



HER STORY LENS ESSENCE



# Women in Film PRE CONFERENCE

PLUS MERIDIAN HOTEL, NAIROBI

PRE-CONFERENCE  
REPORT



Film Stage - Capture Action

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a report of the first-ever major gathering of Women in Film in Kenya which was dubbed 'Women in Film Pre Conference' due to its pilot nature. The film industry is arguably the highest-profile of all the creative industries that can have a considerable impact on cultural, social and economic spheres.

Gender imbalance and stereotyping in cinema have received critical attention over the recent past. UNESCO's 2018 Global Report "Re-Shaping Cultural Policies" states that women are under-represented in key creative roles and severely outnumbered in decision-making positions.

The Women in Film Pre-Conference was facilitated by the Association of Slum Media Organisations (ASMO) under the 'Feminist Matters Project' supported by the Swedish Institute through Nacka Nairobi.

The objectives of the pre-conference were to:

1. Provide women working in the film industry a platform to reflect on their achievements

2. Identify factors influencing their overall performance

3. Discuss the needs and challenges facing the wider film sector in Kenya particularly focusing on the performance of women.

4. Out of the conference support the creation of a database of Kenyan female film-makers

5. Draw out recommendations for advancing the status of Women in Film in Eastern Africa

Forty-nine women and five men attended the Pre-Conference. The participants were drawn from all key filmmaking departments i.e. actors, directors, producers, managers, writers, teachers, production designers, directors of photography, sound and lighting technicians.

The Pre-Conference was carried out through plenary presentations, panel discussions, group work in breakout sessions, as well as facilitated film screening. Several presentations were made by award-winning women filmmakers in Kenya - taking the continuum of the 3 stage film making process - Pre-Production through Production to Post Production. The participants shared their experiences, successes, and challenges they face as women in film and gave possible solutions, recommendations, as well as, actionable steps.

From discussions and experiences, Film in Kenya is male-dominated. Sexual Harassment and sexism are rampant and men are prioritized for key roles over women. Many a time, women lack privacy, are subject to intrusion of personal space, and experience physical insecurity on set. Low pay, lack of funding, gender blind and punitive policies as well as poor audiences for women film jeopardies the quality of women productions and therefore limits their voices and influence.

The Pre-Conference came up with a set of recommendations that if implemented should start the long journey of advancing the status of women in film in Kenya.

Women should effectively participate in policy and decision making processes in Kenya to secure their rights and enhance their position in film. This can only happen if they are better organised, support one another by working collaboratively, drawing and pursuing consistently a well-informed agenda. Plans should be made to end discrimination, recognise exceptional women filmmakers, improve skills and technical know-how, expand audiences for women films and create spaces for collaboration, partnerships, networking, information and knowledge exchange and advocacy.

## BACKGROUND

The film industry is arguably the highest-profile of all the creative industries, with considerable impact on cultural, social as well as economic spheres. Film is also a powerful medium that reflects and shapes societies and cultures.

Gender imbalance and stereotyping in cinema have received critical attention over the recent past. UNESCO's 2018 Global Report "Re-Shaping Cultural Policies" states that women are under-represented in key creative roles and severely outnumbered in decision-making positions.

Sexism permeates the industry with women assigned certain roles and responsibilities that perpetuate gender stereotypes and discrimination. Many women report of sexual harassment at the workspace, have less access to funding and face substantial gender pay gaps.

Diversity and gender-parity are crucial to the filmmaking process. Given that women compose half of the population and the inherent importance and relevance of women's issues in global development, women directors would project female perspectives more strongly in film.

In Kenya, women filmmakers have excelled and given a good account of themselves treating their stories with the sensitivity their unique perspective gives them. Yet, so far there has been little or no research and documentation on their achievement, the space where they operate and how they have impacted on filmmaking in particular.

It is for these reasons that Alliance of Slum Media Organizations (ASMO) organized a Women in Film Pre-Conference that was held in Nairobi from the 14th to 15th of November 2019, as a way to jump-start a discussion, a discourse and strategize on advancing the status of women in film in Kenya and the Eastern African region.

## THE PROCEEDINGS

These are some of the dynamic, myth-busting, powerful opening statements made by keynote speaker Njoki Muhoho, that set the tone and pace of the Pre-conference. Njoki is the Academy Director of Multichoice Talent Factory and Executive Producer of Zebra Productions. As she built up momentum, she took on myths, that women in film have for too long taken as gospel truths.

