



Minister meet Makers Dialogues Report



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“Minister meet Makers” Dialogues Report

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The mAkE project

The African European Maker Innovation Ecosystem (mAkE) project aims to strengthen networks of makerspaces as key drivers of local digital innovation in Africa and establish sustainable connections with European digital innovation hubs (DIHs). mAkE enables makerspaces to amplify their voices and advocate for improved innovation policies. The **Fab City Foundation** and the **Africa Makerspace Network** led the development and dissemination of the common policy agenda through mAkE. We facilitated dialogues with policy makers at various levels and shared the common policy agenda at major national and international gatherings in Africa and Europe. By leveraging the experience and partnerships of mAkE project partners, we engaged intermediary organizations, local governments, and relevant NGOs to support policy research and dissemination efforts. In 2023, we engaged over **60 African and European makers** and presented at over **10 events** in 2024. This report outlines the approaches and outcomes of our activities.

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The Case for Maker Policies

Makerspaces play a vital role in advancing sustainable development, driving innovation, and fostering education across various sectors in Africa and Europe. Despite their contributions, comprehensive policies to support their operations and growth remain limited. This gap limits their potential to innovate, educate, and contribute to community development, undermining their long-term sustainability and broader impact.

In Europe, several initiatives and regional efforts recognize makerspaces as essential infrastructure for manufacturing, STEM education, and collaboration. The European Union's Horizon 2020 program (2014–2020), with a budget of nearly €80 billion, included projects aimed at addressing gaps in digital innovation for manufacturing, with makerspaces as key players. One of such projects is the African European Maker Innovation Ecosystem (mAKE) project, which identifies makerspaces as vital components of local digital innovation ecosystems and global collaboration networks. Additionally, regional and national efforts occurring in Europe have facilitated the integration of makerspaces into public libraries and universities, further embedding their role in innovation systems.

In Africa, policy support for makerspaces is emerging. Kenya's Startup Bill 2022, championed by President William Ruto and Parliament, aims to provide entrepreneurs—particularly those outside major cities—with access to funding, knowledge, and support to scale their businesses. Similarly, Ghana is advancing the Ghana Startup Bill, a joint effort between the private sector and the government, to enhance the startup ecosystem through co-created legislation. The proposed Act seeks to establish a supportive environment for startups, fostering growth and attracting investment. These efforts aim to create favorable conditions for makerspaces in Kenya and Ghana to secure funding and benefit from tax incentives.

On a regional scale, the African Union's Science, Technology, and Innovation Strategy for Africa 2024 (STISA-2024) prioritizes science, technology, and innovation as drivers of Africa's socio-economic development. A key pillar of this strategy is creating an enabling environment for innovation, which could directly benefit makerspaces if fully implemented. Initiatives such as Innovative Manufacturing in Africa and mAKE have further strengthened the capacities of makerspaces through access to resources, funding, and global networks.

mAKE contributes to these regional agendas and initiatives by promoting the adoption of the Common Policy Agenda. This unified policy framework aims to provide the necessary support for makerspaces to advance innovation, education, and economic growth globally. The framework informs governments, policy makers, foundations, and donors about the transformative potential of makerspaces and their alignment with broader development goals.

To foster collaboration, the project has facilitated "Minister Meet Makers" dialogue events, where policy makers and makers engage in discussions on how policies can support the maker movement. These events are critical dissemination efforts to share the Common Policy Agenda and highlight the role of makerspaces in advancing national, regional, and global research and innovation agendas.

Key policy recommendations

The Common Policy Agenda outlines five key recommendations to integrate support for makerspaces into national and regional strategies:

1. Collaborate with makerspaces on national projects.
2. Create dedicated funding initiatives.
3. Endorse maker programs.
4. Integrate makerspaces into STEAM education.
5. Recognize makerspaces as critical local manufacturers.

The goal is to ensure the design and implementation of policies and initiatives that enable makerspaces in Europe and Africa to thrive and drive innovation, education, and economic growth.



Setting a policy agenda: “Minister Meet Makers” Dialogues



Our approach to engaging policy makers is built on three key pillars: **understanding**, **co-creation**, and **communication**.

Understanding

Gaining insights into policy advocacy strategies across Europe and Africa, while also identifying the needs of makers in these regions and beyond.

Co-creation

Facilitating collaborative activities that bring together makers, maker networks, government ministries, development organizations, and foundations to co-develop policy recommendations.

