From the Side-lines to the Table: Arts and Culture in Zambia's Development Agenda

CONNECT FOR CULTURE AFRICA

SELAM

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ROUTES

> CfCA Zambia's story is not simply the story of a campaign asking government to invest 1% in culture.
>
> It is the story of building the **people**, **evidence**, **relationships** and **pathways** that can help make that investment possible.

Khazike Sakala
Executive Director,
PAAGZ

Foreword

The Story Continues

As the Connect for Culture Africa (CfCA) initiative closes, it is tempting to measure success by what was achieved or implemented. But for us at PAAGZ, we ask not only what was done, but what changed and what Zambia's cultural sector can carry forward. With Selam's collaboration and support, we sought greater public investment in arts, culture and heritage by strengthening the foundations beneath advocacy: people, evidence, relationships and pathways to decision-makers.

Creatives, government, cultural practitioners, civil society and academia now share a conversation about the sector's future, and new evidence frames arts and culture as a matter of livelihoods and national development. These are foundations, not a finished story: the 1% budget goal is yet to be reached. Still, we end with optimism, as creatives increasingly assert themselves as entrepreneurs, advocates and rights-holders with a rightful place in Zambia's future and development agenda.

PAAGZ is proud to have helped facilitate this journey, but not any one stakeholder owns it. We sincerely thank Selam, the African Union (AU), SIDA, our government partners at Ministry of Youth, Sports and Arts- Department of Arts, National Arts Council, the National Working Group and, above all, the artists whose voices and creativity gave this work meaning. CfCA may be ending, but the movement does not. Our task now is to keep culture at the table and ensure Zambia invests in it as an essential part of national development.

FROM THE SIDE-LINES TO THE TABLE: ARTS AND CULTURE TAKES ITS SEAT IN ZAMBIA'S DEVELOPMENT AGENDA!

About Connect for Culture Africa (CfCA)

Connect for Culture Africa (CfCA) is an initiative implemented by Selam in partnership with the African Union, running from 2023 to 2026 It starts from the conviction that culture and the creative industries are vital to democratic, inclusive and sustainable development, yet remain under-re-sourced in public budgets. CfCA advocates for African states to allocate at least 1% of national budgets to arts, culture and heritage by 2030, builds awareness of the sector's value through research and data, and strengthens partnerships and networks among stakeholders.

Implementation of the CFCA is in 5 countries namely Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia. It involves government agencies, research institutions, the media, artists and civil society. In Zambia, People's Action for Accountability and Good Governance (PAAGZ) led the project, working with the National Working Group, the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Arts (Department of Arts) and the National Arts Council to bring creatives and decision-makers into one conversation about the sector's future.

CFCA in Zambia

Culture and arts has always been a part of Zambia's national story. It lives in music and film, dance and design, literature and visual art, fash-ion, crafts, performance and heritage. It shapes identity, creates livelihoods, inspires communities and increasingly forms part of a growing cre-ative economy.

Figure 1. Zambia's cultural and creative industries are more than expression, they are livelihoods, enterprises, identity and economic activity.

Yet, the sector faces an awkward contradiction: *it is highly present and visible in the cultural life of the country, but far less visible in the decisions that determine how public resources are allocated and invested.*

For many artists and cultural practitioners, the challenge has therefore not only been about creating. It has also been about being recognised as part of Zambia's development story; as workers, entrepreneurs, innovators, rights-holders and economic actors whose sector deserves deliberate public investment.

This was the space into which the *Connect for Culture Africa (CfCA) Zambia* initiative entered.

Implemented by the People's Action for Accountability and Good Governance in Zambia (PAAGZ), in collaboration with Selam and Africa Union (AU) with support from SIDA, CfCA sought to strengthen the case for investment in culture by connecting what had too often existed separately: *artists, evidence, institutions, policy dialogue, public financing and advocacy*. Over the life of the project, PAAGZ increasingly served as a bridge between creative practitioners, government institutions, cultural organisations, academia and other sector stakeholders.

