

## Research Article

## The Role of Creative Arts in the Fight against COVID-19 in Kenya

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Received: 23.12.2020

Accepted: 09.01.2021

Published: 26.02.2021

**Journal homepage:**<https://www.easpublisher.com>**Quick Response Code**

**Abstract:** Initial response to the outbreak and fast spread of the coronavirus (Covid-19) disease was very slow in most countries. Rightly, most efforts at understanding it turned to and concentrated on the medical field, and within a very short time, its economic impact gained a central place in ensuing discussions on the pandemic. Little attention was given to non-health related aspects like the social and psychological implications, the role of religious and other traditional believe systems in understanding and combating Covid-19. Even less thought was given to contribution of the latter factors and others in efforts at fighting its wide spread and measure at containing it. This paper takes the position that fighting the Covid-19 disease needs to be multifaceted in order to present a holistic affront on the dangers it possesses. The paper argues that creative artists have a key role to play in this fight and uses examples from Kenya to indicate that role. It discusses works of artists from different genres of literature, and brings their contribution to the fore. Aspects like the presentation of the pandemic, messages contained, and language used in weaving their art are looked at and their role presented. It concludes that creative artists' role in society clearly goes beyond entertainment and calls for them to be included in various initiatives, spanning all sectors including sustainable development efforts and health related campaigns.

**Keywords:** Creative arts, creative artists, Covid-19, pandemic, corona songs, performing art.

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### INTRODUCTION

When a report of the first case of the Novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) was made sometime in December 2019, many people, especially those outside the medical field, made no serious notice. Indeed, it looked too distant not only geographically but also in terms of the potential to be of global concern. However, in a couple of months the whole world took note as the coronavirus quietly and steadily crossed borders from Wuhan in China and became a threat to the entire world, disrupting the smooth operations of health systems put together painstakingly over many years, and ravaging economies. The developed world was not spared either as nations in Europe, the United States of America and Asia were attacked in equal measure. Pictures of anguish, desperation and hopelessness in the developed economies sent shivers in the third world in view of the less developed health care systems, lack of infrastructure and limited capacity to handle medical emergencies in those economies. Leaders, health care practitioners, and the general public feared for the worst because seeing what Covid-19 was doing in the first world, the possibility of more devastation in third world countries in Africa, Asia and the rest of the world seemed very real. This led to quick action from the World Health Organization (WHO), other international organizations and foundations, governments and other bodies in crafting intervention measures in response to what was clearly turning out to be a threat to

humanity's very existence. This paper, therefore, attempts a discussion of these interventions with emphasis on the role of the creative arts in responding to the threat of Covid-19. It starts with a brief description of the Covid-19 Virus, including its symptoms, spread and effects, followed by the response of the Government of Kenya, and the challenges faced in combating it. The next section zeroes in on the role that creative artists have played in this whole situation in Kenya, before making concluding remarks. Prior to embarking on the foregoing, a short note on the methodology employed is presented.

### METHODOLOGY

This was a desk research, in which the researchers relied mainly on news and reports from the Government and other agencies involved in the fight against coronavirus. Data was collected from Covid-19 related publications, and both print and electronic media, as well as different social media platforms that carried many discussions on different aspects of the pandemic. These sources were augmented with observations of people's behavior towards the pandemic and adherence to protocols proposed by relevant authorities.

### Novel Covid-19 and its effects

The effects of coronavirus did not take long to be manifested in society. Measures taken by

governments in tackling the pandemic had immediate effects in society, including a forced change in the way of doing things. The masses were encouraged to wash hands regularly, something that many were not hitherto used to doing; greeting by shaking hands was discouraged; and keeping social distance became a new norm. All these were new and it took a lot of effort getting used to them. In many traditions shaking hands and congregating for different activities is the expected way of doing things but this was no longer tenable. Customs and traditional practices that went with burials, weddings, and other activities in society were challenged. In Kenya, for instance, there are certain ethnic communities, which are used to laying out very elaborate and expensive burial ceremonies that involve crowds of people largely depending on the stature of the deceased and the socio-economic status of the family. Okal, Kodak, Yakub & Okello [1] have addressed this among the Dholuo community in western Kenya and concluded that the coronavirus pandemic is likely to alter the community's cultural practices going forward. In general, many are now considering the possibility of sticking to avoidance of handshakes all together in the post Covid-19 era.

