

Building the Creative Economy in Africa



Navigating Challenges: How to Build Resilience in the Creative Economy



Learning Unit 6

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Learning Unit 6: Navigating Challenges: How to Build Resilience in the Creative Economy

1. Introduction

Welcome to the final unit of this course!

This concluding unit is designed to help creative entrepreneurs **reflect on the challenges they may face in building and sustaining a creative business**. It will also provide practical advice to overcome these difficulties. As artists and creatives, navigating the journey of establishing and growing a creative business can be rewarding but also demanding. By understanding these challenges and equipping yourself with strategies to tackle them, you can build resilience and thrive in the creative economy.

2. Learning Objectives

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand common challenges faced by creatives in building and sustaining a business.
- Apply strategies for managing financial and professional challenges.

This unit will provide you with insights, resources, and tips to navigate the complexities of the creative economy with confidence and creativity.

Please be on the lookout for **short activities** to complete throughout the unit. They will help you achieve the learning objectives mentioned above.

You can find the **video transcripts** at the end of this unit.

3. Challenges You May Face as a Creative

In the Creative Economy, artists and creators have the chance to show their talents and run their own businesses. However, this **industry also comes with challenges that need to be managed**.

Up next, we'll hear from Volley once more as we explore some common challenges creatives often encounter and share practical tips to help navigate and overcome them.



Activity 1: Challenges for Creative Professionals

Watch the following video, where Volley explains key challenges and shares advice on handling them.

[Key Challenges and How to Deal with Them](#)

After watching the video, review the points mentioned below by Volley.

Competing with Big Companies:

- Large companies have more money and resources, making it harder for independent creators to stand out.
- Competing with these giants can feel overwhelming when you are just starting out.

Misunderstanding Contracts:

- Not understanding contracts can lead to legal or financial problems.
- Contracts can be tricky, especially if you don't have legal knowledge, which can put you at risk.

Being Exploited:

Some people might try to take advantage of your talent and passion for their own benefit.

It is important to stay alert and protect yourself from unfair treatment or deception.

Think about how you could handle these challenges if they come up. What practical steps could you take to overcome them?

Our Reveal:

You'll find some possible solutions to these and other challenges at the end of this section.

Now that Volley has shared some of the challenges he has faced in the past, let's see what other challenges creatives may face when starting or running a business.



Activity 2: Identifying Additional Challenges

The creative industry is always evolving. With new technologies, shifting trends, and societal changes, creative professionals often encounter unexpected challenges. Let's think about this for a moment:

What other challenges have you faced or do you think you might face in your creative work?

Take a minute to reflect, and then write down your thoughts.

Our Reveal:

Here are some common challenges creatives face, with examples from the creative economy:

Financial Instability	Irregular income can make it hard to plan and sustain a business. <i>Example:</i> A freelance illustrator might have months with multiple projects and others with none, making budgeting difficult.
Adapting to Technological Changes	Keeping up with new tools and technologies is essential to stay competitive. <i>Example:</i> A graphic designer needs to learn updated design software or new tools like AI art to meet client demands.
Maintaining Creative Control	Balancing your artistic vision with what clients want can be tough. <i>Example:</i> A filmmaker wants to make an experimental short film, but a client insists on a more traditional style, forcing compromises.
Managing Client Expectations	Clear communication is key to avoiding misunderstandings and ensuring clients are happy. <i>Example:</i> A photographer agrees to a client's vague request for "a creative look" but ends up redoing the shoot because the client had a different idea of what that meant.

These examples highlight the challenges creatives often face and how they can impact their work. In the next activity, you'll see how Aysha overcame the challenges she faced.



Activity 3: Aysha's Challenges

You met Aysha earlier in the course. She's a creative entrepreneur from Kenya who has built her business around her culinary art. Aysha's story highlights some of the challenges she's faced, not just in running a business but also in navigating the industry as a woman creative.

Watch the following video, paying attention to how Aysha describes the obstacles she's encountered and then answer the question.