But the most important story of CfCA in Zambia is not the number of engagements, meetings held or reports produced. It is the story of *how the conversation began to change*, and this is documented through 5 most significant changes throughout the life of the project.

THE FIRST (1st) CHANGE

From fragmented Voices to a Shared Table: Creating a Shared Table

Right from the beginning, one of the challenges facing cultural advocacy was fragmentation.

Artists had their concerns, government institutions had their mandates, civil society had their advocacy experience, researchers had the experience of producing evidence and economic and budget institutions had their own processes. However, these actors did not always occupy the same spaces or speak through a sufficiently coordinated agenda.

CfCA Zambia began by convening

A multi-stakeholder roundtable in 2023 introduced the initiative and created an early space for cultural actors and institutions to identify shared priorities. This was followed by the establishment of the **National Working Group (NWG)**, bringing together expertise from government, the creatives, parliament, civil society, academia and other institutions. PAAGZs' collaboration with the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Arts (MYSA) and the National Arts Council of Zambia (NAC) was subsequently strengthened and formalised through an MoU. Over time, the circle widened further.

The Parliamentary Budget Office and Ministry of Finance and National Planning created entry points into public-finance conversations.

The Zambia Development Agency (ZDA) brought an enterprise perspective to capacity development. Arts festivals and Creative Industries Business Summits offered platforms through which advocacy could reach wider audiences.

The change was not simply that more people met. It was that traditionally fragmented sections of the cultural ecosystem increasingly began to interact more around shared questions of policy, investment and sector development.

CfCA's distinctive contribution was therefore less about creating new institutions than about helping connect actors and processes that might otherwise have remained fragmented.

Figure 2. A shared table: CfCA brought creatives, institutions, civil society and other sector actors into increasingly coordinated conversations on cultural investment.

social revolution
without the liberation
of women
THANK YOU!

THE SECOND (2nd) MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE

From Perception to Evidence: From asking for support to making the case!

A stronger network needed a stronger argument. For years, cultural advocacy could easily begin with the statement: "*Government does not invest enough in the arts.*"

But that statement immediately raises another question: *How much is being invested? and beyond that What does Zambia receive in return from its creative economy?*

CfCA began strengthening the evidence behind the advocacy.

A baseline study on the budgetary allocation to arts and culture in 2024 examined governments financing of the creative sector in Zambia. Subsequent budget tracking through a follow up report in 2025 provided a way of following investment trends over time.

The later study in 2026 on the economic contribution of Zambia's CCIs expanded the argument further, from what government spends on culture to the contribution culture itself makes through

Figure 3. From perception to evidence: research helped shift cultural-financing advocacy towards documented facts and economic arguments.