A big change was witnessed in the way people interact on a day-to-day basis. Actions that are considered routine like greeting by shaking hands, hugging either as a form of greeting or showing affection, touching, sitting close to one another and chatting heartily are no longer permitted. The initial period was particularly challenging for many since keeping social distance, greeting at a distance devoid of any form of touching is against the cultural practice in many African societies. Whereas some people adjusted over time, the majority, especially in rural areas, have not complied fully.

Another change that has occurred as a result of Covid-19 is the aspect of spending time outside or going out. The Government of Kenya, through the Ministry of Interior as advised by the Ministry of Health has imposed restrictions on the way one has to go out. Though total lockdowns were issued in places like Wuhan, South Africa, Spain, and England [2], in Kenya it is only Mombasa, Nairobi and Manderu that were initially put under partial lockdown where people were restricted from entering or leaving the said places. Also, the Government of Kenya imposed a variety of curfews among them the 6PM to 5AM curfew to limit the spread of the virus. It is important to note that Night travel was cancelled since March 2020. While restrictions on entry to certain parts of Kenya were later

removed, several measures remain in place, including curfew between 10PM and 4AM.

Measures that the government put in place to curb the spread of the disease were many and far-reaching. These measures changed people's lives as had never been seen before. They led to new ways of living. These included working from home and closing schools indefinitely. People who had tested positive of the disease or who portrayed Covid-like symptoms were stigmatized, leading to psychological torture; exacerbated by such things as lockdown, quarantine, financial strain, lack of basic needs, loss of jobs and fears associated with overemphasis on the effects of the disease especially in the media.

Reports of an increase in gender violence were made owing to the stay at home directive that meant that more people had to stay together for extended periods. The same has been reported in several other countries, both developed and developing. In Kenya, Rugene [3] states that a report from the national gender helpline 1195 shows that cases of sexual violence and psychological torture went up significantly since the start of the mentioned measures. In April, for instance, there was an increase of sexual violence and gender-based violence cases reported from 115 in March to 461. Most of the time, consequences have included physical injuries, mental, sexual and reproductive health problems.

Economies all over the world, both developed and developing have been greatly affected by coronavirus. In fact, they have been devastated. Unfortunately, it is developing nations that have had to bear the greatest brunt as has become the norm in such outbreaks of diseases or in times of other naturally occurring catastrophes. The most hit sectors include transport, with air transport particularly suffering a complete shutdown. Airlines like KQ (Kenya Airways) which has been struggling with a huge debt burden has seen its situation get worse with every passing day since the suspension of flights into and out of Kenya in March, 2020. Containment measure targeting road transport equally interfered with the operations of many businesses in that sector. Drivers of long distance trucks that transport goods from the port of Mombasa to neighboring countries of Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi and eastern Democratic Republic of Congo have been going through very hard times. They are expected to be tested and issued with a certificate at the border towns of Busia and Malaba before being allowed to cross into Uganda. The exercise does not seem to be well coordinated, a situation that has attracted

complaints from the drivers and members of the public. The drivers claim testing is too slow and once tested it takes several days, up to a week, to get results. As a result, they are incurring expenses well beyond the normal practice. On the other side, members of the public treat them with a lot of suspicion because a number of them have tested positive, hence raising fears. By 24<sup>th</sup> May, 2020 there were trucks lined up along the road between Malaba border and Kanduyi in Bungoma, a distance of 27 kilometers. One of the drivers who were interviewed on NTV, a local national television station in Kenya captured well their tribulations along the way, including being targeted for stoning should they stop by the roadside for a short call. The public does not want them to stop in their neighborhood with some openly accusing them of spreading Covid-19.

The hospitality industry also suffered immensely due to the coronavirus and resultant measures taken by Government. Tourism, which depends greatly on transport and the hotel industry to thrive took a major hit too. Consequently, there have been job losses in all the above sectors, as well as in horticulture especially flower farming in Naivasha. Indeed job losses, forced leave, reduction of work force, and pay cuts are some of the effects witnessed in Kenya and the rest of the world. America, for instance, has recorded the highest unemployment benefits requests witnessed for a long time. These realities exacerbate the already dire economic status of the majority in poor countries leading to desperation, hopelessness, increased crime rates and other vices.

