

MANIFESTO FOR A NEW RELATIONSHIP

A Speech for the 2016 Inter-Ministerial Conference and Expo, Nigeria April 2016

Thank you for coming today to the 2016 Inter-Ministerial Conference and Expo, an important opportunity for the UK and Nigeria to agree how we can work together across the creative industries. The conference is one of the key events of UK/Nigeria 2015–16, a major season of arts in Nigeria aimed at building new audiences, creating new collaborations and strengthening relationships between the UK and Nigeria.

I originally floated the idea on my first trip to Nigeria back in 2011, before much of the rebuilding of the Council's position within the Arts. So it's particularly gratifying to see the season come to fruition in a mutually beneficial way, and to have been such a success - the trick as always is to see how between us, we can keep the magic alive in the years to come.

From this point, it's my hope that the conversations kick-started over the coming days lead to sustained and fruitful partnerships between our two countries that boost creativity and prosperity on both sides as we build towards hosting a sizeable Nigerian delegation in the UK later this year. Indeed I hope to see many of you at the Edinburgh International Culture Summit in August, a forum for the discussion of the impact, positioning and profile of the arts, culture and the creative industries within a successful contemporary society, as well as those with significant social issues.

Arts and heritage have never been more important for the UK's international standing. I would like to talk a little bit today about why this is this and about how I think our two countries can work together towards shared goals. The British Council was founded to create 'a friendly knowledge and understanding' between Britain and the wider world. We do this by making a positive contribution to the countries we work with, using the cultural resources of the UK such as art, sport, education, science, culture, language, innovation, creativity and the sharing of the UK's values and ways of living. Our work makes a lasting difference to the UK's international standing by increasing the country's influence and networks with key decision makers, influencers and the wider public globally. It increases UK prosperity by encouraging more trade, investment and tourism. It helps to keep the UK safe and secure by improving stability and security in strategically important countries. It also increases influence by growing the number of people who know and trust us. Most important to me is that it's a genuine partnership with the countries we engage with: we learn about their cultures, their heritage, their artists, their ambitions, and we try to help them realise these, whether it's in the arts, society, education or in the enabling of their citizens to play a larger role in international conversations.

The arts are vital to this undertaking. Cultural exchange, supports economic and social development, strengthens relationships and creates opportunity. This is increasingly important, as the safety of our citizens at home, the ability of UK organisations to operate internationally, and the freedom of UK citizens to travel and trade, face serious and growing challenges. Conversely the UK is undergoing a sharp conversation about its own place in the international world, with many not seeing the advantages of a genuine open and multi-cultural society. We normally do not take a position in political matters: but, encouraged recently by our Chief Executive, as an organisation we are resolutely pro the UK remaining in European Union. And I am personally too!

Meanwhile across the Middle East and North Africa, for example, our arts projects are helping to engage young people and give them alternative ways of imagining their futures and seeing the world, whilst also strengthening their connections with the UK. Cultural exchange is key to our prosperity. It develops a modern, vibrant and creative image for the UK amongst millions of people in fast growing economies, it creates markets for British arts and creates opportunities for organisations to share their expertise in the cultural and creative industries. Through this work we are able to build stronger trading links and enlarge our influence in key economies, as well as opening up opportunities for young artists and creatives within UK markets

Through recent seasons and festivals we are giving people across the globe a dynamic and creative vision of Britain and we have demonstrably increased demand for what the UK cultural sector can offer, by way of arts, experience and skills. UK/ Nigeria 2015–16 is the latest example of this work. Since August last year more than 50 new partnerships have been created between Nigerian and British artists and creative businesses, including this one. 3,400 people have participated in workshops, seminars and events, 38,627 people have attended festivals, exhibition and performances. We have reached over 136 million people through press, television and social media. We have worked with British and Nigerian institutions, not least the Federal Ministry of Culture.

We have seen performances from Candoco Dance Company, one of the world's finest disabled and non-disabled dance companies in Lagos; collaborations between the hugely gifted Tunde Jegede and British jazz musician Jamie Cullum at the Roundhouse in London; Lagos Theatre Festival, which I hope will one day be the largest performing arts festival in Africa; work with Lagos Fashion and Design Week to showcase Nigeria's vital fashion scene; and work in the North of the country with Kabosh Theatre from Northern Ireland who use arts for community development and conflict resolution. Workshops and Seminars across Nigeria have seen some of the UK's finest creative practitioners share their expertise and learn from their Nigerian counterparts. In parallel the British Library mounted West Africa: Word, Symbol Song, a major (and very inspiring) exhibition tracing a thousand years of literature on the continent; we supported Cassava Republic Press' launch in the UK. What Cassava Republic did was unprecedented: an African publishing house establishing a base in Britain after nearly ten years in Africa rather than the reverse. They are an exemplary illustration of the strength and depth of the Nigerian creative industries; a brilliant example of what partnership between the UK and Nigeria can achieve; and a great model of the British Council's idea of mutuality.

