Untapped opportunities for livelihood recovery in crisis and post-crisis settings: Applying music as a use case

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This paper explores the potential of leveraging cultural and creative industries, especially through music, to assist in the recovery from crisis and post-crisis settings. It focuses on music, not to elevate it above other art forms, but because engaging with it provides lessons and tactics, understanding and benefits across all other performative art forms and forms of intellectual property (IP). This study emphasizes the pivotal role of music and cultural participation and its engagement as a coping strategy, adding resilience to affected communities, and the expansive impact of music if it is regarded as an economy and an ecosystem. We propose an innovative approach: to incorporate music and cultural production into programmes and strategies to support affected communities for livelihood recovery. The objective is to explore how music, and the wider creative economy, can be a powerful tool in supporting economic diversification in a non-extractive manner, by leveraging potential passive income streams inherent in music and cultural intellectual property.

Why Music and Culture?

While there are opportunities across wider creative and cultural industries, this paper, and the specific opportunities it articulates, are focused on music. This is not to elevate music above other cultural arts but simply to use it as an effective case study, because as a piece of intellectual property, it is the most complex to manage, engage with and regulate. Regardless of the challenges, music – and the act of experiencing, performing and sharing culture - is everywhere. If there are people, music and creative expression exist, even in crisis situations. Yet, much of the work done to incorporate this common resource into development work or as a response to crisis is neither strategic nor intentional. There is a lack of awareness of the opportunities that could be introduced
via music and the creative economy to support livelihoods, through the creation, securitization and monetization of IP rights. Music, taken as an example, is not just a cultural or creative act that occurs in a community at a particular moment; it is a thriving economy based on the creation, recognition and usage of intellectual property. The use of music as a case for a framework responds to the notion that it can provide a template that can easily be adapted and catered to other creative industries’ needs, such as IP frameworks, ecosystem development, policy entry points to diversify economies and education reform and creation of sustainable livelihoods, among others.

Several nations are investing in music and the creative economy as a tool to support livelihoods, promote recovery and foster economic growth. Recent reports from international financial institutions underscore the economic potential of cultural sectors in developing countries, highlighting their capacity to diversify income sources and generate employment. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in its ‘Creative Economy Outlook 2022’ emphasizes that cultural and creative industries, which include music, arts, theatre, software creation, culinary arts, writing and video games, contribute approximately 3.1 percent to the global gross domestic product (GDP) and provide 6.2 percent of all employment, equating to nearly 50 million jobs worldwide. These industries are particularly vital for young people and women, offering more employment opportunities than other sectors.

The COVID-19 pandemic, however, exposed vulnerabilities within these industries, leading to a reduction of US$750 billion globally and the loss of ten million jobs in 2020. Despite these setbacks, the creative economy remains a critical segment for sustainable development, as it fosters innovation and cultural diversity, which are essential for economic resilience and growth. The UNCTAD report also notes that creative services exports, which vastly exceed those of creative goods, were more resilient during the pandemic, declining by only 1.8% compared to a 20% drop in overall services exports. This resilience underscores the potential of creative industries to adapt and thrive even in adverse conditions, particularly through the adoption of digital technologies and remote working models. The integration of digital platforms has enabled creative professionals to continue their work remotely, thereby expanding their reach and market potential beyond local boundaries. This shift not only mitigates the impact of physical restrictions but also opens up new avenues for income generation and job creation in developing countries. Furthermore, the creative economy’s inclusiveness and post-industrial characteristics, such as flexible organization and extensive use of technologies, make it an attractive sector for investments and development. The United Nations’ policy recommendations advocate for greater investment in digital technologies to support the remote delivery of creative products and services, which is crucial for the sector’s growth in the digital age. Additionally, the development of national strategies and policies tailored to the unique realities of developing countries can enhance the competitiveness of their creative industries in the global market. By recognizing cultural and creative businesses as pillars of development, countries can nurture creativity and innovation, leading to the emergence of new niche markets and the commercialization of indigenous technologies.