#### **Response of the Kenyan Government to Covid-19**

There are concerted efforts in place to try to tackle the pandemic globally. In Kenya, various players have come up with many initiatives aimed at providing accurate information about the disease, sensitizing the populace on Covid-19 and its effects, best practices in view of the prevailing circumstances and many others. The main player in this has been the Government of Kenya, which is in the forefront in fighting the pandemic. The response of Government when it became apparent that Covid-19 had reached Kenya in March 2020 was swift. Primary and Secondary schools as well as all institutions of higher learning were ordered closed in the week of starting on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Not very long after that, air transport was stopped as all flights into and out of Kenya seized operations. A significant measure that followed was imposition of a national dusk to dawn curfew requiring everyone save for people serving in well-documented essential sectors, to be home between 7 PM and 5 AM. Although imposing the

curfew had many challenges at the initial stages, mainly due to the use of excessive force by the police, the measure served to slow down the rate of infections tremendously.

Besides the curfew, there was cessation of movement into and out of certain regions that were experiencing increasing infections. These included Nairobi Metropolitan Area, Mombasa, Kwale and Kilifi counties. Mandera County joined the list after a couple of weeks. The curfew, which was initially meant to last 21 days was extended on April 25<sup>th</sup> for another 21 days, and was further extended for another 21 days on Saturday, May 17, 2020. Likewise, President Uhuru extended cessation of movement in the above regions for 21 days alongside the curfew in a televised address to the nation. There are, however, calls from different sectors, especially the business community to the president to ease some of the containment measures in place. They explain that the economy is suffering immensely due to the curfew and partial lockdown of parts of the country. Businesses have suffered; individuals are facing difficulties in providing for their families because many of the activities that earn them an income have been suspended. Besides, many people are out of work since businesses cannot afford to maintain them. Despite those concerns, President Uhuru Kenyatta has kept on extending the curfew after every review. In the latest such review it was extended until January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021 albeit with a change in time. It currently lasts between 10PM and 4AM.

#### **Challenges Facing the Coronavirus Response**

While the Government of Kenya was quick to put in place several measures aimed at containing the spread of the coronavirus, a number of challenges have been faced. Firstly, there is a general lack of adherence to guidelines provided by government. Kenyans have a history of defiance and failure to follow government directions on many issues. The Covid-19 containment measures seem to have been treated similarly. Despite gazettement of a law requiring everyone to wear a facemask in public, and a specific fine attached to failure to comply, only a small percentage of people do so. Although there was an order that only those providing essential services can move out of and into Nairobi Metropolitan area, various tricks have been employed by many to travel against that directive. A group faked a funeral and traveled from Nairobi to Homa Bay County in western Kenya for a 'burial'. It was discovered that they had no dead body but only wanted to travel home. Upon undergoing a test, the driver of the vehicle turned positive and a frantic effort to trace their contacts started. A friend narrated to one

of the authors how an acquaintance of his sneaked out of Nairobi to go for a funeral in Kisumu and back.

A researcher from the East African Community (EAC) in Arusha sneaked into Kenya but was fortunately nabbed and taken to quarantine. A number of people gave samples for testing in Eastleigh, Nairobi but took off before the release of results. Upon release of the results, some samples tested positive but those concerned were nowhere to be quarantined and treated. Perhaps quite daring was a group of youths who were captured on national television using an ambulance from the work place of one of them as transport back home from a drinking free, exhibiting no social distancing at all. These are just examples of the many ways in which the public is working against the containment measure given by the Ministry of Health and in the process affecting the fight against the disease negatively. The police who take bribes and let people who break the guidelines get away have only managed to make the situation worse.

Poverty is another big challenge in efforts at fighting Covid-19. Many people live from hand to mouth, depending on earnings from a day's work. In such circumstances, it is very hard for them to follow the guidelines from the Ministry of Health. On several occasions people have openly said that, it is better for them to die of coronavirus as opposed to hunger in their houses. It pains them that they have no food to give their kids, hence the choice to break the set rules. Masks are also not affordable to the majority. Faced with a choice to buy food or a facemask, many would opt for food. As a result, the country has witnessed some innovations to take care of the need to wear a facemask in public, especially at the initial stages of implementing measures against Covid-19. A woman was spotted in Likoni, Mombasa County with improvised masks for herself and her child. She had made masks out of plastic bottles and when interviewed she said she could not afford to buy masks. She was lucky because Governor Ali Hassan Joho came to her rescue by giving her Ksh. 100,000 to enable her start an incoming generating project. Many are not that lucky and they continue going about their duties without wearing facemasks.