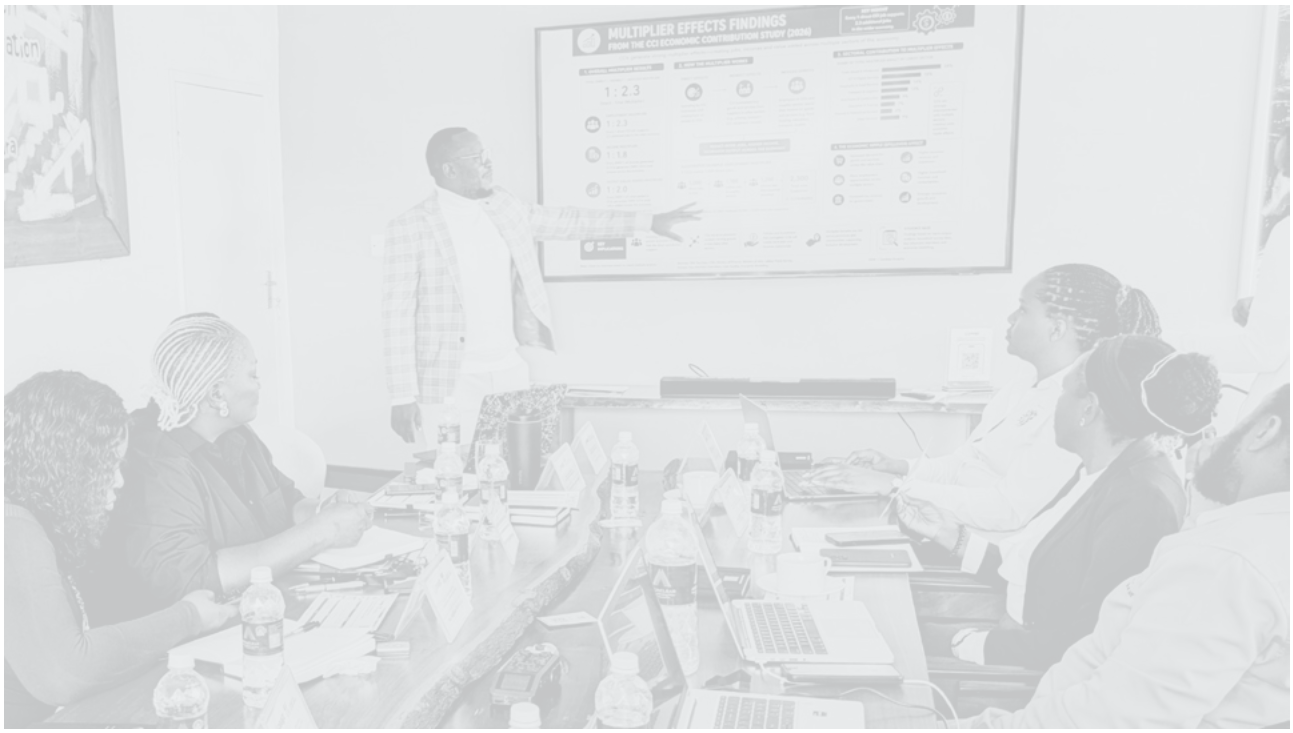

Figure 4. Building the economic case for culture, not only asking what government invests, but demonstrating what the sector contributes.

enterprise, employment, livelihoods and wider economic activity both formal and informal.

This *mattered* because it changed the language at the disposal of advocates. The debate increasingly moved from:

"The arts are neglected" to "Here is what is being invested. Here is what the sector contributes. Here is why greater investment makes economic and developmental sense."

Research was not left on shelves. Findings informed policy engagement, capacity strengthening and advocacy, and were later translated into policy briefs and simplified knowledge products intended to remain useful beyond the project.

In that sense, CfCA helped *change the currency of advocacy* from perception alone towards evidence.

THE THIRD (3rd) MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE

From the Cultural Table to the Budget Table: Opening the budget door!

Evidence has limited power if it never reaches the institutions that influence national resources and their spending. This made engagement with Zambia's budget architecture particularly significant.

Through CfCA supported processes, cultural-sector evidence and perspectives were brought closer to the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) and Ministry of Finance and National Planning (MoFNP) through institutional champions also seating on the National Working Group (NWG). Within the framework of the project, this was identified as an important institutional opening, linking cultural advocacy more directly with actors involved in national public-finance processes.

An especially important development was the greater coordination around budget advocacy. Government cultural institutions, civil society and artists were able to approach the issue from different institutional positions while increasingly carrying a common message about the need for greater cultural investment.

This should not be mistaken for the completion of the journey. Zambia has *not yet reached the 1% cultural-financing target*, and CfCA cannot claim to have transformed national budget allocations during the project period.

The change was more foundational:

> *The cultural sector developed stronger evidence, better access to budget institutions and a more credible pathway through which its financing case could continue to be made.*

The strongest documented change was improved access, institutional engagement and advocacy architecture rather than large-scale financing reform.

