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67% creative economy workforce uncertain about surviving beyond 2021: Report

Despite the relaxations and opening up of the economy, income streams for the creative workforce remain inconsistent and sporadic, pointing towards a bleak outlook for India's informal creative economy.



13 January, 2021
by EE News Desk

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The British Council, FICCI and Art X Company jointly launched the second edition of the Taking the Temperature report on the deepening impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on India's creative economy. The report that tries to understand the economic state and sentiment of the creative sector workforce and artists, underlines the continued uncertainty in the creative sector and poses a risk to its long-term survival if emergency action is not taken.

The second edition of the Taking the Temperature report provides a comparison of the situation in India since the outbreak of Covid-19, the consequent national lockdown (March-June) and the period following the relaxation of the lockdown (July-October). Despite the relaxations and opening up of the economy, income streams for the creative workforce remain inconsistent and sporadic, pointing towards a bleak outlook for India's informal creative economy.

Key findings of the report:

- 67% of surveyed respondents are uncertain that they can survive for more than a year with current resources and funding.
- Individual professionals and artisans are facing short-term hand-to-mouth existence even as sectors are adapting to digital and live business models to stay afloat.
- 90% of the sector fears the long-term impact of social distancing on the creative economy, an increase of 4% from the previous survey.
- The creative economy is contracting with 16% of the creative sector facing permanent closure.
- Organisations are closing permanently to avoid bankruptcy. 22% of the sector is forecast to lose more than 75% of annual income.
- 26% of arts businesses fear they will not be able to continue in the last two quarters of 2020-2021.
- Creative businesses are contending with increasingly difficult choices to remain resilient.
- Some of the workforces are leaving the creative economy and changing careers.

In view of the findings and the feedback from the creative industry workforce and stakeholders, the report makes the following recommendations:

1. Collaborative emergency action through investments by governments and corporates
2. Strengthening of the creative economy for India's international competitive advantage by recognising the cultural and creative sector as an integral part of the social and economic recovery plan
3. Establishing creative economy networks of artists, artisans, and culture organisations to develop the sector for pooling resources and mutual support

Jonathan Kennedy, Director Arts India, British Council, said, "Since March 2020, the British Council has worked with partners to understand and address the impact of COVID-19 on India's creative economy. Through in-depth surveying, the Taking the Temperature reports draw comparisons, developments, and changes for the creative economy since the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020. While the first report helped to understand the immediate impact of COVID-19 on the creative economy; the second report reveals the diminished economic conditions that creative organisations and artists are now faced with. With a greater understanding of the condition of the artists. The report makes recommendations necessary to sustain and keep alive India's creative economy. As the world over the Taking the Temperature Report confirms the serious depth of the current contraction on the creative economy in India which echoes the global economic recession precipitated by the pandemic. "

Rashmi Dhanwani, Founder-Director, The Art X Company said, "It is clear the creative organisations and artists who have explored new possibilities of culture making in the digital space have come out stronger during the pandemic. The report emphasises the importance of digital entrepreneurship within the creative economy and its vital role in reorganising and rebuilding creative endeavours which were limited to the offline space before. But there is a gap in levels of digital literacy within the creative community and governments as well as corporates must step up to close this gap so that the sector is ready for future uncertainties. However, we must also recognise that despite adapting to hybrid live and digital models, some sectors in the creative industries will remain reliant on face-to-face audience interaction to generate income in the long term."

Sanjoy Roy Co-chair, Creative and Cultural Industries, FICCI said, "The Covid-19 pandemic's impact has been felt in MSMEs, the backbone of India's economy. Creative MSMEs work with limited resources and minimal infrastructure for survival. Without the safety nets and policy-level intervention, their revival is challenging and may take longer than anticipated earlier. While some state governments have provided emergency grants for relief to artists and cultural organisations in India, key segments of the creative sector have not benefited as most are part of the informal economy. The report casts an informed lens on the sectors and particular nature of policy-intervention they can benefit from. For sustainable progress of these segments, robust creative and collaborative networks need to be forged."

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