The nation has generally witnessed people improvising and using parts of bras, pieces of ordinary cloth and leaves as facemasks. There are also reports of the practice of sharing masks in the rural areas thus defeating the purpose of using them. This happens because many use them simply to avoid getting in trouble from law enforcers. As such, when one is going

to the market, hospital or any other public place, they borrow from a member of the family or a neighbor who owns one [4]. Church leaders claiming to have a cure, asking their faithful to keep going to church, and priests being nabbed in prayers involving congregants were other instances in which the laid down protocols were ignored [5]. It is clear from the above that guidelines in the use of masks are not being followed and this puts the entire population at risk.

Fears that corruption crept into the fight against coronavirus have been raised by many. On several occasions, the Government of Kenya has been accused of misuse of public funds. There has been a growing perception by the public that funds set aside for public projects have often ended in individual's pockets. Furthermore, the Ministry of Health has had a share of financial scandals in previous undertakings, hence the skepticism voiced in the media. In response to the pandemic, the government has set aside funds and received assistance from several donors. Initial reports indicated that a total of Sh. 8 billion worth in kind and cash has been committed to the fight against Covid-19 in the early stages. Out of this amount, the Government contributed 1 billion; the World Bank donated 6 billion while the rest came from other donors. A report to the public on the expenditure of the funds by the time of its release elicited mixed reactions from Kenyans, many of whom felt the money is either not being well accounted for or is not put to good use.

An outcry emanated from citizens on a number of expenditure items for funds used, including Sh. 4 million on tea and snacks; Sh. 70 million on campaigns in both print and electronic media; and Sh. 42 million in leasing 15 ambulances and over Sh. 6 million on stationery among others. A further Sh. 12 million that was allegedly spent on accommodating 30 health workers needing quarantine for 30 days was contested, with claims being made that no health workers were housed in the mentioned hotel. Also being questioned is the use of Sh. 2 million on airtime for 500 health care workers yet Safaricom, a locally based mobile service provider had offered a package for calling and internet use to 5,500 frontline health workers for three months. In general, the Government needs to do much more to assure the public that funds committed to the containment of Covid-19 are being utilized for that purpose. This became urgent considering that the IMF had communicated its decision to extend a loan of Sh. 79 billion to Kenya towards the coronavirus pandemic response. Besides, several other local and international donors have pledged assistance and lack of

transparency in the use of donated funds will only serve to keep other potential donors away.

The above corruption allegation was further heightened by an investigative feature titled *Covid Millionaires* aired by NTV Kenya. The report indicated that procurement rules were flouted by medical supplies agency, KEMSA [6]. Tenders to supply KEMSA with medical supplies were influenced from high offices in the Ministry of Health (MOH) and were therefore not transparent. Companies not eligible to supply medical goods were given tenders and in some instances goods tendered for were not delivered despite the payment for the goods being made. Medical supplies donated by Chinese Billionaire Jack Ma also went missing after they arrived at JKIA [7]. All these corruption and theft became a big challenge towards the Covid-19 response. After the expose by NTV, public trust on the government measures against Covid-19 waned as the public deemed the whole campaign as a ploy for politicians and well-connected people to make money. Actually this led to the erroneous believe among some that there was no Covid-19 in Kenya.

Stigma has also had a negative impact in the fight against Covid-19. Just like was the case during the outbreak of HIV/AIDS, Ebola and other diseases stigmatization has again reared its ugly head in the current pandemic. Those who are diagnosed with Covid-19 are stigmatized by society. People do not want to mix with them freely for fear of infections, leading to psychological torture on their part, with some relapsing to depression. Stories are told of victims who have been chased away from homes they tried to visit simply because their kin have been reported to be Covid-19 positive, especially in rural Kenya. The first patient in Kenya, for example, who went on to recover complained about the challenges she had reintegrating into society. She also received a lot of cyber bullying with some people even daring to claim that she was not sick in the first place and the claimed recovery is therefore a hoax. Besides the torture that stigmatization brings to the affected and their families, it does impede the government's efforts of ensuring many citizens do test for the coronavirus.

