ARTICLE 01

WHO GETS TO TELL THE STORY? EXCLUSION IN CREATIVE SECTOR

Publishing, media and cultural spaces cannot claim to represent society if whole communities struggle to enter, be heard or be taken seriously.

A country's creative sector does more than entertain. Publishers decide which stories reach readers; editors and broadcasters influence which experiences become news; festivals and studios shape whose work is seen as art. These decisions help determine who is remembered, who is considered credible and whose imagination is allowed to shape public life.

In Tanzania, conversations about exclusion in the creative sector must be understood alongside documented challenges to artistic freedom and media independence. Freedom House has reported pressure on journalists and artists, including censorship and penalties affecting musicians whose work criticised government conduct. The Tanzania Human Rights Report 2025 also describes arrests, regulatory suspensions, intimidation and restrictions that contributed to self-censorship in journalism and digital expression. These reports do not prove that every publisher or media house excludes particular communities; they do show that the conditions in which stories are produced and circulated can be constrained. [1][2]

Exclusion can also be quieter than a ban. It can happen when emerging writers cannot afford publication, when editorial networks repeatedly select familiar voices, when creative opportunities depend on personal connections, or when marginalised creatives are treated as subjects to be discussed rather than creators with authority over their own stories. Such barriers should be examined through transparent submissions data, commissioning practices, pay, representation in leadership, access to equipment and opportunities to distribute work—not merely through good intentions.

> *"There is an urgent need to address issues of social protection, market access and exposure for artists and their works locally and globally."* **— Nancy Mwaisaka, UNESCO National Professional Officer for Culture in Tanzania [3]**

UNESCO's reporting on Tanzanian women in the creative sector highlights the importance of market access, visibility and fair working conditions. Globally, UNESCO has also documented persistent gender inequalities in cultural and creative industries, including unequal access to decent work, fair remuneration and leadership positions. These patterns matter because access is not only about being allowed into a room; it is also about being paid, credited, published, protected and able to build a sustainable career. [3][4]

The response should be practical. Publishers and media houses can publish transparent submission and commissioning criteria, expand open calls, compensate contributors fairly, protect editorial independence, improve accessibility and track whose work is accepted, reviewed and promoted. Festivals, studios and funders can widen selection panels, create safer reporting pathways, and invest in emerging and community-rooted creators. Creative workers can build cooperative publishing, independent platforms, archives and solidarity networks that reduce dependence on a small number of gatekeepers.

GenDAR's position is that creativity must be protected both within the creative sector and through the creative sector as a means of advancing human rights. The question is not whether every story must be published or every work accepted. It is whether decisions are transparent, fair and open to a genuinely broad range of voices. A creative sector that reflects society must do more than invite diversity onto the stage; it must share the power to commission, publish, distribute, review and remember.

SOURCES & FURTHER READING

- **[1] Freedom House, "Tanzania: Freedom in the World 2025" —** https://freedomhouse.org/country/tanzania/freedom-world/2025
- **[2] Legal and Human Rights Centre, Tanzania Human Rights Report 2025 —** https://humanrights.or.tz/en/report/download/thrr2025
- **[3] UNESCO, "UNESCO celebrates Tanzanian women in the creative sector" (2021) —** https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-celebrates-tanzanian-women-creative-sector
- **[4] UNESCO, "UNESCO reports persistent gender inequalities in cultural and creative industries" (2021) —** https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-reports-persistent-gender-inequalities-cultural-and-creative-industries