Communication

Developing and implementing dissemination strategies that foster a feedback loop between mAKE and the African and European ecosystems, ensuring continuous engagement and mutual learning.

The policy making process is complex and varies in perspective across different stakeholder groups. It involves multiple stakeholders and requires a process of triangulation to align diverse interests and contributions. Our approach to establishing a common policy agenda for the African and European maker ecosystems focused on identifying policy makers and innovators whose goals aligned with the mAKE project. We initiated conversations to explore how makerspaces could be integrated into their broader national agendas and programs, alongside practical steps for implementation.

To facilitate these engagements, we employed dialogue formats, including community calls, one-on-one interviews, and networking opportunities, to foster discussions and collaborations.

Moving from research to a broader policy perspective, we implemented these engagement strategies outlined below.

Identifying policy advocacy approaches occurring within innovation ecosystems

We explored existing methods for multi-actor policy guidance and assessed the benefits of collaborative strategies using qualitative comparative analysis. To initiate this process, we identified innovation hubs, makerspaces, and hub networks in Africa and Europe engaged in policy advocacy innovation. Through virtual, semi-structured interviews with seven organizations, we gathered insights that informed the **Report on National and Regional Hub Associations**, which includes seven detailed case studies.

The report explores the activities undertaken by innovation hubs and hub networks to drive growth. It highlights key policy advocacy efforts in Europe that could offer valuable insights if adopted in African contexts. Furthermore, the report recommends a bottom-up, multi-actor framework for supporting hubs and hub networks in Africa.

Insights and recommendations from the report influenced the development of the common policy agenda and informed the subsequent Minister meet maker dialogues by highlighting the significance of integrating bottom-up and multi-actor frameworks in policy advocacy.

Promoting a common policy agenda for makerspaces in Africa and Europe

Focused on the development and dissemination of a practice-based common policy framework, we initiated the creation of the common policy agenda with a series of activities.

These included identifying and assessing seven existing policy agenda frameworks in Africa and Europe, conducting a co-creation session to refine the research structure, and identifying potential stakeholders and events for gathering insights

Desktop research on innovation ecosystems across both continents provided critical context, complemented by the development of essential research materials such as focus group discussion guides, presentation slides, consent forms, and reporting templates. Stakeholder mapping was carried out to identify key actors and relevant events for research activities. Furthermore, we engaged with event organizers to explore opportunities for hosting focus group discussions and other qualitative data collection sessions at major events, including the AfricArena Nairobi Summit 2023 and the AfriLabs Annual Gathering 2023 in Rwanda.

The insights provided in the common policy agenda highlight the significant role that makerspaces play in contemporary societies and economies. When policy makers and key stakeholders collaborate with the maker community to develop and implement policies that strengthen the maker network, makerspaces can have more widespread and tangible impact on local communities. Such collaboration fosters new partnerships and facilitates the mobilization of resources to sustainably address local challenges, moving beyond reliance on aid and grants.



Engagements with African and European makerspaces and stakeholders

Through the Africa Makerspace and Fab City Networks, we identified over 60 makers from Africa and Europe who contributed their experiences and insights to developing this common policy agenda. These global networks collaborate with makerspaces worldwide to facilitate local project implementation and foster strong professional and personal relationships across governance levels and disciplines. Leveraging these connections was instrumental in securing participation from the makers.

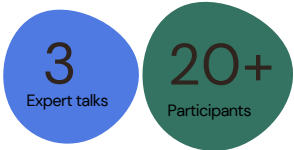
In order to strengthen global networks and their collaborations with makerspaces, policy makers should actively engage in gatherings and events organised by global networks and their members to create opportunities for meaningful collaboration with local makers and innovators. These engagements foster a cohesive and sustainable maker ecosystem, where key stakeholders exchange ideas and collaborate on projects that drive progress at local and global levels.

We explored these ‘Minister meet maker’ dialogue formats to promote the common policy agenda.

Insights and recommendations from the report influenced the development of the common policy agenda and informed the subsequent Minister meet maker dialogues by highlighting the significance of integrating bottom-up and multi-actor frameworks in policy advocacy.

Community call

A virtual community call to discuss the five policy recommendations and insights gathered over the course of the policy research. The event also featured experts from the African and European maker communities.