Busting myths like 'women are weak and helpless and cannot handle some roles in filmmaking'. And just like light disperses darkness: - the realisation that all roles in filmmaking were open to both men and women equally, lit a fire of interest in the participants. Njoki reiterated that, for women to succeed in the film industry, they have to be willing to unlearn what society has imprinted on them and take up those so-called 'male-oriented' roles in film.

Women are busy working but they are not at policy-making and decision-making levels. This means that women can mourn or even work thrice as hard as men but as long as they are out of boardrooms they cannot change anything. Therefore, women need to find their way to boardrooms and make decisions that affect them.

Many are producers, production managers and many are getting into the traditional male roles of directing, lighting and sound and yet there is no data on them. There is no proper documentation on women in film and we do not hear about them. There is, therefore, a need to develop a database as a matter of urgency.

'Skills, competence and confidence are what gets you the job, not your gender!'

In her parting shot, Njoki urged women in film to actively seek mentors, volunteer to work alongside other women and to create stronger synergies that will bring much needed 'drastic change to the film industry in Kenya.

*"Women have the power! Never underestimate the power of a woman. She makes decisions in her homestead, office and community, all she needs is to have more confidence in herself, then watch as she takes the lead"*

- Keynote address Njoki Muhoho - Academy Director of Multichoice Talent Factory.



Women in Film  
**PRE-CONFERENCE**

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## DISCUSSIONS & PROPOSALS

With the pace set, the pre-conference was carried out through plenary presentations, panel discussions, group work in breakout sessions, as well as facilitated film screening. Several presentations were made by award-winning women filmmakers in Kenya - taking the continuum of the 3 stage film making process -pre-production through production to post-production. The participants shared experiences, successes, and challenges that they face as women in film and gave possible solutions, recommendations, as well as, actionable steps.

In Pre-Production, Appie Matere producer of Zamaradi productions recounted her journey as a producer; and then involved panellists Jackline Emali a screenwriter from the Kenya Scriptwriters Guild and Lorella Jowi a casting director of Filmic Media in a lively panel discussion. This session focused on how to find a good story, identify talent and funding for productions. It was moderated by Damaris Irungu Ochieng' renowned scriptwriter credited with some of the most loved and watched Kenyan TV programmes and series like Makutano Junction, Jastorina, Mali, and Kona.



In Production, Jennifer Gatero, CEO of Avant Films, a prolific producer, writer and director gave a presentation on the role of a Director which was followed by a panel discussion with Keziah 'Bo' Mungai Director of Photography, Phoebe Munene-gaffer, Neha Manoj Shah -production designer and award-winning actor Mwajuma Belle, about the intricacies of what happens on set. This session was moderated by Dr.Zippora Okoth; a lecturer of theatre and film who runs several film initiatives including Legacy Arts and Film Lab and the Lake International Pan African Film Festival.

For Post-Production the talented Yvonne Muinde, a matte painter and VFX specialist did a presentation on visual effects; creating imagery that enhances the storytelling. Some of Yvonne's creations have made their way into box office movies like Avatar, Game of Thrones and Blank Panther. The session was moderated by Keziah Wangui a lecturer at Multimedia University.

To demystify the myth that is marketing and film distribution, leading experts in Kenya, Cindy Mbae - Sales and Acquisitions Manager - Rushlake Media, Lucy Muthui a content acquisition and distributor, and Heta James, Country Manager - content distributor - Africa XP were on set. The session was moderated by Wilfred Kiumi, Founder of African Digital and Media Institute (ADMI) and a scholar of Film Distribution & Marketing from Birmingham City University, UK. The panellists gave an insight into how they acquire and distribute content, challenges in distributing Kenyan content and how a filmmaker can ensure they get the most out of marketing and distribution of their content.



“Zawadi”-the Movie shot by the Koch girls - an all-girls crew from Korogocho Slums was exhibited as part of the Pre-Conference. The girls had participated in a project implemented by ASMO and Kyouth bringing young women from different informal settlements together to participate in workshops and media training. The project objective was to empower young women to use media to tell stories from a woman’s perspective to tackle some of the issues women face in the society- in this instance the prevalent gender-based violence in the slums of Nairobi. The showcase was facilitated by the film director Mercy Owegi and producer Juliana Kabua.

This project was the genesis of the pre-Conference as part of the challenge the project team faced in finding female mentors, especially for those jobs conceived as purely male-oriented. In the process, the team found out there was so many women have achieved but they are never appreciated.