The creative economy’s potential to diversify a country’s income is further evidenced by the increasing revenues from trade in creative goods and services. UNCTAD data show that global exports of creative goods rose from $419 million in 2010 to $524 million in 2020, while creative services exports nearly doubled from $487 billion to almost $1 trillion during the same period. This growth highlights the sector’s capacity to generate substantial export earnings and enhance developing countries’ participation in dynamic global trade opportunities. In conclusion, creative industries hold immense potential for economic diversification and job creation in developing countries, particularly through the adoption of digital technologies and remote working models.

The best-known examples of countries engaging in comprehensive strategies aimed at developing the cultural sector are the Republic of Korea and Turkey. In the Republic of Korea, the state has had a major role in the development of cultural industries in an effort to diversify the economy and leverage global soft power as a result of its pop culture. Turkey has also played a role through its development of the economies of urban centres. Other examples of countries adopting policies fostering the arts and culture include the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where art and entertainment exports grew 106 percent in 2023 compared to 2022 with its model of 11 cultural commissions. As a result, a number of new jobs were created in the Kingdom specific to music, such as the development of new music festivals (MDL Beast, Riyadh Jazz), the creation of new Saudi Music Hubs (employing musicians, teachers and technicians) and the development of the soon-to-be launch of the Saudi Copyright Management Organization. Zimbabwe, with the launch of its Music Strategy, has also shown significant growth in its cultural sectors.
Regardless of one’s language, culture or immigration status, if the music created in communities or on the move is professionally recognized and registered as a piece of intellectual property, it offers a potentially passive income stream that will last for 70 years after the death of the creator. Anytime this music is aired or used, those responsible for its creation would earn a royalty if appropriate systems exist to register, track and regulate this usage. These copyrights must be regarded as IP and incorporated as part of a broader economic livelihood strategy in crises. To best understand and explore how this is possible, music is the best use case to explore this opportunity, not only at the individual level but also at the local and national levels if pursued at scale.

According to the International Federation of Phonographic Industries, the music economy grew by 10.8 percent in 2023, while music streaming expanded by over 300 percent in Africa, and the market is expected to grow by 7 percent a year until 2027. Most telecommunication firms now offer subscriptions to music streaming services with pay-as-you-go plans connected to mobile money accounts. At the same time, the ability to register, track and pay music copyrights, has never been simpler; the systems already exist. The models in which these services remunerate artists is complex and, in many cases, disassociated from the artist themselves, because these services establish agreements with record labels and collection entities that represent multiple stakeholders, rather than the artists themselves. As a result, inequities exist in these systems that often promulgate the message that streaming does not pay. It is true, however, that if there were no system, there would be no opportunity. As a result, systems can be implemented in regions lacking an IP regulatory framework and support policy interventions where applicable. This is already being done outside national jurisdictions, through the ‘offshoring’ of local copyrights into foreign management systems, returning revenue locally without passing through national taxable systems.

This starts with a simple premise: How can we incorporate the production and management of IP into livelihoods and economic recovery strategies and development initiatives? Can the creation of art and culture – a foundational right – be a tool to foster livelihoods and economic recovery in crisis settings? With the proper infrastructure and safeguards currently existing, music can demonstrate this.

The entry point selected for this analysis is one of economic inclusion. By expanding markets and generating a passive income stream, this approach complements income generation through cultural activities at the local and national level. In doing so, we can foster and enable unconventional livelihood reactivation mechanisms and, over time, secure resilient and passive income streams for those we support through existing technologies. Nothing new must be created; the technology already exists. Globally, this sector is growing. The property that requires monetization exists and thrives in every market in which we work. We need better policy, education, a mindset shift and the will to recognize music – and the broader creative economy – as an income source.

How Does Music Link to Recovery?

Music and culture play an important role in coping strategies and conflict transformation and are resilient traits of affected communities. They support, whenever possible, the fostering of cultural ecosystems and engaging in efforts to ensure that culture production can form the basis of a local economy. Securing IP rights for local culture makers and deliverers is an innovative approach to sustainable livelihoods, since this could expand the markets where culture production could generate a passive income stream. At the same time, every new song is added to the archive, which can help protect and strengthen local languages and cultures and provide a clear path to monetization (should it be wished). Lastly, this is a non-extractive, additive sector that requires little technological advancement to operate in post-crisis settings. This sector would complement income generation through cultural activities at the local and national levels.