Yaw Adu-Gyamfi, Chairperson of the Ghana Hubs Network

Ahmadou Diallo, Host of the Airbus Africa Community

Guillem Camprodon, Executive Director, Fab Lab Barcelona

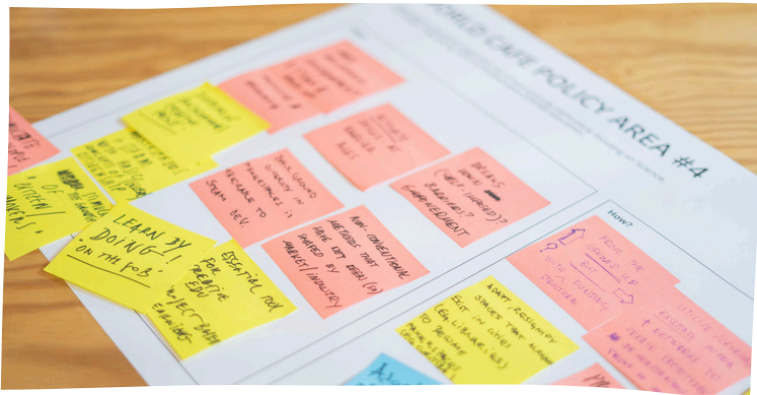


Talks

Transformation Literacy Conference, Virtual

A virtual presentation delivered during the Transformation Literacy Conference organized by the Collective Leadership Institute (CLI), with a focus on advocacy and identifying transformative approaches to influence key societal areas and engage with leaders/governments. The presentation aimed at advocating for the adoption of the common policy agenda.





Ghana Digital Innovation Week 2023 and 2024

The talks presented the latest developments driven by the collaboration between the Africa Makerspace Network and the Fab City Foundation. The talks informed participants about the mAKE project, showcasing its impact, and collaboration with networks such as the Fab City Global Initiative and Global Innovation Gathering.

Yaw Adu-Gyamfi, Chairperson of the Ghana Hubs Network
Joseph Agyina, Makerspace Practitioner
Samuel Duah Boadu, Makerspace Practitioner
Jeremy Acquah, Robotics Engineer
Freda Yamorti Gbande, Fab City Foundation



Ghana Hubs Network General Meeting

During the Ghana Hubs Network general meeting themed ‘Connecting Innovation Hubs for Collective Growth’, the policy recommendations were presented. Government representatives and stakeholders in attendance included the Director of Communication from the National Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme (NEIP), a GIZ representative, the Dean of Languages at Takoradi Technical University (TTU), representatives from the Ghana Association of Industry, Ghana National Chamber of Commerce, Ghana National Youth Employment Agency, and others.

The feedback from participants highlighted their strong interest, with some requesting the public version of the policy and seeking guidance on establishing makerspaces at their hubs. These ongoing conversations have the potential to catalyze further policy discussions with policy makers.



Wind Empowerment Conference, [Greece](#)

One critical vision of the mAKE project is to increase the collaboration between Africa and Europe makerspace/digital innovation hubs. This vision has already started being realised as through the project, makerspaces in Africa were made to participate in Wind Empowerment workshops to share their knowledge as well as learn how to build small wind turbines to solve local electrification challenges which is a pressing issue in Africa.

As part of the policy dissemination process, the mAKE team was hosted by Wind Empowerment Association during their conference and workshop to share the common policy agenda and bring on board makers from Africa to learn how to build wind turbines to support electrification in vulnerable communities in Africa.

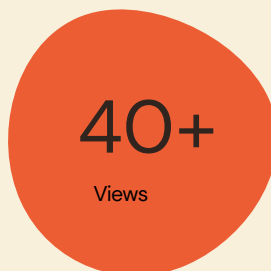


Vulca seminar 2023 and 2024, [Slovenia and Germany](#)

The Vulca seminars are gatherings for European makers. In 2023, Andrew Lamb, Chair of the Council at the Internet of Production, and Fadia Elgharib, Community Manager at the Global Innovation Gathering, facilitated a co-creation session to collect insights for the Common Policy Agenda. In 2024, Sandra Mamitzsch, Executive Director of the Global Innovation Gathering, led a follow-up session to present the Common Policy Agenda as a tool for guiding policy engagement for makerspaces.

mAKE talk, [Virtual](#)

The mAKE talk is an initiative designed to capture the outputs from the mAKE project in audio visual format. This approach ensures inclusivity by catering to diverse audiences, making the project's activities and outcomes more accessible. Notably, the Common Policy Agenda has also been featured in this format. The audio visual content highlights the development process, the rationale behind the policy agenda, key recommendations, and the support required to implement the agenda effectively. This content is readily available on the official mAKE YouTube channel for public access.