[Navigating Challenges as a Woman Creative](#)

1. What do you understand Aysha's challenges to be?

Our Reveal:

- **Social Stigma:** Single women, especially single mothers, often face judgment and are underestimated due to cultural biases and societal norms.
- **Cultural Differences:** Attitudes toward single women vary across cultures—some may dismiss them, while others embrace their skills and contributions regardless of background.
- **Lack of Business Connections:** Without established networks or affiliations (e.g. owning a restaurant or brand), it's harder for women to gain recognition or access opportunities.
- **Quality vs Recognition:** Even when women offer high-quality products (like food), they may struggle to compete with established businesses due to limited visibility or support.
- **Resilience and Talent:** Despite these challenges, many women excel, especially in culinary fields, proving their expertise and dedication through their work.

How did your answers compare with those given above? Did you come up with other points that we hadn't spotted?

Through stories like Aysha's, you can see that the creative industry is deeply personal and shaped by factors like gender, culture, and societal expectations. These narratives remind us that **challenges can also be opportunities for innovation and resilience**. Keep these insights in mind as we move forward in our creative journeys.

These three activities have helped you identify key challenges in your creative business. Now, let's **explore some practical ways to overcome these challenges**.

Challenge	Solution	What You Can Do	Example
Competing with Big Companies	Highlight Your Unique Style	Focus on what makes your work special	Jewellery designer uses local traditions to create one-of-a-kind pieces that big brands can't replicate.
	Build a Loyal Customer Base	Offer great service and build personal connections	Painter sends thank-you notes and offers custom artwork to repeat buyers.
	Find a Niche Market	Target a specific audience that values your approach	Photographer offers eco-friendly wedding shoots for sustainability-minded couples.
Ensuring Contract Clarity	Seek Legal Help	Ask a professional for advice if a contract is confusing	Singer checks with a lawyer before signing with a big client
	Read Carefully and Ask Questions	Understand all terms before signing	Freelance writer asks about payment terms to avoid confusion
Protecting Yourself from Exploitation	Trust Your Gut	If something feels off, look into it further	Illustrator rejects a deal offering "exposure" suspecting it may not be genuine
	Don't Chase Empty Promises of Fame	Focus on real opportunities that respect your talent	Musician declines an unpaid "big break" gig for and works with smaller venues that pay fairly.

4. Advice for Creative Professionals: Insights from Volley and 'H'

In the Creative Economy, **success comes with both challenges and opportunities.** Learning from experienced creatives can help you navigate this journey. In the following videos, Volley and 'H' share tips on the qualities, discipline, and focus needed to grow your career.



Activity 4: Advice for Creative Professionals

Watch the following videos and then review the key advice 'H' and Volley have gathered from their experiences.

[Volley on Working with Others](#)

['H' on Your Role as an Artist](#)

Our Reveal:

Punctuality and Reliability

- Always be on time and deliver your work as promised. This builds trust with clients and teammates.
- Meeting deadlines shows professionalism and helps strengthen your reputation.

Creating a Safe Environment

- Make sure clients and team members feel comfortable working with you. Create a space where everyone's ideas are respected.
- A safe, inclusive environment encourages open communication and better creativity.

Setting Your Rules

- Establish clear rules and boundaries for your projects. This helps you keep control of your creative vision.
- Clear guidelines ensure your work aligns with your values.

Fair Compensation

- Pay everyone fairly for their contributions, including fellow creatives and support staff.
- Fair pay shows professionalism and supports an ethical creative industry.

Prioritising Artistry

- 'H' emphasises keeping your art as your main focus. While advocacy and activism are important, don't let them overshadow your creative work.

Avoiding Risky Situations

- Be cautious about taking on roles or responsibilities that could harm the stability of your creative career.



Reflect on This Advice

- Can you think of how you can use these tips in your creative journey?
- Do you know any other creatives who could benefit from this advice? Please share it with them. Learning from other people's experiences can save a lot of time and worry!

A Word Before You Go...

As you shape your creative journey, remember that **success isn't just about talent—it's also about integrity, clarity, and care.** These principles form the foundation of a creative practice that is not only sustainable, but deeply respectful and empowering—for yourself and those you work with.

5. Conclusion

We hope you found this unit insightful as it provided an opportunity to address the challenges of building and sustaining a creative business. Throughout this unit, we explored strategies to navigate obstacles and shared practical advice to help you thrive in the creative economy.

What We Have Explored

- The common challenges faced by creatives including financial, emotional, and professional hurdles.
- Practical strategies for overcoming these challenges and maintaining balance.
- Ways to build resilience and ensure sustainable growth in the creative economy.