The UK is rightly regarded as a leader in defining and developing its creative economy. The creative industries are now the fastest growing sector in the UK, contributing more than £80bn each year. Globally, they generate 3% of GDP and employ 1% of the population. Beyond the financial success they are recognised for their innovative role in social and civic development. But major shifts in digital technology and funding mean this dynamic, diverse sector is changing rapidly. Accessing the resulting new means of production, finance, collaboration and distribution, can be challenging. As most countries are now considering how best to foster creativity and culture holistically for development, there is much for us to work on together in the coming days.

The Nigerian creative industries, including film, broadcasting and other arts and recreation activities, contributed just over 2% to the Nigerian economy in 2014. The Nigerian film industry (Nollywood) is the second largest film industry in the world and Nigerian music, fashion and other creative sectors have large-scale national and regional appeal as well as growing international profile. Indeed the UK can learn much from the creativity, entrepreneurship and vitality of Nigeria.

On my last visit to Lagos in 2011 the potential for growth in areas such as music, the visual arts, digital technology and film was self-evident. Lagos is no idyllic utopia. It is still a city of opposites - a place where the monumentally inappropriate, ugly and barely used National Theatre - designed in the 1970s by Hungarian architects to resemble a General's cap for the disputed FESTAC celebrations - can sit at the crest of a hill overlooking a mainland Lagos where, within little more than a block of each other stands Cc Hub, an incubation lab for digital solutions and CCA, an exemplary contemporary art gallery. At Cc Hub app producers, public agencies, and other entrepreneurs can test the usability of their new products in a room full of state of the art mobile phones. It encourages start up industries to work together in shared space on everything from new solutions to refuse collection to digital publishing. I was struck by Freedom Park, an oasis of both of green and creativity.

At the heart of this particular initiative and the work of Cc Hub is a desire to make the dream of a truly global African creative economy a reality. Because as much as you can wax lyrical about Nigerian creativity, there are still major obstacles. The ambition is there, but often times young creative businesses are working in silos, eager to be the first but not willing to participate in the

kind of collaborative working that would kick-start real change. The theatre producers need to talk to the graphic designers; the App makers to the city planners; the fashion designers to the visual artists.

I am thrilled to see some of the artists and creatives I met on my last visit on panels here today: Emem Ema who won the British Council International Young Music Entrepreneur Award in 2006 and is now Executive Director of VZHUN Media, a Lagos-based entertainment company and content provider; Audu Maikori who won the global International Young Music Entrepreneur Award in 2007 who runs Chocolate City Entertainment; and Segun Adefila, whose adaptation of Shakespeare's Two Nobel Kinsman I look forward to seeing whilst I am in Nigeria. I hope together, we can address the challenges I mentioned earlier. Our engagement with them, we hope, has had a hand in their subsequent success, and we love staying in touch with them to see how they develop and then influence others amongst their peer group.

Research by Ipsos MORI for the British Council demonstrates that arts, and cultural and historic attractions, are two of the top five contributors to a nation's attractiveness to people from other countries. It's because of the quality of our cultural sector in the UK that the country is regularly placed in the top of global rankings of soft power. I am heartened for example by the recently elected Governor of Lagos State's commitment to tourism. This something we are supporting in the next two months through Open House, a project that will see beautiful historic buildings across Lagos and Calabar open their doors to the public and the unveiling of a major work by British Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare in Lagos next month. Lagos is a fascinating, creative melting pot but must do more to promote itself to international businesses and ultimately tourists. Tell the good story!

In March, the British Council and Watershed ran Playable City: Lagos, designed to support, inspire and challenge participants from Lagos and the UK to develop playful interventions that respond to specific social challenges and specific geographic locations in Lagos. The idea is that small, street-level interruptions can make cities more "liveable", and spark conversations with friends or strangers about what we would like our cities to be. Of course one single idea cannot change cities this large and this chaotic overnight, but change is more realistic when it's open and inclusive. I hope that projects like this help make Lagos even more of a creative hub in the future. For those interested in supporting creative economies, hubs are important, not least as 85% of global employment growth comes from small start-ups. Creativity is often the product of social encounter - creative practice is not confined to galleries, artist studios or cultural institutions. These hubs might take quite different forms: temporary to permanent, digital to physical, local to global. They might be makerspaces, incubators, labs, hacker spaces; they could be temporary, permanent, digital or physical. But they share some common characteristics. They allow inventive and imaginative people, artists, musicians, designers, filmmakers, app developers or start-up entrepreneurs to share workspace and access experience, tools and investment.

The British Council supports the formation of policy and leadership in cultural skills training, youth engagement and professional learning. We also share insights with policymakers to promote the development of creative economies worldwide. Ultimately that's what I am here to do today. It is fitting that the next time I will see many of you will be in Edinburgh a city that has done so much to boost the UK's creative economy, and arguably the greatest cultural festival city in the world. Edinburgh is a creative hub - a place to share ideas, best practice and policy on the development of workspaces for people in the creative industries. I hope that by August our two countries will have committed to developing our relationship across arts policy and the creative economy further, to support the optimism, the ambition and the imagination of people in both our countries to explore more positive and sustainable futures.

Graham Sheffield, Director Arts, British Council