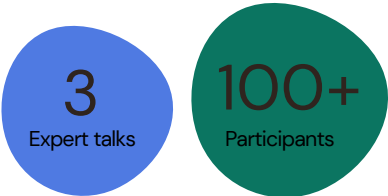
Afrilabs Annual Gathering Makerspace Track, South Africa

The Makerspace Track at the Afrilabs Annual Gathering 2024 highlighted the impact of makerspaces in Africa, focusing on their contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals. The session was led by Joseph Agyina, Africa Makerspaces Representative, and featured three expert talks.

Kweku Adu Efa-Ampomah, Aenics Engineering Makerspace

Geraldine de Bastion, Global Innovation Gathering

Freda Yamorti Gbande, Fab City Foundation



During the main stage sessions, we presented a printed copy of the Common Policy Agenda to Ricardo Denver Mackenzie, Minister of Cultural Affairs and Sport of the Western Cape, who has been serving in this role since June 2024.



Workshops

Distributed Design Platform and mAKE Collaborative Policy Workshop, [Spain](#)

In collaboration with the **Distributed Design Platform project**, we co-designed a workshop based on the Common Policy Agenda. The workshop provided makers, designers, and project coordinators from maker communities with the skills to engage effectively with policy makers. The outcomes of the workshop were captured in a multimedia manifesto, inviting the participants to practice their newly gained skills; they presented their policy proposals in front of the whole group. Captured by the team at Fab Lab Barcelona, this multimedia maker manifesto.

2

Collaborating projects

20+

Participants

20+

Participants

Africa Open Science Hardware 2024, [Ghana](#)

The Africa Open Science and Hardware (AfricaOSH) Summit, held at Academic University College on July 18th and 19th, brought together over 25 participants from across Africa. A key session of the event was the mAKE Common Policy Agenda workshop, which trained participants on communicating effectively with policy makers to advocate for their ideas using the Common Policy Agenda (CPA).

The policy discussions highlighted the essential role of makerspaces in driving innovation and economic growth in Africa

Africa Makerspace Ecosystem Gathering 2024, [South Africa](#)

On November 12th and 13th, Cape Town, South Africa, hosted the Africa Makerspace Ecosystem Gathering (AMEG), organized by the Internet of Production, Distributed Manufacturing, and the Global Innovation Gathering. This event brought together over 70 participants, including makers, educators, researchers, government representatives, and donors, to address critical challenges facing the maker movement in local and global contexts.

The gathering served as a key platform for disseminating the Common Policy Agenda (CPA). A policy workshop was held to share the CPA and gather feedback. Participants recognized that innovation in Africa is progressing more slowly than in other regions, emphasizing the need to support makerspaces as a means of accelerating innovation and industrialization. A printed copy of the CPA was presented to Edgar Pieterse, founding director of the African Centre for Cities (ACC) at the University of Cape Town.

70+

Participants

Other Dissemination Strategies

Meeting with a Representative of the Ministry of Environment, Science, and Technology, [Ghana](#)

Discussions with the representative, Nasiru Salifu emphasized collaboration with the Ghana Hubs Network to integrate makerspaces into the Ghana startup ecosystem, with a focus on promoting prototyping. Additionally, the ministry is working with development partners to establish makerspaces across the country. Through a partnership with JICA, they plan to implement a startup project that includes the development of a makerspace. We hope the Common Policy Agenda shared with the representative will help guide the design and implementation of these initiatives.

Collaboration to have Chad Minister attend Afrilabs Annual Gathering 2024

Another significant part of the strategies involved a collaboration with Chad Innovation Center to invite the Minister of Communication and Digitalisation in Chad to the Afrilabs Annual Gathering and Africa Makerspace Ecosystem Gathering. Even though the minister could not be at the event, there was however, progress made as the mAKE team had the opportunity to share the policy recommendations and other mAKE materials with the minister for further engagements. We anticipate that Chad Innovation Center and Chad Minister of Communication and Digitalisation will continue the conversation to provide support for makerspaces.

Fab City Summit, [Mexico](#)

The Fab City Foundation distributed **50 printed copies of the Common Policy Agenda** to participants at the summit, ensuring its reach among attendees.

Policy video

As part of the mAKE project, we produced and shared a video that outlines key aspects of the Common Policy Agenda to promote the maker movement and its objectives.