What Creative People Can Take Away

This unit has equipped you with tools and strategies to manage the complexities of a creative business. It has encouraged you to find solutions for the problems you may face and to prepare for the road ahead with confidence and creativity.

Reflection on Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you should have:

- Identified key challenges that creatives face and ways to overcome them.
- Identified strategies to deal with these challenges.

Applying What You've Learned

This unit has provided practical guidance to help you:

- Recognise and address challenges in your creative journey.
- Build strategies to overcome obstacles and sustain your creative practice.
- Reflect on the importance of balance and resilience in personal and professional growth.
- Apply lessons learned to inspire and support others in your creative community.

Want to Know More?

Kiptoo, M., Sambajee, P. and Baum, T. (2024), "Resilience through adversity: a case of informal artisan entrepreneurs in Kenya", [International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEER-07-2023-0762), 30(11), 446-465. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEER-07-2023-0762>

Find out more about protecting your creative work: [African Regional Intellectual Property Organization \(ARIPO\)](https://www.african-ipo.org/).

6. Course Conclusion

You have now come to the end of this unit and the course. Congratulations on completing this course! Over the past six units, you have taken a deep dive into the essential steps for establishing a successful creative business within the vibrant and dynamic African creative economy.

- In **Unit 1**, we introduced the concept of the creative economy, highlighting its importance and the ways it contributes to individual, community, and national development. You began to reflect on the skills and vision needed to transform your creative talents into a sustainable business.
- In **Unit 2**, we guided you through the process of finding your niche and crafting your artistic statement. You explored how to align your creative vision with market demand, ensuring your business resonates with audiences and funders while preserving and embedding the rich cultural heritage that makes it unique.
- In **Unit 3**, we looked into identifying and reaching your markets. You learned practical strategies for engaging with your audience, creating compelling narratives, and using tools like online marketing, storytelling, and public relations to grow your business.
- In **Unit 4**, we focused on collaboration—an essential element of thriving in the creative economy. You saw how partnerships and equitable collaborations can not only enhance your business but also contribute to the sustainability of your community and its cultural heritage.
- In **Unit 5**, we learned about sustainability in the creative economy. We focused on environmental, social and cultural sustainability and highlighted how this can be adopted as part of a creative business.

- In this final **Unit 6**, we discussed some of the challenges that people face in the creative economy. We learned a few ways to handle these challenges successfully and heard from people who have successfully dealt with them themselves.

Through these units, you have developed a toolkit to start turning your artistic talents into a thriving business by:

- Understanding the creative economy and its benefits for individuals and communities.
- Crafting a business vision that aligns with market needs.
- Building your audience and market presence with strategic marketing tools.
- Fostering collaboration to enhance creativity, efficiency, and community impact.
- Creating your products with the three types of sustainability in mind.
- Applying professional standards when facing challenges.

The African Creative Economy is rich with opportunity, driven by its diverse traditions, innovations, and people. You are now equipped to take your ideas forward, balancing personal ambition with the responsibility to sustain the cultural heritage that inspires your work.

As you embark on the next stage of your journey, remember that your success will come from a blend of creativity, determination, and collaboration. Together, these elements will allow you to succeed in the creative economy while making a meaningful contribution to your community and beyond.

All the very best for your creative endeavours, and keep creating!

7. Before You Go...

At the start of this course, we asked you to think about the following three statements and rate them between 1 and 5.

- I understand what the Creative Economy is
- I know how to generate an income from a niche market
- I know how to use my African culture and heritage within a creative business



Now go back to the evaluation form and mark your post-course self-assessment.

Do you feel more confident about how to turn your creative passion, rooted in African culture and heritage, into a meaningful business that thrives in niche markets and contributes to the broader creative economy?



Also, please take a minute or two to share your thoughts, suggestions and ideas about this course on the evaluation form. We'd love to hear your feedback!

