



SUPPORTING THE RESILIENCE OF THE KENYAN ARTS SECTOR **Report from 2020 Artists' Survey**

BACKGROUND

The Trust for Indigenous Culture and Health (TICAH) has been working with artists to share beauty and stories and for artists to connect across age sets, practices and genders to create and learn from one another. When the pandemic arrived in 2020 it disrupted the practices and economics across the world, including with Kenyan artists. Through online and social distanced projects, TICAH kept up with many Kenyan artists and listened to the changes taking place in their lives. The work TICAH built with its community of artists coalesced into the theme of resilience: resilience of the arts community, of the individual, of the family, of the mind, of the art itself. Together we explored resilience in a number of ways: through an installation of work created by 46 artists that toured Nairobi; through public art events and public art creation; through explorations of mental health; through artistic experimentations between age sets, and through discussions about the future of the arts sector with this survey and research. The aim of this research was to better understand how the landscape for artists has changed during the pandemic and how artists have adapted in order to learn how best art enthusiasts, arts organizations and government can support the sector to survive and thrive.

PROCESS OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

TICAH developed the questionnaire, in collaboration with several artists, which was then uploaded on Survey CTO, an online data collection tool. A link was then created that was then shared with artists through email and WhatsApp. The link reached 257 artists who were able to complete the questionnaire, with 5.4% of the respondents declining to complete the questionnaire. In an effort to reach artists who aren't able to connect online, the TICAH team called many artists and helped them complete the survey over the phone. Data was collected from November 2020 to the end of the year. The collected data was exported in an excel format for analysis and put into a data visualization table using Microsoft Power BI.

The survey was developed to reach fine artists and digital artists. As the arts sector includes all practices of art including fine arts, digital arts, performance arts, music, etc. it was TICAH's feeling that the differences between the various practices lends itself to an individualized approach to fully understand the nuance of each practice and how these artists have adapted to the changing environment around them. TICAH decided to reach out to both fine artists and digital artists as there is sometimes overlap between these groups and also because the lessons to be learned from these two groups could be helpful for each other and for the arts sector as a whole. Our focus on fine arts

included sculptors, painters, and mixed media artists. Our focus on digital artists included illustrators, photographers, and animators.

After collecting and analyzing the data, the TICAH team held a focus group discussion with a group of artists (of different practices, ages, genders and collectives). The aim was to review the findings of the survey with the group and to discuss specific findings that were unclear or could be interpreted in different ways. After the focus group meeting, the TICAH team consolidated its information and learnings into this report.

OVERVIEW OF RESPONDANTS

The findings from the survey revealed that 54% of the respondents were male, 39% female and 7% of the respondents did not wish to reveal their gender. With regards to age, 53.73% were youth between the ages of 18 years and 35 years with the rest being above 35 years of age. 72.16% of the respondents were from Nairobi County, 5.49% from Mombasa with Nakuru and Kisumu counties being represented by 4.7%. 7.45% came from other regions across the country. Over half reported being the sole supporter of their family and not having another source of income apart from their art or teaching art.

ART PRACTICES AND CHANGES

As mentioned previously, the survey was targeted at fine artists and digital artists. The respondents were made up of painters, sculptors, mixed media artists, illustrators, photographers, filmmakers, animators and others. 41% reported to be painters. The survey managed to reach artists of different levels of experience: those just starting their practices with only a few years of experience (25% of respondents), those who are established in their practices as professionals with an average 10+ years experience (30% of respondents) and those who are retired or near retirement (9% of respondents). As cross-generational learning is important to TICAH's arts programs, the team made a point to reach out to all levels of fine and digital artists for this survey.

Of those that responded to the survey, only 5% were signed by a gallery or management agency and only 30% were part of a collective or studio. Of the 30% who are part of a collective or studio, the artists reported to be part of 46 art institutions (collectives, studios, associations, clubs, museums, etc.). During the focus group discussion with artists to understand these findings, the group noted that the 30% figure sounded about right to them as many artists "prefer to work in isolation from one another" but also noted that they felt the art collectives and studios were in decline prior to the pandemic and the pandemic led to the downfall of more groups. It was reported that the decrease in income, pandemic restrictions and changing priorities of artists within collectives led to the closing of some of these joint working spaces/groups.

Despite this, the artists involved in the focus group discussion also noted how important it is for artists to be able to come together, as this is the only way to push for supportive policies and to challenge one another to improve in individual practices. Part of the issue of these groups, as discussed by the artists, is that the administration and organization of these groups is lacking and so a loose arrangement of artists quickly devolves into individual interests. While some of these findings are not necessarily

specific to the pandemic environment, they do offer insight into the future of collectives and studios and ways in which arts organizations and others can be supportive of these groups.