180+

Views



Outreach Impact

March – December 2024



300+

Downloads of
the **Common
Policy Agenda**

400+

Key
stakeholders
reached



800+

Social
media
reactions



10+

Events



10+

Expert talks

- Community call
- Ghana Digital Innovation Week 2023 & 2024
- Transformation Literacy Conference
- Ghana Hubs Network General Meeting
- Wind Empowerment Conference
- Vulca seminar 2023 & 2024
- Afrilabs Annual Gathering
- Distributed Design Platform and mAKE Collaborative Policy Workshop
- Africa Open Science Hardware Summit
- Africa Makerspace Ecosystem Gathering

- Kweku Adu Efa–Ampomah, *Aenics Engineering Makerspace*
- Geraldine de Bastion, *Global Innovation Gathering*
- Freda Yamorti Gbande, *Fab City Foundation*
- Samuel Boadu Duah
- Joseph Agyina
- Yaw Adu–Gyamfi, *Ghana Hubs Network*
- Guillem Camprodon, *Fab Lab Barcelona*
- Ahmadou Diallo, *Airbus Africa Community*
- Jeremy Acquah, *Robotics Engineer*
- Andrew Lamb, *Internet of Production*
- Fadia Elgharib, *Global Innovation Gathering*
- Sandra Mamitzsch, *Global Innovation Gathering*



100+

Makers
engaged



60+

Organisations
engaged

List of Organisations Engaged

Makerspaces/Fab Labs/ Digital Innovation Hubs

Fab Lab Copenhagen
Peddle Innovation Labs
Cape Craft and Design Institute
Fablab, Stellenbosch University
Fablab Winam
Rlabs
Design & Technology Institute Makerspace
Triple Dimension
The Makerspace Durban
TMG Makerspace
Hive Makerspace
Mboalab
iLead Lab
Makerspace of Sèmè City
Robotech Labs
Chad Innovation Center
BiT Makerspace
Blue Ocean
Digilogic
Mobiklinic foundation
Tsoumakers
Community Creativity for Development
Makerspace Harare
Westerwelle Makerspace
Twende Social Innovation Center
Ghana Tech Lab
DIT Design Studio
Fab Lab Cameroon
Noni Makerspace
Garatu Makerspace
Fab Lab Benfica
Fab Lab Barcelona
Fab Lab Iceland
Foreningen Maker
Africa Robot

Government Institutions

Ministry of Engineer Science and Technology, Ghana
Ministry of Small Business Development, South Africa
Ministry of Communication and Digitalisation Chad

Development Organisations

Afrilabs
Research and Innovation Systems for Africa (RISA)
GIZ, Dar es Salaam
Transformative Innovation Policy Consortium
(TIPC)

Others

Fashion Revolution
Enrich in Africa
IOMe254
Doing Good Work in Africa/ HYBR group partner
African Centre for Cities, University of Cape Town
Flatrock Studio
Mclub South Africa
Fab City Tanga
Ghana Hubs Network
Wind Empowerment Association
Renewable Energy Policy Network
Learnlife Urban Hub
Odyssea
Arteria Lab
Africa Open Science Hardware
Digital Times Africa
IREDE Foundation
Internet of Production
WeMakE
Sofos Consultancy
Stake



Key Learnings from the Maker Policy Engagements

- **Limited Awareness of the Maker Movement in Africa**

The maker movement has influenced European policy agendas by demonstrating its potential to transform science and innovation systems and contribute to sustainable development. Policies such as the Right to Repair are gaining recognition within the European Union, aligning with frameworks like the Digital Decade and the Green Deal. In Africa, despite publications on the maker movement, progress has been limited. Outreach efforts show that the concept of makerspaces and fab labs is largely unfamiliar to the public and many institutions.

The concept of makerspaces, along with their contributions to innovation, education, and sustainable development, is still relatively novel to many policy makers and stakeholders. Each engagement required a significant investment of time and effort to explain the makerspace ecosystem, its relevance, and its alignment with broader policy goals. Engaging with a new group of stakeholders often meant starting from scratch, which slowed down the momentum of the initiative and required repetitive advocacy efforts.

This highlights the need for focused efforts to increase awareness and engagement within local communities.

- **Maker Perspectives on Policy Development and Support**

Makerspaces interviewed highlighted the importance of a common policy agenda as a tool for advocating for maker policies and integrating makerspaces into national programs and initiatives. One maker noted, "Implementing dedicated funding programs would allow makerspaces to enhance their capabilities, invest in critical equipment, and drive forward innovation projects." Similarly, another emphasized that, "Establishing government partnerships and collaborating on national projects could provide makerspaces with opportunities to contribute their expertise and resources toward addressing societal challenges, while also raising their profile and influence."

