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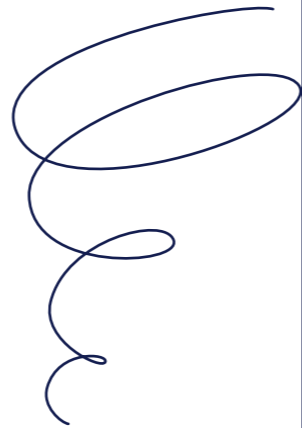
In the vibrant heart of Nairobi's cultural epicentre, an exciting transformation is underway. It is a story of innovation, collaboration and empowerment set against the backdrop of a bustling creative landscape: a safe space for both women and LGBTQI+ creatives which emerged in the basement of one of Nairobi's oldest shopping malls.

nairobi



In Kenya, women as well as the LGBTQI+ community face ongoing difficulties in locating easily accessible venues in which they can unleash their creativity, refine their skills, and convey their ideas. The scarcity of prospects impedes not only the development of artistic talent but also the dissemination of knowledge and inspiration from those designated as creatives and visionaries.

FemLab is tackling this problem head on by offering creatives a place to realise their artistic endeavours. This underground oasis is a place where imagination knows no bounds and innovation comes from sharing and collaborating.



A Safe Space for Creatives

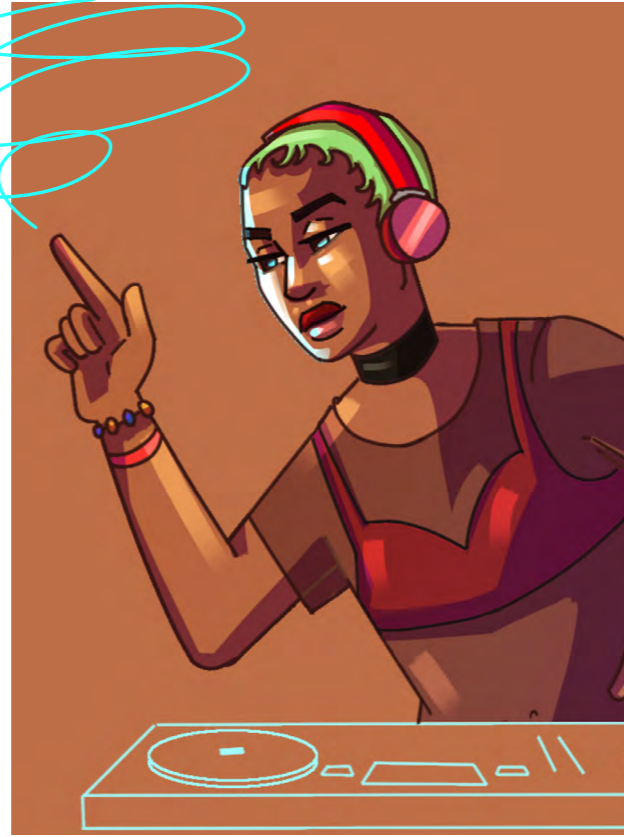
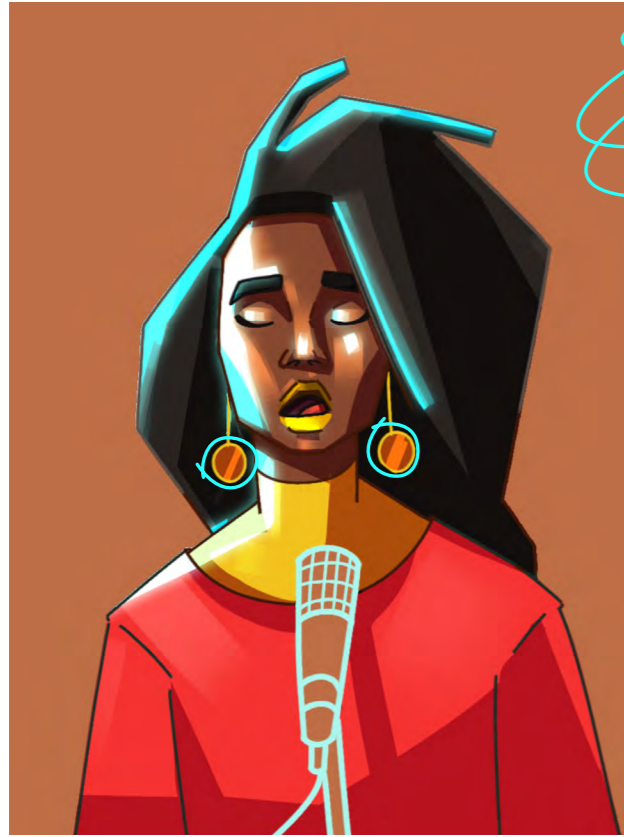
Initiated and managed by the [Goethe-Institut](#) in 2023, the FemLab creates a safe space for female and non-binary creatives to learn, grow, work, collaborate, exhibit and connect. Although the FemLab only provides basic infrastructure, from tables and chairs to water, projectors and speakers, it is a versatile space that can be seamlessly transformed to host trainings, workshops, co-working projects, art exhibitions and events. The FemLab was established as part of the [Cultural and Creative Industries](#) project.



Rooted in the Basement

Located in Westlands, FemLab is strategically placed in Nairobi's cultural hub. With three educational players from the music and virtual reality scenes as immediate neighbours, the basement presented an opportunity to cultivate a vibrant creative ecosystem.