ADAPTATION TO PANDEMIC

With pandemic restrictions to movement and social distancing, the surveyed artists, like the rest of the population, shifted their working environments to home or private studios. Almost half of the respondents had exhibitions, events or residencies planned and booked for 2020 that didn't happen and had to change tactics to get their work seen. What is interesting to note is that about half of the respondents reported that the pandemic didn't change their creative process; some they felt increased motivation and focus as they saw new opportunities for creation. Fine artists and digital artists alike reported discovering a focus they had never experienced for their arts practice that led to breakthroughs in their work.

Part of what was driving this motivation of creation was the sense that there were many opportunities online for artists: competitions, collaborations, and calls for proposals. Offline there were also several opportunities for artists as many businesses began looking for artists to create COVID related work (public service creations about the pandemic, etc.). During the focus group discussion, a digital illustrator mentioned that there was a sense that because, for the first several months of the pandemic, everyone was at home all over the world with little to do, everyone was turning to art online and streaming services and that producers and artists around the world were reaching out to one another online for collaborations. The sense was that "things were both shutting down and opening up" at the same time.

While half of respondents continued to create and find focus within the pandemic, the other half reported decreases in productivity, access to materials, and mental health levels. The connection to clients and sales were the main issues that were reported. During the focus group discussion, artists talked at length about how the marketing of their work and the access to markets was disrupted by the pandemic. "Buying art can be harder than buying food," one artist reported. Artists that relied on in person studio visits, exhibitions and other physical interactions appear to have suffered the most. Additionally, the loss of opportunities and income led to many artists moving out of the cities and into the rural areas to save money. In these new locations they reported being cut off from their materials and having to adapt to what they could find. This was reported as both a nice artistic challenge and demotivating.

For most respondents the pandemic led to decreases in income as their clients' priorities changed, spaces to connect with clients closed and "no one had money for art anymore." Artists found moral and mental health support from friends and family. Many artists are also teachers, so the survey included questions about their teaching practice during the pandemic. More than half lost their teaching gigs during the pandemic. The 28% that were able to continue relied on online, individual or small classes. For others, about 9% of artists, they shifted to creating work that would sell – smaller pieces or functional art – relying on small popup events or "boot sales." About a third of the respondents reported applying for grants or looking for other sources of

incomes and many others reported that they hadn't adapted to the pandemic yet and were still waiting and hoping for things to go back to normal.

About half of the respondents turned online to connect with markets, working through their social media accounts and creating personal websites to show their work and reconnect with clients. The survey took place before the digital tax was introduced at the beginning of 2021. During the focus group discussion with the artists about the survey, they expressed confusion and concern over the digital tax. Some weren't aware of it and didn't understand what it was about and some talked about how it was going to be another challenge to the recovery of the sector. There is a need to provide artists with education on the new tax structures.

In terms of the relationship between the government and the artists that responded to the survey and those in the focus group discussion, the feelings were mainly of confusion and disillusionment. A few reported that they were pleased the government had a stimulus package for the arts, but framed this as "if it weren't for this pandemic, these opportunities wouldn't have come." 64% of those surveyed did not apply for the government stimulus interventions. When asked why not, most said they didn't know about it or didn't feel like it would be fair and wasn't developed with artists' needs/interests at heart. Others reported that they thought the process was too complicated and a few reported that it wasn't enough for all the artists in Kenya so they didn't bother to apply.

As registration with the government was a requirement for stimulus interventions, we asked artists if they were registered. 55% said no and 40% said yes. Most of those that were registered did so because they felt it was important to have government recognition (for protection of intellectual property) and also because it is needed to land some jobs. A small percentage reported the reason for registration was so they could work in communities and with children or to pay taxes. For those that said they were not registered, the reasons they gave were that they didn't understand how to register, felt the process was too complicated and that registration wouldn't benefit them in any way. Others felt they weren't "stable enough" to be able to pay taxes.

During the focus group discussion to dive deeper into the survey results, the artists talked at length about their relationship with the government and registering with them. There is a lot of confusion within the arts sector as to where they should be registered and who is actually managing the arts sector within the government. Artists noted that some register with the Ministry of Culture, others as businesses, others with the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife. Then there's the Music Copyright Society of Kenya for musicians. The group talked about the need to come together to advocate for someone who actually knows about the arts to manage the sector from the government side. If there is someone who understands the sector within the ministry, the government can better support artists. Otherwise, the government appears to never know what to do with the arts, or how to engage with the community, and tries to steer artists towards business and other linear and easily understandable fields.