Fearing that they may turn positive and face similar treatment a number opt not to test. This was witnessed early May when the Government declared a lockdown in Old Town in Mombasa and Eastleigh in Nairobi and initiated mass testing exercises in those and a few other places initially. The number of people who turned up voluntarily for testing was very small. Further, this stigmatization has led to a claw back in the

gains made in the campaign to have more deliveries in hospital. Information from Siaya, Kisumu and Homabay counties in western Kenya indicated that the number of pregnant women attending clinics and those giving birth in health facilities went down. Three women interviewed during the KTN 9 O'clock news on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2020 expressed the fears in that region. They had sought services of traditional birth attendants during the Covid-19 period for fear of visiting health facilities saying that their temperatures may be judged to be high leading to forced quarantine. Luckily, all three had given birth without any hitch but the report goes a long way to show the extent of the problem.

### **The Role of Creative Artists in Response to Covid-19**

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been felt globally, affecting all walks of life in personal, social and commercial contexts. The Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI's) – industries within which the convening of people is a natural aspect in the delivery of creative artefacts-are not exempt, nor have they escaped the significant negative impact. Consequently, theatres, operas, art galleries and other places of public congregation have been forced to close at short notice bringing the results of intense creative effort and preparation to an abrupt end.

The COVID-19 circumstances have forced a change of situational context – where changes or novel behaviors have emerged – telepresence has become the norm where workplace dialogue is conducted remotely, and teams work and collaborate from home. This forced change of situational context can also result in innovative behaviors and new collaborations that arise in order to find new solutions. An interesting aspect of this is the wide-scale intense forms of agile cross-sector collaborations that are emerging for problem resolution. Collaborations that comprise a global community of scientists, government officials, journalists, programmers, and concerned citizens – all brought together by a shared conscience and a technology & communications infrastructure that goes beyond spatial and temporal borders.

Examples of this include Novartis, the global healthcare company, joining the COVID-19 Therapeutics Accelerator – a programme coordinated by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Wellcome Foundation and MasterCard. General Motors and Ford shut down North American manufacturing in March and announced plans to make critically needed ventilators in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. So, asking what the Culture and Creative Industries

positively contribute in this crisis is interesting. As fervent and passionate defenders of the CCIs and believers in the immense value of culture, it would not be a surprise to hear us say that we believe CCIs can contribute a great deal indeed. In reflecting on this question, many obvious and natural answers emerge – ones that don't require any deep inquisition or search.

The social and economic impact on culture and creative industries will be severe and these sectors, like many others, will need support across their respective ecosystems and supply chains. The discourse that we read and see in the media understandably focuses on the negative impact but, as in many crises, positive opportunities arise – opportunities for contributing & collaborating and ones which may lead to new innovations in terms of how that dialogue is conducted as well as the outcome.

While it is the health workers who are at the forefront in the fight of pandemics whenever they are reported, many other groups of people participate albeit in very different ways. These include governments, relevant ministries, the media, and policy analysts among many others. Although rarely mentioned, creative artists do lend their hands too. The same scenario has been witnessed in the response to the novel coronavirus in Kenya, with several artists, especially musicians making a contribution through music (songs), fine arts, comedy, films among others which have impacted in promoting awareness and hope amongst their constituents [8].

### **Corona Songs**

Musicians can't perform on the road but they're still able to create music during the coronavirus pandemic. There is a list of songs released in the last six weeks related to life in quarantine and social distancing. A playlist of the tracks are available on Spotify and Apple Music.

There are over 560 corona songs [8] which were release during the pandemic. The main theme is to create awareness and develop hope to the people. These songs are of various genres; Gospel songs, country music, Reggae, Spoken songs among others.

In March, 2020 a little known girl from Eldoret in Kenya called Salome Wairimu shot to the national limelight with a song on coronavirus titled "Janga la Korona" which loosely translates to the corona pandemic. Using the tune of an old song well known in the country due to its attachment to a particular historical event, and aided by her beautiful

voice, the song traces the origin of coronavirus and discusses its effects on Kenya, including closure of schools and other educational institutions and suspension of flights. She proceeds to pray that God intervenes and rescues humanity from the pandemic. In listening to this captivating piece, one gets a lot of important information which has the potential to better arm society to tackle the disease.

There are many other songs that tackled the Covid-19 pandemic [8] which in a big way contributed to awareness creation about the coronavirus and steps that needed to be taken in combating it. Bobi Wine, a popular Ugandan Musician cum politician has also used his talent and creativity to come up with a song on the coronavirus. Employing the reggae beat that is appealing to the youth, the upcoming opposition Member of Parliament warns that the disease is sweeping over mankind and advises on steps that people need to take in order to deal with its effects. These include being keen on observing its symptoms, and taking precautionary measure as advised by relevant authorities. Due to his large following as a musician and politician in Uganda, his message is likely to reach many people and it is hoped that it will have a positive impact on the fight against Covid-19.