Moreover, it is important to emphasize the potential positive impacts of supporting the cultural scene in crisis-affected countries. These benefits extend beyond livelihoods and income generation, and include fostering social cohesion, peacebuilding and meaningful engagement through the content delivered via music, theatre and other storytelling artistic endeavours.

Although very challenging to those still inside Syria, offshoring is an alternative for Syrian musicians. Still, it bypasses the potential tax it could generate for the country and its potential contributions to its GDP.
How Music Works

There are several ways that musicians – and those who work in the music business – earn income. Copyright composition is at the heart of all income streams, whether performing live, teaching music or selling merchandise. As a piece of IP, when a song is recorded and registered, it creates two distinct copyrights (owned pieces of property) that are administered and monetized separately: The first is the composition (often referred to as the ‘publishing’ or ‘musical work’) and the second is the specific recorded version of the composition or ‘sound recording’ (often referred to as the ‘master’). Both copyrights can be owned solely or shared. Unique identifiers are created to represent the composition (ISWC) and sound recording (ISRC) and these are embedded in the song’s metadata. When a song is used, whether copied onto a compact disc (CD) or vinyl, streamed on a platform or played on an internet radio station, the attached metadata allows the use to be tracked and paid for. For example, when an artist uploads an adequately registered song to a digital distributor and streams it on a digital service provider such as Spotify, the metadata allows the streaming platform to correctly assign the stream and ensure that all the rights holders are paid.

Underpinning this process is the administrative and knowledge-based capacity required to understand intellectual property and related rights. This is a challenge in the music industry in all countries, but is most pronounced in crisis and post-crisis settings. There is a lack of education and training related to the business of music versus the act of making the music itself. When the focus is solely on the making of music, the services, skills and trades are often ignored because of a lack of understanding of how music works and what is needed for it to flourish. As a result, ancillary roles that engage with musicians – including management, concert promoters and marketers – are not prevalent in places where music thrives, such as Syria, but the business division of music is developing.

Systematizing all created music in a registry would support multiple skills and roles. These registries form various frameworks, including member-owned and run societies often called performing rights organizations (PRO), collective management organizations (CMOs) or independent management entities (IMEs). In over 100 countries these organizations either do not exist, or if they do, the relationship between their activities – ensuring royalties are paid for used music – is not aligned with national and international intellectual property decrees and laws.

Many markets in these systems mentioned above need to be more compliant or adequately functioning; otherwise, they deny opportunities for musicians to earn revenue outside of cash in hand from informal arrangements. This informality reduces the capacity and the ability for music to be a tool to impact livelihoods. If these systems, in place in many parts of the world, functioned everywhere and there were facilities, training and capacity building to offer music-specific management skills to those in crisis, including information on what can be copyrighted, how to do so and how to market copyrighted material, then no matter the situation, what has been previously created can create income for the artist.

Anecdotal evidence from Syria reports that despite having a robust community of musicians – formal and informal – and an intellectual property registry administered by the Ministry of Culture, there is no framework for musicians to earn royalties, because an intermediary – a PRO, CMO or IME – does not exist. Successful Syrian artists register their work in France, Germany or the UK, for example, and this revenue is not tracked in GDP calculations, making it impossible for music to demonstrate the true economic value it could have in Syria, and with it, income for Syrian musicians and their families.

How Music Works in Syria

Syria established the Directorate of Copyrights Protection in 2001, which marked the issuance of the first ‘modern’ law governing copyrights. In 2013, an updated copyright protection law was issued, cancelling its predecessor and including many updates that covered royalties and tackled performance and performers’ rights.

To administratively create, manage and protect registrations, a dedicated directorate was created under the Ministry of Culture. While the registration process itself is relatively easy, one of its major shortcomings is that it is designed and focused on the process of physical copying, distributing and selling CDs and cassettes. Means of broadcasting...
have already become outdated in the music industry today with the shift to steaming services and online platforms. With the lack of CMO/PRO/IMEs, registering with the directorate has been rendered obsolete. No copyright management organization monitors usage in Syria (such as on radio, audiovisual, streaming) that tracks when the property is used. Therefore, when a Syrian artist is streamed on Anghami or YouTube or their music is played on the radio, either their royalty is paid to a rights administrator outside of Syria or no payment is triggered at all. Consequently, prospective income that should be due to the individual or group that owns the rights is not delivered.