ARTISTS THOUGHTS ON NEW NORMAL

67% reported that the move to online spaces was the biggest overall shift for artists in 2020. Artists see that there is a lot of potential and opportunities online, not just in social media marketing of individual work but in production spaces where some content creators have turned completely to online spaces and are engaging artists from all over the world for work. Online marketplaces like Etsy have also become huge platforms for artists to reach markets all over the world. About 10% of those surveyed reported that they felt online spaces were more egalitarian (more content, more voices) and that more people have turned to art during the pandemic in general (since everyone was home for a long time). The challenge is how to set oneself apart from the crowd of artists who are all online.

Collaboration has become more important for artists in the new normal, particularly for those that may not have the online reach to be able to market their work and reach new audiences. Visual artists will need to consider how they can collaborate with online content creators (vloggers, social media influencers, youtubers, etc) for use of their channels to reach more people. Individual social media accounts won't do this alone; collaboration with those that understand online content is one of the best ways to make online work for artists.

Midway through 2020 when everyone in the world was at home and the world was engulfed in the police brutality issues rising up around the globe; there was suddenly an increased interest in black artists and content creators. An illustrator in the focus group discussion shared how producers and others approached him and his friends interested in stories from black artists. He reported that he's seen more content in the works on black people and more black led productions. While the outreach has reduced with people getting back to work a bit more than before, the interest is still there.

ARTISTS RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE SECTOR

The survey and focus group discussion ended with artists asked what recommendations they would have for a bright and thriving Kenyan arts sector moving forward.

Education – Art students in university should learn not just about creating art but also how to be a professional artist (the business side of being an artist); There is a need for trained art managers (who can handle promotion, marketing, etc.) as well as curators and critics; Kenyan art history and appreciation should be a course within every degree program to create consumers and critics

Exhibitions and Residencies – Kenya needs more exhibitions, more opportunities for artists to showcase their work, more residency programs for collaboration and creation, the return of the Art Fair

Physical Spaces – Artists need affordable, physical spaces for creating work (studios) but also for the incubation of artists and movements of art, collaborating and community building

Grants – Access to funds to help fledgling artists as they are growing their practice or to help those who have fallen on hard times would be helpful in ensuring we don't lose more artists from the sector

Workshops for Capacity Development – Artists need access to more continuing education, especially around the new normal and being online, understanding the new tax structures, mental health support, etc.

Government Support – Artists need supportive policies, programs that promote and support Kenyan arts, tax breaks, opportunities for showcasing Kenyan work

Marketing Support – Reaching consumers of the arts has always been a challenge and the sector could use support to reach local and international markets

National Art Spaces – There are no publicly funded art spaces or museums dedicated to the arts, these spaces would go a long way to legitimizing the arts sector and showing how pride for this sector

Materials – Access to materials can be challenging for artists as well as expensive, if there could be a waiver on the import taxes of art materials that would go a long way

Online Forums and Platforms – Now that everyone is online how can we come together as a community online and how can we support one another – what platforms are there or can be created for this, how can we learn about this space together, how can we share information and opportunities?

Advocacy – Advocacy is needed for more supportive policies, education, initiatives, and trained personnel to bolster the arts sector

REFLECTIONS FROM TICAH

The pandemic has negatively impacted all people and all sectors around the globe. The arts have seen enormous setbacks to the growth of the sector as much of the performance and fine arts creative economies rely on events, performances, exhibitions, with people coming together. Some artists, including muralists, illustrators and animators found work creating COVID related pieces as public service announcements. Other artists managed to navigate these changes by shifting all their networks, studios, and work online. Ironically, what we have learned from this survey is that “things were both shutting down and opening up,” as the migration online has led to interesting opportunities, a seeming equalization of artistic voices and a camaraderie over the common struggles of living through a pandemic. Those that could get online and navigate these changes spaces found artistic motivation, new audiences and new ways of connecting and communicating.

What we are seeing with the shift online (for the art sector and beyond – education, health information, etc.) is that access to internet and knowledge of online platforms and applications has become a dividing factor. Those that can work from home, get online and navigate these space have significantly more opportunities for education, access to markets, collaborations, up-to-date health information, etc. In Kenya, some of this divide is based on urban/rural access and connectivity issues, some on generational learning, some on economics, some on access to the hardware to connect. If the shift online continues to be the trend moving forward for many fields, including art, there is

need to support and educate those that have not been able to access the internet and benefit from this shift. The more things are dependent on a decent internet connection and online information, the greater the chasm between those that can and can't access this space. Internet is no longer a luxury.