The integration of maker activities into formal education was also identified as crucial. As one maker observed, "Recommendations #3 and #4 regarding endorsing maker programs/courses and integrating makerspace activities into formal education curricula could significantly boost awareness, access, and sustainability for these facilities." From a broader perspective, another maker highlighted the global impact of the agenda, stating, "From a global perspective, it stimulates open-source knowledge exchange and the proliferation of technologies."

These diverse perspectives underscore the importance for makers to actively engage with the common policy agenda as a foundation for initiating dialogues with local and national authorities, ultimately advancing the maker movement in Africa and Europe.

- **Policy Perspectives on Makerspace Integration and Challenges**

Engagement with policy makers revealed both promising developments and structural challenges in supporting makerspaces. In Ghana, the Ministry of Environment, Science, and Technology demonstrates active commitment to integrating makerspaces into the national startup ecosystem. Their representative, Nasiru Salifu, outlined collaborative initiatives with the Ghana Hubs Network to promote prototyping and establish makerspaces across the country. The ministry's partnership with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) exemplifies how international cooperation can support makerspace development through startup initiatives.

However, significant systemic barriers remain. However, significant systemic barriers remain. Edgar Pieterse, founding director of the African Centre for Cities at the University of Cape Town, identifies a critical challenge: government research and development support continues to prioritize the industrial sector over emerging small-scale innovation enterprises. This systemic bias highlights the need for dedicated funding streams and policy frameworks that recognize the unique value and contributions of makerspaces in promoting local production and innovation.

- **Value of Global Networks**

The maker movement's progress is greatly facilitated by accessibility, which enables anyone to share knowledge, tools, and ideas online with a global community of makers and innovators that aligns with the 'Products In Trash Out' (PITO) to 'Data In Data Out' (DIDO) model proposed by the Fab City Global Initiative. In addition to virtual connections, in-person events, such as the Makerspace Track during the Afrilabs Annual Gathering and the Africa Makerspaces Ecosystem Gathering, provide additional avenues for knowledge exchange and collaboration. These platforms are organized and funded by global networks and their members.



Collaboration is essential within the maker movement, as it enhances the quality and outcomes of activities and introduces diverse perspectives. This is evident in initiatives such as policy research conducted by the Fab City Foundation and Africa Makerspace Network. Our access to makers was facilitated through the makerspace network, Fab City and Fab Lab Networks, Ghana Hubs Network, and Global Innovation Gathering. We have observed that makers are more likely to contribute to initiatives when they have an established relationship with the network. Global networks play a crucial role in fostering these relationships by providing funding support, networking opportunities, and collaboration avenues.

- **Impact of Maker Gatherings**

Maker gatherings play a pivotal role in fostering innovation, collaboration, and knowledge exchange within the maker movement.

The **Maker Faire events**, held in over 140 countries and attracting over 1 million participants, have transformed education and culture by providing platforms to showcase self-made products, innovations, and experiments.

The **FABx events** bring together members from more than 2,500 worldwide Fab Labs to discuss, collaborate and build communities around local and global interests in digital manufacturing, innovation and technology. Since 2005, these gatherings have hosted an average of 1,200 participants from more than 55 countries worldwide, for a week of engaging discussions and activities around the latest trends in technology.

Events like **Maker Faire, FABx, Africa Makerspace Gathering, Re-publica and Vulca seminars** are organized by networks to strengthen the maker movement. These gatherings encourage collaboration, showcase innovations and methodologies, and create opportunities for networking. They also serve as platforms for engaging policymakers through dialogues such as the “Minister Meet Maker” sessions, fostering greater alignment between maker initiatives and public policy.

- **Limited Synergy within and Across the Maker Ecosystems**

Maker ecosystems consist of diverse stakeholders, including makers, enthusiasts, researchers, policy makers, foundations, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), educators, communication experts, business consultants, humanitarian organizations, and global networks. These stakeholders collaborate at varying levels and capacities depending on regional contexts, working to implement social impact projects, mobilize resources, provide support, and advocate for policy changes.

It is essential for all stakeholders to work more collaboratively than they are doing currently for maker ecosystems to remain resilient. This requires increased engagements, collective responsibility, and equitable distribution of resources and opportunities.

Our interactions with makers, combined with desktop research, reveal a lack of cohesion among stakeholders within maker ecosystems. This fragmentation weakens the ecosystem’s ability to act collectively and diminishes its potential to advocate effectively for the policy changes it seeks.