Hence, Syrian musicians, or the limited number of them who know their way around and have the means, resort to registering their music with online digital distributors. These distributors manage the circulation of catalogues to the online streaming services, track usage, collect the proceeds and channel a proportion of it back to the artist, after deducting a subscription fee or a percentage of the overall income generated. To do even that much, a Syrian artist must have a bank account or a PayPal account outside Syria or a debit/credit card that is internationally accepted. Most likely that will require an address outside the country, which is nearly impossible for the average Syrian artist.

What Are the Opportunities in Our Approach?

As evidenced by UNDP work in Kyrgyzstan, the creative economy is a fast-growing sector globally, generating considerable GDP revenues and driving employment\(^\text{17}\). UNDP’s support across culture and creative industries’ growth strategies (e.g. the redevelopment of the University Theatre in Erbil\(^\text{18}\), the support of the Belgrade Concert Hall\(^\text{19}\), and upcoming projects for cultural industries and value chains in Kosovo) demonstrate the opportunities to invest in the creative and cultural sectors, all of which can be replicated in post-crisis and recovery settings. UNDP’s work in Kyrgyzstan, for example, aims at supporting one of the critical pillars of the strategic plan for the development of cultural sectors and implementing an integrated strategic vision towards the development of a creative economy accompanied by improved legislative and regulatory frameworks\(^\text{20}\).

In Syria, similar to Kyrgyzstan, there is a robust cohort of musicians, artists and creative entrepreneurs producing content and IP that can create economic growth. What needs to be added is a joint top-down and bottom-up approach to systematically address the IP challenges and regulatory frameworks that our approach addresses. We recognize that systemic change across multiple jurisdictions and government departments is challenging. Still, the existence of IP offices (as in Syria) or infrastructure investments (such as in Iraq) outline that frameworks exist to incorporate more detailed, applied knowledge to improve legislative and regulatory bodies to better recognize and act on the fiscal opportunities prevalent in music and cultural IP. What is lacking is a joined-up and bottom-up strategy that uses existing technologies and tools to empower creators and musicians to help professionalize their content and utilize the global systems. At the same time, the policy and procedural work is ongoing.

UNDP Ukraine supported local authorities in establishing a multipurpose hub in the western town of Mukachevo\(^\text{21}\). One of the features includes a studio for music production to support the integration of displaced communities. Such an approach provides an exciting example of the combination of services supporting youth, mental health and access to other public services. In some cases, the presence of a facility for music production represents the main entry point to attract youth.

With that said, there is an even greater opportunity worth exploring: the potential for working at the regional level rather than just the national level. While there are numerous contextual differences, the socio-economic circumstances of young artists show similarities across Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and other countries in the area. Additionally, countries like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are already expanding their influence on the regional and global cultural and entertainment stage. The UAE, for example, has launched a golden residency programme for artists and creatives, while KSA has been steadily expanding its array of art festivals. If executed thoughtfully, a regional organization that attracts, educates, empowers and manages talents from across the region, distributing their intellectual properties to regional and global markets, could provide a sustainable solution for generating long-term income for young artists in crisis and post-crisis settings.
Why Does This Matter?

The proposed approach is about increasing economic growth and livelihood support now, while also developing system changes that can be a powerful economic tool to support local, regional and national governments long into the future. There is revenue that can be in the pockets of individuals in crisis and post-crisis settings now that we can increase. At the same time, the sustainable, non-extractive fiscal benefit of investing in and regulating music and creative copyrights can provide passive taxable revenue for thousands of individuals and businesses, all of which can be tracked, monitored and applied to the GDP. This can work currently and in the future with an applied, structured approach.

In more than 100 countries, local policies lack the foundational economic structure for music and the creative economy to exist because of a lack of intellectual property frameworks and compliance. At present, in countries with little or no intellectual framework, music and creative IP are, in essence, ‘offshored.’ IP is registered elsewhere, and as a result, no potential tax revenue or local contribution to GDP is captured locally. Yet, systems to manage, monitor and monetize IP exist and function worldwide. Policy adjustments, research and supporting states to enhance these frameworks would create a foundation where intellectual property revenue is captured in national jurisdictions, which would appropriate all revenues associated with its usage. However, as it currently exists, the system inhibits the creation of jobs, the development of passive income streams, the generation of tax revenue and the fostering of local development.

