

# Jamaican Economy Panel

A partnership between United Nations Jamaica and the Department of Economics at The University of the West Indies (UWI) Mona



JEP Discussion 15

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# Creative Economy



Src: Los Angeles County's Third District

Jamaica has been described as a “cultural superstate - a powerhouse over-bubbling with talent and creativity” - Dr Marcus Goffe. The small island boasts a global platform in music, sport, dance, and other spheres. However, Jamaica hasn't realised the full potential of its creative ability. This may be partly due to the lack of accessible finance for the creative sector or the opportunity to monetise the industry thoroughly.

Jamaica has achieved developmental progress in its cultural economy over the last couple of years. The Jamaica Business Development Corporation (JBDC) and the British Council show through the [Jamaica Cultural and Creative Industries Mapping](#) that the most significant opportunity for growth is through “improving market development and sales” and “sector skills.” This could include business skills, creative and technical skills, improving knowledge of intellectual property and copyright and lastly digital skills. Additionally, the proposal of a Creative Economy Act has been commended and would provide a guide to advance Jamaica's cultural and creative industries.

UNCTAD and UNDP have defined the creative economy as an “evolving concept based on creative assets potentially generating economic growth and development.” Before the coronavirus outbreak, the sector was one of the fastest growing and played a transformative role “in terms of income generation, job creation and export earnings with spillover effects that stimulated innovation in other sectors.” This point is hugely important to emphasise: investment in the creative economy will not only improve this sector but will have a knock-on effect on other industries, ultimately resulting in the diversification of the economy, which is critical to Jamaica, especially with the severe impact of COVID lockdowns to the tourist industry.

Elliot Harris, Former Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development, explained that within the creative economy industry over 60% of positions are held by women and over a third by young people under 35. The creative sector is technology-intensive and service-orientated, meaning that “cost structures are more fluid and less of a barrier to entry than in the recent past.”

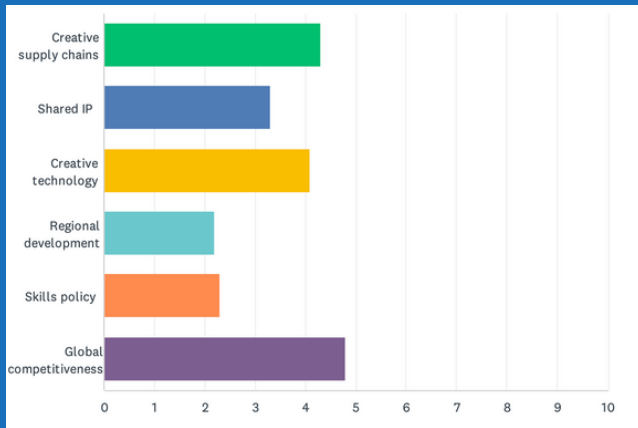
At the most recent United Nations Jamaica Partnership Forum, Harris emphasised that “creative expression is more likely to flourish in a conducive environment.” He proposed that the country creates this atmosphere by supporting entrepreneurship, regulatory and legal framework that facilitates intellectual collaboration and exchange of ideas and skills and promotes intellectual property rights. In addition, he recommended expanding access to sufficient and appropriate financing to enable a scaling up of creative undertaking to the point that it can provide a live yield.

In practical terms, this could mean expanding access to broadband, providing commercial premises and training, creating effective and manageable contracts, addressing the funding gap, and mobilising adequate finance opportunities. When JEP panellists were asked how the creative economy contributes to growth, they felt that global competitiveness and creative supply chains were the most important contributors.

Economist, Dr. Karsten Müller, Assistant Professor of Finance, highlighted that brain drain has an extremely negative affect on the economy, notwithstanding the creative sector. Müller further emphasized that to retain some of the brightest Jamaicans as well as entice highly skilled immigrants, it is necessary to invest in “more cultural offerings” which he posits would “improve the liveability of Kingston.”

This leads to the question panellists were asked regarding the role of the government and development partners in furthering the creative sector.

## Areas of growth for the creative economy



For significant progress, panellists felt that investment in adequate infrastructure was crucial. [The Global Infrastructure Hub](#) recommend “transformative infrastructure.” This type of infrastructure provides “lasting social and economic value for everyone, produces long-term prosperity for future generations and creates the conditions to transition towards a resource-efficient, sustainable economy.” The sustainability and diversification of the Jamaican economy is key to limiting brain drain and ensuring adequate opportunities for future generations.

