

Skilling in creative industry is key.

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Music producer David Phelan in action together with one of his students during a studio session at East African Records. Courtesy Photo

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By Lawrence Ogwal

Music production and gaming might not be what comes to mind when you think of Uganda's most pressing education needs but it would be foolhardy to ignore them.

Early this year, Finn Church Aid (FCI) enrolled a number of youth from different parts of the country for a week long training in music production and gaming at The East African Records in Muyenga, Kampala. Their aim, to skill youth and develop capacity and employment opportunities in the creative industry.

“The creative industry is the fastest growing industry in many parts of the world and has shown resilience towards the impact of the global economic crisis. Potential artists and entrepreneurs in developing countries lack the expertise, networks and channels to deliver their products,” says Ville Wacklin the senior programme manager, FCA College/Creative Industries.

Wacklin says governments in many developing countries generally do not value the creative industries. However, modern streaming services offer new opportunities to generate income for potential artists and entrepreneurs around the globe.

“There is also a lot of hidden talent and potential on the music scene. The young talent needs skilled producers, support, networks and know how to deliver their products to the local and international market,” says Wacklin.

After two days of the training, 30-year-old Fortunate ‘FortZion’ Kasumba a music producer, singer-songwriter and graphics designer came up with a unique sound. He together with other trainees worked with producers Hank Solo and David Phelan.

“Working with Phelan and Solo was mind opening. Their approach to the process of making music was different and practical! Their methods helped us realise new ways of using the tools we had at our disposal.

It was refreshing to learn how things in the music industry work from the perspective of people who have been very successful at it at an international level,” Kasumba says.

“We gave the students different tasks with samples of Uganda and Congolese beats to change them to rap beats” Solo says, he adds, “This helps them to not stick to one kind of sound but to learn to come up with blended sounds to create the real African touch.

What production entails

Music production is the process by which a record producer or music producer oversees the recording and production of a track, single, or record. This may include listening in on recordings, making suggestions for edits and alterations, or working with other professionals to ensure the record comes out as well as possible.

The music production process varies, but it always includes many of the same components. In some cases, music producers write material, in others, they simply oversee its production and organise the process into a cohesive and productive effort. More and more music is made in different writing teams so professional song writing and music production is a collaborative effort.

On average, a music producer would charge between Shs100, 000 and Shs2million to produce a song in Uganda. And with the number of aspiring artists, this trade seems to be booming.

Unfortunately, not many producers in the industry are skilled enough to produce music that can compete internationally.

“If well nurtured, the creative economy can be an important source of socio-economic growth, jobs, innovation, and trade, while also contributing to social inclusion, cultural diversity, and sustainable human development,” Wacklin says.

Gaming

The training had 27 participants with 14 enrolling in gaming and the rest showing interest in music production.

“We did some research and realised that besides music, there are many gaming stores and we thought that if we instilled the art and idea of creating game soft wares then you never know, we might have some gamers from Uganda. That would mean reduced reliance on imported games,” Ville says.

What is gaming?

“Gaming in our programme means digital interactive entertainment or educational products that are played with computers, consoles or smartphones. In this programme, we concentrate on making those products,” Ville says.

He says all you need is a creative mind and a laptop.

“Normally game creation, or development as we like to say, is a team effort. First, we need a design that is basically a set of rules of what is happening in the game. Then this needs to get to a digital form that can be played in phones or computers and for this, we need talented people to do art, code, music, and many other things. With game creation, it does not matter where you are coming from, if you are young or old, male or female. What matters is the willingness to work hard with a team of creative people,” Wacklin stresses.

About gaming

Gaming means digital interactive entertainment or educational products that are played with computers, consoles or smartphones. For someone to create a game, Jenni Lähteenmäki, the FCI Content Specialist says it only takes a creative mind and a laptop.

“Game development is team effort that just needs to get to a digital form that can be played on computer or phones” Lähteenmäkisays, she adds, “In gaming, all that matters is the willingness to work hard with a team of creative people.”

Lähteenmäki, also points at how the game industry in Uganda is still just under developed and how most of the games are got from international developers and the leading gaming country being Finland.

If Ugandans with interest in this field keep receiving the necessary skills, perhaps Uganda’s game industry could grow big and strong enough to compete too.