Supporting countries in addressing these pressing issues and catalysing economic diversification, with a specific focus on cultural industries could play a pivotal and transformational role. Collaborating closely with member states and the private sector at the global and national level is critical. Actions need to be taken in the following domains:

1. Policy: Spearhead the establishment of internationally and nationally relevant and actionable policy frameworks aimed at empowering countries to effectively capture and extract value from cultural industries.

2. Ecosystem development: Facilitate the coordination of various stakeholders to commission and execute projects conducive to economic growth at a national level on a case-by-case basis, similar to the existing UNDP frameworks.

3. Intellectual property: Ensure inclusivity in the process of securing and safeguarding intellectual property rights, particularly copyrights, by developing global public goods and tools in partnership with organizations, such as the World Intellectual Property Organization and the private sector. This collaboration would establish robust national systems that facilitate value capture in places where this does not exist. It would also allow for collaboration with nations that showcase best practices.


5. Harness the value of music and creative industries: Beyond economic implications, investing in the cultural sector in a structured, intentional and trackable manner, underscores the positive, long-term impacts of cultural expression on health, social cohesion, conflict transformation, peacebuilding and meaningful engagement.

These efforts will support countries in enacting policy reforms and adaptations, tracking best practices and promoting the dissemination of collective learning. Furthermore, strategic and complementary partnerships between the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the World Intellectual Property Organization, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and other relevant UN agencies would reinforce this work in an anchored manner to avoid isolation.
Pathways to Acceleration

To enable such actions, we must establish this work with a straightforward suite of data, evidence and partnerships. We must first understand how creative intellectual property, as an economic function, operates, and what is required for it to thrive. We need to understand the challenges within the systems that require attention, how to overcome them (including current workarounds) and how to measure them across different development frameworks. The goal is to sustain national sites, identify markets outside the country of origin, secure resilient income streams through existing technologies, and demonstrate that this works everywhere (including sanctioned countries) at minimal or no cost. Such mechanisms require the development of multifold policy, education and mindset change to understand how intellectual property functions, how it can be a tool to create income in distressed situations and how to leverage it. If successful, this approach could also be implemented in everyday developing contexts (non-crisis settings).

Reconciling intellectual property mechanisms to capture income could create sustainable income opportunities and develop new value chains. Countries in the Arab region have engaged in developing institutional mechanisms that could serve as a platform or model to protect intellectual property and to incentivize mechanisms to maintain the profits within the country. Such an approach can effectively address the whole spectrum of needs from creative industries (policy engagement at a national level, intellectual property protection mechanisms, ecosystem development at national and local levels and advocacy).

Engaging in a process to support countries’ efforts to generate sustainable and passive income livelihood strategies based on music and cultural industries has many benefits. A comparatively less intensive approach is required, thanks to global intellectual property frameworks and technology. Such an approach could adopt a twofold strategy, where on one side, it identifies an existing or potential ecosystem and networks of artists, where actions linked to capacity development, entrepreneurship, can be developed (either in person or remotely). On the other side, it can focus on the development of an ecosystem aimed at developing a mechanism to support the artist to secure intellectual property rights (via performing rights organizations or collective management organizations) and identify payment mechanisms. In parallel, and whenever possible (given the capacities or contexts), support to develop policies at the national and local level should also accompany the efforts of artists during a crisis.
Endnotes

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6 https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/45761


9 As presented by Paul Pacilica, Head of the Saudi Music Commission of Saudi Arabia at XP Music Futures, Riyadh, December 2023


12 https://pivotaleconomics.com/undercurrents/music-copyright-2022


14 Such examples have been studied by John Morgan O’Connell and Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco in the book Music and Conflict.

15 https://moc.gov.sy/culture-administrations/copy-right-protection/

16 https://www.mact.gov.sy/sites/default/files/Uploads/62%20%D8%B9%DA%A7%DA%98%52%20%DA%99%82%DA%A7%DA%98%88%DA%98%88%DA%98%88%DA%9A%9A.pdf


22 This might pose difficulties in countries where sanctions are in place, due to the limitations of banking systems.