
REGIONAL CASES

➔ **AFRICA:**
**AFRIQUE EN CRÉATION SUPPORTS CULTURAL EXPRESSION
 AND EXCHANGE**

In a Nutshell

Sustain and nurture creativity, promote artists, encourage new talents and innovative aesthetics, strengthen and network cultural organizations: these are the watchwords of the Afrique en Création programme, launched by the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs through the French Association for Artistic Action (AFAA). The programme supports the professional training of Africa's artistic talents in the stage and visual arts, and in so doing helps build upon the continent's rich cultures.

By contributing to a better knowledge of African creativity, paving the way for artistic exchanges within Africa and with northern countries, and bringing together civil initiatives, Afrique en Création underscores the contributions of Africa to worldwide cultural exchange. Moreover, it recognizes culture as an important means of communication between peoples that supports to the wider development process, with the potential for playing a role in improving education and reducing poverty.

The Story

Cultural and artistic activity has blossomed in Africa and is now spreading to the world stage through the growing presence of African artists at international events. While remaining rooted in their cultural heritage, these artists are avidly exploring new avenues of creativity and setting their sights firmly on a global audience.

The Afrique en Création initiative has fostered this evolution by helping to develop a vision and an agenda to promote contemporary arts and culture, especially nationally and regionally. An international forum held in 1990 brought together several hundred artists and cultural representatives to chart the future of African cultural development, and to define the role that cultural cooperation could play.

Over the subsequent decade, artists redefined their position in modern African society, as they progressively broke their dependence on the state and political circles. Young emerging artists began to see themselves as “entrepreneurs” offering a new form of societal expression and playing a more direct role in advancing development.

The initiative aims to professionalize the arts by supporting creativity and the development of cultural expression, offering opportunities to African artists to participate in major international events, and providing exposure to new techniques and production methods. The programme has focused on creating a

network of African cultural organizations; professionalizing African artistic companies; sponsoring artistic events in Africa; and improving the know-how of artists and cultural entrepreneurs

But in achieving their autonomy and freedom of expression, artists have lost many traditional forms of support. Today, they need to devise innovative ways to sustain themselves, even in the midst of harsh economic realities and a lack of encouraging policy and legal frameworks. Financial and technical assistance therefore continues to be critical in furthering their development. In 2001, an updated and reformulated *Afrique en Création* programme, implemented on behalf of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs by AFAA, was launched with this need in mind. A principal source of funding has been the French government's Priority Fund for Solidarity (FSP), totalling some \$2 million.

Results and Critical Factors

According to a recent evaluation, *Afrique en Création* is helping to raise the status of cultural and artistic cooperation projects. The promotion of artistic productions, the artists themselves and cultural organizations has increased noticeably.

A total of 184 activities have occurred in at least 25 countries, while many artists and cultural entrepreneurs have presented their works across the continent as well as in Europe, especially in France. Key achievements include the organization of events in Bamako and Antananarivo, the international recognition of the creative dynamism of African visual arts, and the formation of the informal network of cultural organizations, which has complemented the direct support provided to many cultural agencies and artists. The programme has also given visibility, credibility and opportunities to many hitherto unknown cultural organizations.

Factors that have contributed to the success of *Afrique en Création* include:

- Continuous and close dialogue between the project team and African partners has helped ensure the relevance of assistance. While providing technical and financial support, the programme has emphasized the importance of building existing capacities, networks and information sources. It has mobilized local expertise to provide training and support, as well as to assist with major events. This has ensured that support remains rooted in local experience and adapted to local realities.
- Diverse intervention strategies have been employed to stimulate the sector, ranging from small-scale financial support for individual artists and companies to the organization of international events. Assistance of this nature must be viewed as a long-term process requiring multi-year and flexible funding arrangements.
- Stimulation of complementary support took place: for every 1 Euro spent from the FSP funding, an additional 1.36 was raised. Moreover, local partners have been encouraged to diversify their financial partnerships with

other northern organizations. More effort is needed to build synergy among northern funders in order to rationalize and optimize available sources of assistance.

- More could be done as well to involve formal institutions at the country and regional level that can influence the long-term development and sustainability of the arts in terms of access to funding, as well as the promotion of wider public interest and support.

Further information

Afrique en Création (www.afa.asso.fr/site_aec/index.php).

Various articles relating to Afrique en Création contained in the AFAA magazine, *Rezo International*, 8, and other issues (www.afa.asso.fr/site/part_3_ress/pdf_rezo/rezo-no-8.pdf).

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