Luke Combs, an American singer, through his song 'Six Feet Apart' tackles the simple things we are currently missing in life in quarantine. The country singer elucidates how corona has affected the norms of visiting our parents, going to movies among others. Combs majorly targeting the youthful age gave hope by elucidating all shall come to pass. He therefore warned people through his music to maintain the social distance and to voluntarily quarantine when suspicious of having been exposed to the virus. This has created awareness of the virus [9]. Furthermore, Bono, an Italian gospel singer posted the song, 'Let your Love be known' to Instagram on St. Patrick's Day. Bono wrote the track after being inspired by Italians quarantined during the outbreak. William therefore displayed her own version song which features Jennifer Hudson and Yohiki. This song was basically to promote the awareness and basic measures to combat the virus [10].

There are more songs which tackle the Covid - 19 pandemic, some of which are in praises of the forefront warriors; health care workers for the brave tackle and approaches to the pandemic. This aiming to strengthen and bring much hope to the people [11]. Avril Lavigne, in her famous song 'We Are Warriors' honors the health care officers for staying in the frontline in the fight against Covid-19 pandemic.

However, some songs were written pre- the pandemic but released during the pandemic. Yungblud, the British singer, while writing the song 'Weird' last year, said he felt lost and could not understand the world, which proves to be what the world is feeling and going through now [12]. However, Yungblud, encouraged strict adherence to the health protocols and regulations.

There were many local (East Africa) songs with different themes around the pandemic [13] despite the impact it had on the artists [14]. For instance, Siti Amina, a renowned artist from Zanzibar—Tanzania, has produced 'Homa ya Dunia' as her first single as a solo artist. Created in order to raise awareness about staying safe during the global pandemic of COVID-19, 'Homa ya Dunia' encourages us to protect ourselves while remaining positive and strong. "Music is a channel of hope," says Amina [15]. Rapper Khaligraph Jones' 'Corona Freestyle' aims at Kenyans not taking the coronavirus and self-isolation seriously. Jimmy Gait, Kenyan gospel singer's corona song and video tell the story of a friend who is married to a European man. The man suffers from coughing and difficulty breathing — and then he dies. The doctor concludes the coronavirus as the cause [16]. Gait's message is that "God is in control," and that "itakuwa sawa," Swahili for "it will be okay." From Uganda, Bobi Wine, featuring Nubian Li has the message, "The bad news is that everyone is a potential victim!" The artist further points out... "The good news is that everyone is a potential solution!" As a popular and famous musician and politician in Uganda his awareness creation has a great impact on the population especially the youth [16].

### Performing Arts

Various Kenyan comedians have taken to the stage various artistic ideas and acts whose objective is to create awareness amongst the people. Owago Onyiro, a celebrated Kenyan comedian aspires to be the pioneer of uncensored comedy in Kenya. His comedy content mostly focuses on observational issues and is content preferably ideal for a mature audience. He has made a name for himself in comedy with his signature, 'Ujaluo Utawaua' entry line., which means the Dholuo lifestyle will kill you in reference to the Dholuo ethnic community from western Kenya. He has participated in producing several shows aimed at contributing in combating the coronavirus pandemic.

Many Kenyan Comedians like Phelix Oduor (Jalango'- his stage name) through his YouTube channel Jalango' Mwenyewe@BongaNaJalas (<https://jalangotv.com>) has been interviewing various

personalities; Political Class, celebrities, artists, among others. He has majorly centered in entertainment and also creation of awareness to over his 1 million viewers. Jalango emphasizes social distance and sanitization in his interviews. As part of the introduction, and in between the show, Jalango is seen encouraging his guests to sanitize. This is a strong message that even in social places, people can keep it safe through following laid down health protocols.