- **Few Platforms for Direct Engagement with Policy Makers**

One of the most significant challenges was accessing policy makers who could influence decision-making. Policy makers often operate within tightly controlled schedules, making it challenging to secure their attention. The layers of bureaucracy and protocols required to reach key decision-makers created delays and limited opportunities for direct engagement. Additionally, without existing connections or intermediaries, it was particularly challenging to get our message across to the right individuals. To address this, we utilized relationships within the mAKE project network to secure a few meetings with policy makers, creating opportunities to share insights from the mAKE project and the common policy agenda.

- **Capacity Constraints on Makerspaces**

A key barrier preventing makerspaces from fully engaging in networks and sharing their impact is limited capacity. Many makerspaces operate with small teams and constrained budgets, leaving them without dedicated staff to manage community engagement. In most cases, founders and managers in African makerspaces take on multiple roles, including product development, social media management, and fundraising. Consequently, they often lack the bandwidth to respond to surveys, participate in research initiatives, or fund travel to maker gatherings, where significant knowledge exchange and collaboration occur.

These constraints also posed challenges during the policy research process, particularly in obtaining feedback on the Common Policy Agenda from maker ecosystems across Africa and Europe. To address such challenges, we recommend makerspaces and fab labs explore resources developed under the mAKE project. These open-source tools, including an Open Makerspace Toolkit, Venture-Building Handbook, and Open Catalogue of Business Models, are designed to support makerspaces in overcoming budgetary and operational limitations.



- **Varied European Interest**

Interest in the policy research and the Common Policy Agenda from makerspaces in Europe appeared less pronounced, possibly due to differences in focus areas, the advanced state of the maker movement in the region, or challenges such as budget constraints and limited team capacities. The mAKE project aimed to strengthen connections between the African and European maker ecosystems, emphasizing the importance of establishing mutual and sustainable networks with European Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs). We believe the connections made with the European maker ecosystem through the policy research are valuable. Furthermore, we advocate for other initiatives and projects aimed at strengthening ties between the maker ecosystems of both regions.

- **Difficulties in Collaborating with Other Organizations for Dissemination**

Collaboration with organizations focused on policy advocacy and implementation was essential for effective dissemination of the Common Policy Agenda. However, building these collaborations proved more challenging than expected. Competing priorities, long response times, and differing agendas among potential partners—such as event organizers, government offices, and development organizations—hindered efforts. Delays in responses and the lack of pre-existing connections with established organizations in the advocacy space made it difficult to leverage their platforms to amplify the policy recommendations.



Creating a Conducive Innovation Environment for Makerspaces: Recommendations

This agenda proposes five policy recommendations to inspire policymakers at various levels to support makerspaces globally. Our goal was to engage policymakers, initiate dialogues with African and European policy institutions, and collaborate with intermediary organizations such as local governments, development organizations, and hub associations like the Afrilabs network, Ghana Hubs Association, and the Fab City Network. To strengthen these connections and create a conducive innovation environment, we propose the following recommendations:



Policy makers

- **Adopt the Policy Agenda:** Integrate the policy agenda into national and regional policy frameworks and programs to secure funding and partnerships for makerspaces.
- **Partner with Makerspaces:** Collaborate with makerspaces to strengthen sectors such as manufacturing and promote sustainable practices and local production.
- **Build on the Policy Agenda:** Develop targeted policies that support and scale makerspaces and digital innovation hubs.
- **Engage with Innovation Networks:** Participate in maker gatherings to facilitate dialogue between policy makers and makers, driving effective policy changes and support for maker ecosystems.



Makerspaces

- **Adopt the Policy Agenda:** Use the common policy agenda as a strategic tool to articulate and demonstrate the impact of makerspaces and the maker movement.
- **Disseminate Impact:** Actively share the impact of makerspace activities. Avoid modesty in showcasing achievements to amplify visibility and influence.
- **Align Activities with Policy Frameworks:** Integrate makerspace activities with national, regional, and global policy goals such as the Sustainable Development Goals. Operating in alignment with these frameworks ensures recognition, relevance, and support.
- **Collaborate with Local Communities:** Strengthen collaborations with local communities to enhance the sustainability of makerspaces. These partnerships increase awareness, foster citizen engagement, and build strong support networks.
- **Pursue Common Interests:** Stay informed about policy developments in the EU and AU, understand decision-making processes, and identify shared policy areas such as the right to repair and the common policy agenda. Focusing on these shared interests will advance the goals of maker ecosystems in Africa and Europe.
- **Engage Innovation Networks and Hub Associations:** Actively participate in networks like the Ghana Hubs Network, Association of Countrywide Innovation Hubs (Kenya), Global Innovation Gathering, African Makerspaces, and the mAkE project. Such engagements connect makers with peers, mentors, venture capital investors, research institutions, and policy makers, broadening support and amplifying the impact of makerspaces.