Figure 5. Opening the budget door: cultural sector perspectives entered conversations closer to Zambia's public-finance decision-making architecture.

THE FOURTH (4th) MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE

From the Capital to the Provinces: Taking the conversation beyond Lusaka

A national cultural conversation cannot be national if it only happens in the capital.

For many artists outside Lusaka, distance from the capital can also mean a gap from policy information, national institutions and opportunities to participate in discussions affecting their sector.

CfCA therefore deliberately decentralised engagement.

Policy dissemination and Joint Planning engagements reached creatives in *Kabwe, Kapiri Mposhi, Kitwe, Samfya, Choma* and *Livingstone*, giving practitioners outside Lusaka opportunities to engage national cultural institutions more directly and to discuss policies in relation to their own local realities.

This did not eliminate inequalities of access.

The project observed persistent barriers related to geography, gender, disability, age and artistic discipline. But it demonstrated a different model of engagement: ins*tead of expecting every creative to find their way to national institutions, institutions could also move closer to creatives*.

That shift matters because participation becomes more meaningful when policy is discussed with the people expected to live with its consequences.

Figure 6. Taking policy beyond Lusaka: creatives engaged directly with national cultural institutions closer to where they live and work.

THE FIFTH (5th) MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE

From artist as beneficiary to Artist as Stakeholder: Seeing the artist differently.

Perhaps one of the most important changes was more personal and at individual level.

CfCA Zambia increasingly challenged the idea that the artist is only a beneficiary of cultural programmes.

Through the *Arts as a Business, Business Essentials and Export Readiness* intervention, creatives engaged with questions of intellectual property, business registration, legal structures, entrepreneurship and market readiness. Participants were encouraged to consider the professional and commercial dimensions of their creative practice alongside their artistic identities.

The project's first Artist Residency themed *Mutti: Healing through Art, Stories of Transformation* extended this thinking further. Fifteen creative practitioners participated in an intensive period of creative development, peer learning and exchange, producing work addressing art, social justice and wider societal issues.

> *CfCA initiated shifts in behavior. The more significant and perhaps important shift was in knowledge, confidence and positioning.*

A cohort of creatives were increasingly encouraged to see themselves not only as artists, but also as *entrepreneurs, advocates, rights-holders and stakeholders with a legitimate role in influencing the policies and decisions affecting their sector*.

An unfinished story

The most credible impact stories are not those that suggest that every problem was solved.

The CfCA project in Zambia ends with important foundations in place, and significant work remains. *The 1% target is still ahead*.

Figure 7. From artist to advocate: the residency connected creative development, peer learning and the use of art for wider social engagement.

Figure 8. Policy dialogue becomes meaningful when creatives are able to question, contribute and relate national policy to local realities.

Some gains remain dependent on relationships rather than being fully embedded in formal systems. Evidence will need to be updated.

Networks will require continued coordination. Provincial engagement requires resources. Cultural financing must compete with many other national priorities. And inclusion will remain incomplete if women, rural artists, persons with disabilities and other underrepresented groups still face barriers to participation.

The project's sustainability assessment recognises that many advocacy gains have not yet become binding legislation, budget directives or guaranteed financing commitments. But this does not make the change insignificant. It tells us what kind of change CfCA helped generate, *foundational change*.

What remains after the project is an evidence base, new and strengthened relationships, advocacy tools, policy knowledge, tested approaches to decentralised engagement, institutional entry points and a stronger constituency of cultural actors capable of carrying the argument forward. *The 1% has not yet been won*.

But Zambia's cultural sector is increasingly able to make its case with more than aspiration. I*t has evidence, it has relationships, it has new spaces for engagement and it has a stronger language which is its new advocacy currency through which to describe its place in national development*. That is the most significant change of all.

CfCA's Zambia story is therefore not simply the story of a campaign asking government to invest 1% in culture.

It is the story of building the people, evidence, relationships and pathways that can help make that investment possible.