Other forms of creativity were witnessed as artists went all out to combat the virus in varied ways. One of these included a football commentary involving two teams nicknamed WHO and Corona FC. The competition between the World Health Organization, on behalf of humanity, and Corona FC mirrored the fight between the devastating effects of the pandemic and those fighting to control it. Besides presenting it as a football match, hence immediately drawing people's interest due to the wide following that football commands, creativity was also noted in the naming of the players in both teams. Players in the WHO team included: mask, sanitizer, soup, don't shake hands, wash hands, and avoiding crowds. Corona FC had players like coughing, sneezing, Covid-19, crowding and shaking hands. Complete with the background noise usually heard in football match commentaries, the duel was an interesting one to follow. At the end of the first half Corona FC was 1-0 up, perhaps due to the fact that the fight against Covid-19 is still on and humanity was yet to manage to deal with it in real life. An argument can be successfully presented that as people were listening to the commentary, important information was being imparted through the names of the players as well as the comments that were being made by the commentator on the strength of the Covid-19 and what the WHO team needed to do to outwit the pandemic.

It is good to note that despite all the gloom surrounding the Coronavirus outbreak, people found time to joke about it and construct messages that helped in reducing the negative impact it had on society, and gave hope to others. There in too, was an opportunity to relook at ourselves as people and communicate our feelings on several issues. Comedian Eric Omondi provided such comic relieves as with his mock Kenyan Ministry of Health announcements. Eric Omondi's pressers offered much needed humour amidst Covid-19 gloom [17] that has engulfed the world.

### Digital platforms useful for survival, but scale is key

The artists were able to survive and continue producing during this time partly due to revenue

streams generated by music aggregators, such as YouTube or Spotify, and in particular the Kenyan platform Mdundo, which have helped mitigate pandemic-related losses, through the download of artists' music tunes and ringtones for mobile phones. Mdundo, which is expanding its presence in 15 African countries, featuring more than 60,000 African artists, reaches more than 5 million active users, 22% of whom are from Kenya [18]. The UN agency quotes Koinange, Mdundo's chief operating officer as saying "Music downloads have been rising steadily with a 26% uptick in 2020's second quarter on the first quarter's 33 million downloads." The COO further divulged that COVID-19 was also changing the way creative content is being produced. Artists relying on digital platforms for income during the crisis have become more productive. But profitability for both African producers and the platforms requires time and scale.

UNCTAD's 2019 Digital Economy Report found that in many developing countries, digital entrepreneurs face various barriers to scaling their activities; especially as global digital platforms dominate most product categories. A national e-commerce strategy will help identify solutions that can help the Kenyan creative industries and those beyond, using e-commerce as a new tool for income generation [18].

Artists have had to adjust in ways of doing things as illustrated above. Reinvention is paramount. American children's book illustrator and artist Carson Ellis started a quarantine art club on Instagram with daily assignments for people stuck at home [20]. Musicians from the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra embraced technology to record a virtual rendition of Beethoven's Ode to Joy from their homes.

In understanding the role of art in the pandemic, in August the Media Owners Association (MOA) organized Kenya's biggest concert of hope amid the COVID-19 pandemic in commemoration of the hundreds who have lost their lives and the thousands that have contracted the disease. The concert was dubbed 'Kenya Ni Yetu' (Kenya is ours) and was broadcast on all leading television, radio stations and digital platforms. "We stand with Kenya at this time, because we know the feeling of despondency and concern people are feeling. We need to encourage Kenyans and uplift their spirits at this time," said Wachira Waruru, MOA Chairman [19].

## CONCLUSION

The Covid-19 pandemic that continues to ravage the world is affecting all aspects of human life. Since its discovery in Wuhan, China in December 2019, it has continued to spread and affect the way we used to do things. Initial response to the outbreak and fast spread of the coronavirus (Covid-19) disease was very slow in most countries. Rightly, most efforts at understanding it turned to and concentrated on the medical field, and within a very short time, its economic impact gained a central place in ensuing discussions on the pandemic. Little attention was given to non-health related aspects like the social and psychological implications, the role of religious and other traditional belief systems in understanding and combating Covid-19. This paper tried to look at the measures the governments put in place to curb the spread. The emphasis was laid on Kenya. We also looked at the challenges faced while trying to mitigate the disease. Finally we looked at the core of our research—the role of creative arts in combating Covid-19. We have seen that creative artists of different nature helped especially to create awareness, psychosocial support, inform, critique, and console. These roles have helped the people cope with the pandemic.

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**Cite This Article:** Ernest Sangai Mohochi & James Marwa Mwita (2021). The Role of Creative Arts in the Fight against COVID-19 in Kenya. *EAS J Humanit Cult Stud*, 3(1), 61-69.