FemLab has a busy programme: Masterclasses in '3D rendering' for women have already lit up the space, and diversity training sessions have raised awareness of inclusive practices among creative businesses. An open dialogue series on intellectual property and copyright in collaboration with the Kenya Copyright Board and GIZ informed and empowered creatives.



A Venue for All

Hiring venues for events and exhibitions often takes up a significant portion of creatives' budgets, making it difficult if not impossible to realise these. Yet, public exposure is crucial for creatives to promote their work to audiences and clients and thus making money. Limited access to affordable spaces is a struggle that also results in diverse voices not being heard and art not being seen.

For this reason, the FemLab invites creative professionals to host events that align with its transformative vision. Artists who are planning film screenings, exhibitions, small concerts or other events are all eligible to use the underground stage, free of charge, thus enhancing the creative output of Nairobi's artistic community.

FemLab's Eventful Journey

The popularity of the FemLab and the constant influx of requests for its use underline the urgent need for such spaces in the creative sector. Since its inception, the FemLab has hosted a wide range of events, from music listening sessions to thought-provoking panel discussions. Gender-neutral fashion shows, live script readings and exhibitions bringing attention to profound issues such as gender-based violence and queerness are just the beginning.

Although it is too early to determine the full extent of FemLab's success, one thing is clear: The creatives are making a meaningful contribution to social change by addressing important social issues in their art, such as LGBTQI+ acceptance in Kenya.



»Your belief in our mission to challenge gender norms through fashion and your willingness to provide the platform to do so have left an indelible mark on our journey. As we move forward, we look forward to the possibility of further collaboration and to exploring new avenues where our shared values can continue to make a positive impact on our community and society at large.«

Androgenius Alpha, founder of gender-neutral fashion brand BELOWCLOUD97

Safe Space



FemBase connects! Beyond its physical presence, FemLab is developing the FemBase - a database currently hosting over 100 female creatives. This database has the potential to serve as an agency in the future by connecting creative women and members of the LGBTQI+ community with job opportunities. Registered members of the FemBase can also attend mixer events or sign up for one-on-one business consultations.



fembase

FemLab's Highlights in 2023

July 2023

3D Rendering and Architectural Visualisation Masterclass

This workshop gave 40 female participants an insight into the world of 3D rendering, including a public exhibition and panel discussion on the role of women in architecture.

Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya

A Pride Month celebration event brought together the LG-BTQI+ community. The celebration included a panel debate and film screening.

August 2023

Diversity Training

Two workshops for creative entrepreneurs covered topics such as introduction to gender, as well as causes and effects of gender-based violence. The workshops explored how positive masculinity and positive femininity can address gender-based violence and elaborated how gender equality is manifested in policies relevant for cultural and creative industries.

Exhibition: FLUID

FLUID by Arrai Atlas was an immersive and interdisciplinary creative exhibition. It presented avant-garde and culturally provocative African fashion, art, music, and photography that showcased the fluid identities and iconoclastic aesthetics shaping culture in urban Africa. The exhibition was accompanied by a panel discussion on "How Art, Tech and Sex are Shaping Urban Culture".

September 2023

Runway Show

A runway show, celebrating Kenya's growing queer fashion community: Androgenius Alpha, founder of BELOWCLOUD97, is a fashion designer passionate about redefining Kenyan fashion through gender-neutral clothing, promoting inclusivity and diverse identities.

October 2023

Open dialogues on intellectual property, free copyright registration and one-on-one legal consultations

The Kenya Copyright Board (KECOBO) and the GIZ teamed up with Nairobi's FemLab and hosted open dialogue sessions that provided creatives with essential knowledge on how to protect their intellectual property. KECOBO further supported creatives with free on-the-spot copyright registration and re-registration services. Entertainment lawyers offered one-on-one consultations to discuss workable solutions for creatives' individual legal issues.

November 2023

Electronic Music Production Workshop

This workshop for musicians was held by Monrhea, a self-taught producer and underground DJ who recently graduated from the Santuri Electronic Music Academy (SEMA).

Solo-Theatre Performance: My Body Betrays Me, Again

"My Body Betrays Me, Again" is a solo autobiographical performance by Joseph Obel, based on a true story written by Kenyan writer Ndegwa Nguru. It depicted the life of an androgynous, effeminate young queer man who has faced homophobia and violence in different spaces, both voluntary and involuntary. The story was presented as an experimental theatre piece integrating movement, sound and video art.

Exhibition: Stories of African Queers

The exhibition showcased art pieces that tell stories of Africa's queer history through art and was accompanied by talks from queer African activists. The exhibition was an initiative by the organisation Queer Helmut.

what's up

about the project

The project Cultural and Creative Industries is jointly implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and the Goethe-Institut on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

It improves employment and income opportunities for creative professionals in six partner countries; Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Kenya, Senegal, and South Africa and operates mainly in the music, fashion, design and animation sectors. In addition to promoting the development of entrepreneurial, digital, creative and technical skills through training programmes, the project aims to strengthen the framework conditions and the ecosystem of the cultural and creative industries.



Published by: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
Registered offices: Bonn and Eschborn, Germany, Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 32 + 36,
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Project: Cultural and Creative Industries implemented by GIZ and Goethe-Institut
Responsible: Angelika Frei-Oldenburg
Design and Layout: TINKERBELLE GmbH, Berlin
Photo credits: BELOWCLOUD97, Blackink Films/Goethe-Institut, jesuisadam/Goethe-Institut
Illustrations: Oli (Instagram: @nervilas7)
Bonn, 2023

Implemented by