Development Partners and Innovation Networks

- **Promote the Impact of the Maker Movement:** Development partners and humanitarian organizations, with their extensive networks, influential platforms, and credible reputations, can amplify the visibility of makerspaces and the maker movement. By showcasing how makerspaces drive innovation, foster entrepreneurship, and address local challenges, they can inspire greater public and policy-level support.
- **Advocate for the Common Policy Agenda (CPA):** Actively promote the CPA during dialogues, conferences, and meetings with policymakers. Highlight its relevance in addressing key societal challenges and its potential to extend inclusive and equitable access to makerspaces through targeted policies.
- **Integrate Makerspace Activities into Programs:** Include makerspace-led side events and workshops in programs to provide opportunities for makerspaces to share their work and showcase their products. This can lead to increased recognition and endorsements from influential stakeholders.
- **Facilitate Cross-Sectoral Partnerships:** Act as conveners to build partnerships between makerspaces and other stakeholders. These partnerships can provide makerspaces with access to funding, mentorship, technical expertise, and markets, fostering their growth and sustainability.
- **Advocate for Funding Mechanisms for Makerspaces:** Lobby for the creation of grant schemes and other financial mechanisms that specifically target makerspaces. Dedicated funding opportunities will ensure makerspaces can remain operational and continue to deliver impactful work over time.

Conclusion

The Common Policy Agenda has been disseminated at over **10 events**, reaching over **400 stakeholders**, over **60 organizations**, garnering over 800 social media reactions and over **300 online downloads**. It is designed to support "Minister Meet Maker" dialogue formats, where policy makers and makers engage in discussions to understand, embrace, and take ownership of the policy recommendations.

We presented the agenda at key events such as the Africa Open Science Hardware Summit, Ghana Digital Innovation Week (2023 and 2024), Afrilabs Annual Gathering 2024, Vulca Seminars (2023 and 2024), and the Wind Empowerment Conference 2024. Additionally, we leveraged the official mAKE project website and the Fab City Foundation website to further promote the policy agenda.

Policy engagement is most impactful when strong, established relationships with policy makers or a unified community exist. In our efforts, we witnessed the significant influence of the Fab City Network, Africa Makerspace Network, Global Innovation Gathering, and Internet of Production in shaping the outcomes, despite challenges.



Based on the "Minister Meet Makers" dialogue formats, we recommend the following strategies to strengthen engagement with policy makers:

- **Building Professional and Personal Connections:** Engaging individuals with direct professional or personal ties to policy makers or government representatives.
- **Leveraging Events:** Utilizing conferences, workshops, and other events to reach key stakeholders.
- **Leveraging Social Media:** Engaging local government representatives and influencers to initiate meaningful policy discussions via social media platforms.
- **Collaborating with Policy Organizations:** Partnering with institutions that specialize in policy formulation.
- **Engaging Liaison Agencies:** Working with agencies that connect governments with external stakeholders.
- **Ensuring Continuous Dissemination:** Consistently promoting the policy to maintain visibility and cultivate sustained interest among policy makers and key stakeholders.

To extend the impact of our policy efforts beyond the mAKE project's end in February 2025, we encourage makerspaces, policy makers, development organizations, and other stakeholders to continue utilizing and contributing to the policy agenda as a living document.

It is disheartening that the policy initiative gained significant traction and visibility just as the project's funding and timeline were nearing their end. This has created a sense of lost opportunity, as the growing interest and engagement could not be fully capitalized due to resource constraints. The timing gap between the project lifecycle and the gradual adoption of the policy presents a critical challenge for sustaining long-term impact.

Overcoming these challenges requires a multi-pronged strategy, including strengthening networks like GiG and Fab City for ongoing engagements, securing long-term project funding to maintain momentum, and developing concise and compelling communication materials—which the mAKE project has produced—to educate stakeholders and maker communities.

As for the outcomes and impact, it is still challenging to measure them at this stage. However, we anticipate that policy changes supporting makerspaces may take shape in the future. From a policy perspective, the results of our policy research can help better position makerspaces, policy organizations, and initiatives to contribute to promoting maker policies that address societal issues at both the global and local levels.