account for 6.2% of global employment and contribute 3.1% of world GDP. On the African continent, UNCTAD's 2024 survey found CCI contributing between 0.5% and 7.3% of GDP in surveyed economies, employing between 0.5% and 12.5% of the workforce. However, Africa's share of the global creative economy remains under 1% as of 2020 .. This difference can largely be attributed to the limited structural and policy support across many African nations, which stifles the sector's growth, formalisation, and innovation potential.

In Malawi, the actual contribution of the arts sector may be underestimated due to several factors. Firstly, a significant portion of the sector operates informally. Many artists, creatives, and cultural practitioners are not registered under official business or economic entities, making it challenging for their contributions to be captured in national statistics or integrated into the tax system. Secondly, institutional challenges such as poor data management further contribute to this undervaluation. For instance, some records at the Malawi Revenue Authority (MRA), where sectoral contributions were previously reported, are incomplete or missing. These gaps in documentation restrict the ability to accurately assess the sector's economic impact, thereby undermining opportunities for support and investment.

[3] *https://unctad.org/publication/creative-economy-outlook-2024*

RECOMMENDATIONS

8.Recommendations

Fostering the growth and sustainability of Malawi's arts sector requires a holistic approach that combines targeted investments, financial support mechanisms, private-public partnerships, media outreach, and robust institutional support. These recommendations aim to create a thriving arts environment that supports artists, contributes to economic growth, and strengthens national cultural identity.

- ***Increase Government Funding and Infrastructure Investment***
  Prioritise consistent government budget allocations to the arts, focusing on developing performance venues, art spaces, festival facilities and galleries. This investment provides artists with essential platforms to showcase their work, nurtures local talent, and promotes job creation while elevating cultural pride. Possible sources for financing could include levies on beverages and international marketing and local cultural products.

- ***Strengthen Institutional and Policy Frameworks***
  Operationalise institutions such as NAHEC to provide strategic direction for the cultural and heritage sector, ensuring the effective implementation of policies that safeguard artists and support sectoral growth. Government, cultural organisations and artists should collaborate to strengthen, review and develop national policies that align with Malawi's cultural goals, thereby positioning the cultural industries as key contributors to national development.

- ***Expand Research and Data-Driven Policy Development***
  Conduct comprehensive research to assess the arts sector's economic contributions and identify growth opportunities. Collaborations among government, academia, and arts organisations will be essential in guiding evidence-based decisions to address gaps in funding, training, and regulatory support.

- ***Enhance Access to Financial Support and Credit***
  Develop tailor-made, sector-specific funding mechanisms; such as grants, loans, and credit facilities, to improve access to finance and stimulate growth within the cultural sector. These mechanisms can play a crucial role in easing financial barriers, enabling artists and cultural practitioners to scale their work, manage their businesses more effectively, and contribute more significantly to the economy.

- ***Promote Private Sector Engagement and Public-Private Partnerships***
  Encourage private sector involvement in arts development through public-private partnerships. These partnerships can diversify funding sources, provide additional resources, and create a resilient support network for creative entrepreneurs.

- ***Provide Training and Professional Development***
  Build the capacities and skills of arts and cultural practitioners through training and mentorship programmes to increase industry standards. Partnerships with local, regional and international arts training institutions can play a vital role in equipping those working within the sector to produce high-quality cultural products suitable for both local and international markets, thereby enhancing the global competitiveness of Malawian cultural products.

- ***Ensure Fair Compensation and Rights Management***
  Develop a national framework to guarantee fair remuneration in the cultural sector. This will help ensure that artists are properly compensated for their work, encouraging continued creativity, and enabling artists to sustain their livelihoods.

- ***Develop a National Cultural Statistics Framework***
  Develop a national framework for collection of cultural statistics to ensure that the economic the contribution of the cultural industries is captured in national statistics and integrated into the tax system.

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