References

- Dalal, A., Bhattacharya, S. and Chattopadhyay, S. (2024), "Hurdles to handicraft marketing for artisan entrepreneurs in an emerging economy", *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 31(1), 74-94, doi: 10.1108/jsbed-04-2023-0155.
- Nyangulu, R. (2023). Exploring the Productivity Drivers in Zimbabwe's Creative and Cultural Industries: Towards Resilient Creative Ecosystems. In: Virani, T.E. (eds) *Global Creative Ecosystems. Dynamics of Virtual Work*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-33961-5_12
- Resario, R., Steedman, R., & Langevang, T. (2023). Exploring Everyday Resilience in the Creative Industries through Devised Theatre: A Case of Performing Arts Students and Recent Graduates in Ghana. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 26(3), 237-256. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13678779231163606>

7. Transcripts

Key Challenges and How to Deal with Them

Volley: Yeah. Well, as a creative, yoh, sometimes everything doesn't go smooth as everyone will hope for. I give example as a musician. I'm independent musician and you sometimes you sell your product against the big companies that they want their artist to be seen.

And sometimes they can feel like because they have money to kind of talk things under the carpet, they can block you. You know sometimes you need to be clever. Make sure that you play your chess, you know you don't just go out there. You check the space where they're not playing and then you make money out of there. And while they're still waiting you go "Boo! check!" you know. That's how sometimes you need to be smart because some people are out there to exploit your work. Some will say 'We want to help you', but when they see you, they don't see your work. They see money. So they wanna make money for themselves. So it's important to be informative and to make sure that you don't just sign a contract or anything. You need to read and understand the terms and conditions because you may find that you give your life away. By the time you don't agree with certain terms it will be too late because you are sold.

Those are the main challenges that artists go through because they sell you fame, then you forget about everything, then you sell yourself, you'll lose yourself by the time you realise or you wake up from that dream, you are gone.

Obstacles and How to Overcome Them

Ayesha: As a woman, sometimes as a single parent or single mother, the challenges might be that in our society sometimes when you're a single woman people look down upon you and they believe because you're a single woman and this is due to different cultural anthropologies because all culture differs. Some may say she's a single woman, just leave her maybe she doesn't have any expertise.

But there are some who will embrace you for who you are, they do not look at your tribe, your race or your region you're coming from. As long as you can do something, bring something to the table, you're in for it, and you can give a challenge to people. Sometimes people own restaurants, but then the quality of the food that you offer is different from the one they offered from the restaurant. So it's also like because you don't have connections, it's hard for you to get this part of challenge.

You don't get kind of comfort because the fact that you're single or maybe do not have connections and maybe you don't have a specific brand or a hotel or restaurant for that matter. There is when you do not get such kind of comfort. So those are the challenges we met. But as a woman, even a woman can make chapatis because we have very the best chefs, in fact we've met, we've seen most of them women who are doing a very good job at the end

Top Tips on Career Growth

Volley: Working with people, I've learned a lot. You know, there's lots of things that really matters. To me, you know, first of all is to respect the fellow creatives, and secondly you make sure that you are punctual, you are disciplined. You are professional in everything. The way you conduct yourself. You must be able. You mustn't be a problem. No, but when people work with you, they must just feel like, OK, they worry about other things. You know that with you, they're safe. You know? So sometimes it's challenging as a creative and working with people who are more talented and have lots of gigs, but you need them and you can't afford them there. You just need to set the rules out very nice and make sure that you have agreement and then you manage them properly because sometimes when you are rude to them and you don't have afford to pay them what they have value, sometimes they can just walk away. So, there you need to be strong and know that it's everything even if you have like you handle yourself in a way that they will respect you and want to honour your invitation. Because if you become rude to people, then you cannot afford. Even if your friends, they will, they'll, make sure they protect their peace. And peace you cannot buy at any supermarket or anything, you know, so the working with people is so important.

The Role of the Artist

'H': As an artist, you have to remember what your role is. First and foremost, it will always be the artistry. So, although you might sometimes be in a position where you can affect change and change in policy, as an artist and as an academic, you might find yourself in a position where you're becoming more of an advocate and more of an activist. That then places you in a position where it can be a little precarious and very dangerous. Because if for example you are working in Africa it's important that you are not affiliated to any one party or other.

Because what will happen is when there's a change of regime, then you as an artist are out. You have to remain apolitical so that the work that you do and any policy changes that you advocate, are policy changes that can work for any government that is in power at that moment in time or any subsequent government that's going to come in. You cannot afford to become aligned to one party or another. Otherwise, in some instances it can put you in danger and in other instances it can mean that you just have no work at all.