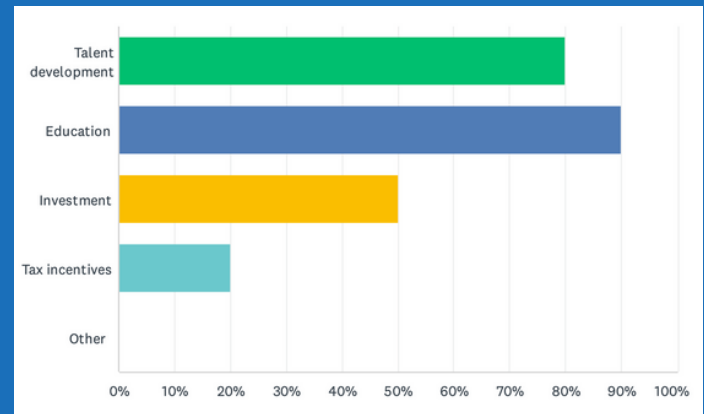
Additionally, Jamaica is particularly well-known for its musical talent. Panellists emphasised the need for infrastructure to support this existing and burgeoning talent. In this regard, the JEP also agreed that emerging artists needed improved access to venues, practice space and business skills to further monetise this talent and further boost the music industry.

Regarding the role of the government and development partners, the JEP offered that they must play a part in helping to promote the creative economy. JEP panellists again felt that investing in infrastructure (such as theatres, sports grounds, etc.) and forming partnerships with businesses, investors, universities, and schools are vital in driving the creative economy. One panellist emphasised that although Jamaica is a “creative powerhouse...our tourism industry barely pays lip service to this competitive advantage.” The panellist suggested a “need to recognise the value of brand Jamaica in terms of creativity and pay for it. Currently, creatives are being exploited even when they are being utilised in the sector.”

Panellists were asked about the value chains for creative economy and how government and development partners’ interventions in the supply side, create capabilities for building talent that result in sustainable careers. Panellists agreed that there is a need to implement adequate investment into talent development (provide skills to monetise talent) and increase education through formal and technical training.

Dr. Patrice Whitely, a lecturer at the University of the West Indies, explained that one of the significant issues “preventing Jamaican artists from achieving global success is [inadequate] knowledge of the business aspect.” Whitely emphasises that to rectify this issue, “education about avenues for monetising talent...is vital for success” in the creative sector.

## Value chain for creative economy



While physical infrastructure and investment in training are critical, panellists indicated that digitisation and access to finance for small and medium-sized enterprises must also be considered an incredibly effective way of transforming the creative sector. Elliott Harris emphasised how digitisation has enabled a new level of access to global markets and can even reach remote areas. “[Assume] digital platforms were made available to all creative entities through marketing, advertising, and export promotion. This could make a massive difference in the promotion and accessibility of the creative economy in Jamaica.” With regards to SMEs, one panellist felt that although there had been some investment recently in SMEs, it had not gone far enough, particularly within the “micro sector,” which they claimed has been “almost totally untouched.” Evidently, there are areas of market efficiency that could be worked on by development partners and the government to benefit the creative economy.



Lastly, panellists were asked to suggest the best mix of financing instruments to support the creative economy. Kevin Williams said that “subsidised loans or grants would enable the creative industry to develop its capacity.” Müller explained that it depends on the specific creative industry but “financial instruments that invest in education and training are key.”

Elliott Harris stated that there is a “great need to expand access to sufficient and appropriate financing that will enable the scaling up of the creative economy to the point where it can actually provide a live yield.”

Dr. Stuart Davies, Senior Economist, United Nations Resident Coordinator’s Office, highlighted the need for flexible financing structures that advance the diversification and economic transformation of Jamaica’s creative sector. He explained that creatives would benefit from increased access to flexible financing mechanisms in order to fully take advantage of opportunities that arise as they develop and take creative products and services to market. Dr. Davies, pointed out:

**“The creative economy’s potential in Jamaica is huge. Root and branch approaches are needed to offer the best support to those already engaged or who would like to develop their creative talents. A few of the key ingredients needed to advance diversification and economic transformation for Jamaica include up-skilling creative artists with entrepreneurial and business-skills development; enabling regulatory environments with strong infrastructure and creative networks; and flexible financing structures that support innovation and creativity.”**



**DR. STUART DAVIES**  
Senior Economist, UN Resident Coordinator’s Office

Nadine McCloud, further highlighted:

**“Jamaica has not reaped the full scale of the pecuniary and nonpecuniary returns from its massive and globally unique stock of creative capital that spans its entire socioeconomic distribution. Jamaica’s production function in the creative arena requires critical facilitating inputs, such as physical infrastructure and financial capital, to help churn out sizeable and sustainable returns that will contribute to its economic development while reducing income inequality.”**



**DR. NADINE McCLOUD**  
Head of the Department of Economics, UWI Mona

### Conclusion

Jamaica has high levels of potential in its creative sector. The report published by the UN in 2010 recognises this. It points out that “creativity represents one of Jamaica’s most distinguishable assets and competitive advantages as a country and urges Jamaica to positively exploit its creative and cultural industries.” Jamaica is encouraged to continue to expand and channel this potential into actionable insights and truly monetise talent, diversify the economy and recognise the value of creative ability in Jamaica.