What we have observed from the survey, focus group discussion and interactions with artists and other communities is that there is huge potential within the smartphone and tablet space to bridge this access gap. Some of the artists we surveyed mentioned that they didn't have computers so instead relied heavily on their phones to access the internet, upload to social media and find opportunities. In our focus group, almost all the artists in the group connected to the zoom discussion through their phones (TICAH provided funds to cover data to ensure access) and almost all the projects TICAH organized in 2020 with artists was organized through phones (calls, whatsapp groups, social media, email, zoom meetings, etc.). With smartphones getting cheaper and cheaper and data packages with communications companies getting more affordable and more reliable, there is potential within this space to bring communities together in ways that we haven't anticipated yet and we have an opportunity to start dreaming and shaping this space in a equitable and supportive way now.

Other than the move online, the survey really illustrated for the team the deep vacillation of emotions and motivations within the arts space. Many artists talked about how the pandemic was simultaneously causing them to feel unmotivated, lonely, depressed while also feeling focused, experimental, united with the world. Many artists talked about how, because of the uncertainty and constant shifting of their sector, they felt that the pandemic was just another hurdle to overcome. In this sense, there is much that the rest of society can learn from artists about how to handle and adapt through uncertainty. On the other hand, there were many artists whose responses clearly indicated a stagnation and depression or regression in terms of mood, ability to work, and ability to adapt. There were several deaths within the arts community in Kenya during 2020 that added another layer to the questions the community have been facing on how to support one other in this space and how to come together over common challenges.

Mental health education and tools for managing stress are much needed interventions that could help the community. The other is community building. The artists in the survey and the focus group said repeatedly that they are individualistic and often times aren't able to agree with one another but also really need one another to grow in their practice and as a community. The pandemic has really enhanced both of these beliefs. How can art supporters, organizations and the government support artists to build their community while also supporting their individualism? What spaces currently exist for these conversations?

There are few spaces as it is that offer artists continuing education or education on how to be professional artists. There seem to be fewer spaces for discussions about community building. The good thing is that many artists aren't afraid to talk, to share their opinions and, when given the chance, they enjoy meeting up with one another and especially with older age sets of artists and those in different practices than theirs. We have found this to be true within our Rika Residency that works to bring different age sets, genders and practices together. If artists can be given regular spaces to talk and to

organise will they just argue and do nothing (as some suspect)? What if instead of organizing spaces and discussions around opportunities and markets, which always seem limited and inequitable, they organise around common values that they share for their practices and their community? These are all important questions to consider. The list of recommendations from the survey for the future of the sector are practical in a lot of ways, but if artists are not able to be more united in some way achievement of these recommendations may be far away or may not be implemented in a way to be beneficial to all.

It would be beneficial for there to be more support and knowledge of the arts sector within the government. Throughout this survey and in other forums that we have participated in, TICAHealth often hears about the challenge of government to fully understand the arts sector because of its inability to get artists to register with them. This leads to the government lacking important data to help them figure out how best to interact with and support the community. This appears to be a “chicken and egg” situation with artists from this survey reporting that they haven’t registered because they don’t think it will be of any benefit or will end up bringing more complications to their practice. How can we bridge this gap? Are there potential incentives that artists can benefit from if they register with the government, so it’s a win win for both the government and the artists? Tax breaks on digital sales or imported art materials? From this research it was also clear that artists often found working with the government to be overly complicated – everything from applying for the stimulus during the pandemic to registration and taxes. How can we help to streamline these processes and better educate the sector? This also seems like an area that would be a win win for both.

The arts are critical for the amplification of marginalized voices and issues important to the overall health of Kenya. Art can be used to help individuals and community manage stress and can spark much needed conversations about how to overcome challenges. Art is also a key area to Kenya setting itself apart from other countries in the global economy and has the potential to bring much needed attention, resources and opportunities to the country. As we have seen in many other countries, investments into and support of the arts sector has the ability to transform the image and economics of a country. Combine the number of amazing artists in this country with just the number of walls surrounding buildings and estates in Nairobi and the city can be transformed into a global centre for murals and public art. TICAHealth is working to support this effort. The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated the world, with the arts sector going dark and falling apart in many ways. That said it has also brought new and potentially important opportunities for the reemergence and growth of the sector if we are able to listen, experiment and adapt quickly enough. The arts community is resilient and ready to create at a greater level.

CONTACT INFORMATION

To comment on the report or for more information on TICAHealth’s work with artists, please contact us at dreamkona@ticahealth.org.

Thank you.