# MAPPING FACTORS CONSTRICTING SPACE FOR WIF

## Why women are discouraged from working in film!

- 1 Film in Kenya is a male-dominated field. Men are prioritised for key roles over women. Women face hostility from men because men feel that they encroach on their space. Their capabilities are belittled, are discouraged from roles seen as physically demanding. The key roles they are then placed in are rarely given sufficient support. E.g. women wardrobe designers rarely get staff to help with mundane tasks and are left to do everything by themselves.
- 2 Many a time, women lack privacy and are subject to intrusion into their personal space, they also experience insecurity. Key examples cited include lack of safe transport home after a shoot and use of shared washrooms.
- 3 Casting stereotypes that lack inclusivity. Makeup that does not adhere to one's skin sensitivity, as well as, high handedness when scenes involve nudity – actresses not given a chance to negotiate exposure. Body shaming is also common.
- 4 Sexual Harassment and sexual favours that are the "bitcoins" of film are supposed to be used in exchange for jobs or roles. This may sometimes be said out loud or implied. And may even carry on into the set, where men will touch, or invade her space just because he can.
- 5 A generally low pay standard for women which is extremely unequal as compared to that of men.
- 6 Limited funding opportunities for women producers and poor allocation of funds (budget) for women filmmakers' roles that jeopardise quality of film
- 7 Poor audience, marketing and distribution of women films: Lacklustre support for women films by key stakeholders in the film market.
- 8 Lack of guidance and counselling services in managing psychosocial (Mental Health) issues amongst crew members.
- 9 Poor, outdated and punitive government policies that are gender blind in addressing the needs of women.

## pre-conference recommendations

- 1 Form a union or association to advocate for the rights of women filmmakers and ensure women are actively involved and effectively participate in policy and decision-making processes in Kenya. Top of the agenda is; Standardised and better pay; Licensing and Funding; Sexual harassment and-sexism; Privacy and security in the workplace.
- 2 Develop platforms to recognise women filmmakers by establishing an awards scheme and a film festival. Women who have done exemplary work by portraying the strength of the woman, those excelling in collaborative endeavours with other women as well as people and organisations with significant impact on women filmmakers should be recognised and rewarded.
- 3 Development of a capacity-building programme to improve skills and technical know-how of women filmmakers. This is to be done through training, masterclasses, mentorship and exchange programmes [ South to south and North and South exchanges]. This should also include awareness on countering dominant narratives that perpetuate discrimination and sexual harassment. Sensitising on legal issues including laws of contract and copyrights.
- 4 Audience expansion through advocacy to film promoting agencies, organising screenings and film forums targeting women films and learning on marketing and distribution. Support women filmmakers to attend film festivals.
- 5 Create spaces for women to collaborate and network where they can build filmmaking communities, regularly share information and deliberate topical issues and developments in the industry.
- 6 Create a database of Women in Film and social media platforms to support collaboration, marketing and visibility of women in film agendas.
- 7 Hold a Women in Film Conference in November 2020

A photograph of Judy Ogana, a woman with short black hair and glasses, wearing a patterned blazer and a red scarf. She is speaking into a microphone and gesturing with her right hand. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a conference setting with a whiteboard.

## IMMEDIATE AGENDA & PARTING SHOT

The pre-conference was closed by Judy Ogana, UNESCO National Programme Officer for Culture at Kenya Office. Judy noted that the creative economy is a powerful transformative force in the world today. The cultural and creative industries generate annual global revenues of US\$2,250 billion and exports of over US\$250 billion. These sectors, currently provide about 30 million jobs worldwide and employ more people aged 15-29 than any other sector. The creative economy has become a major driver of trade strategies in developed and developing countries alike

She emphasized that gender parity is crucial and, imbalance and stereotyping in the creative sector has received UNESCO's attention in recent years.

In 2005, the global community adopted an international law as a strategic framework to promote domestic cultural and creative industries. Now called the UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions has now been ratified by the many governments around the world – (146 member states), including Kenya which ratified the convention in 2007.

She noted that Kenya needs to crack the whip and move from information rooms to boardrooms. There is a need to see progress in film within a short span of time.

She noted that UNESCO has established two funds to support the creative sector; The International Fund for Cultural Diversity and the Sabrina Ho initiative - "You Are Next: Empowering Creative Women", an initiative to reduce the gender gap in the digital creative industries in developing countries.

Ms Ogana concluded by saying that the Women in Film Pre Conference has come at a very opportune time and its goal to recognize the contribution of women in film is commendable. Therefore, the actionable recommendations arrived at the pre-conference should not be swept under the carpet.

*"Women in Film Pre-Conference has come at a very opportune time. Its goal to recognize the contribution of women in film is commendable. The actionable recommendations arrived at should not be swept under the carpet "*

- Judith Ogana UNESCO Kenya Office



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## PARTNERS



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SLUM  
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## VOLUNTEERS

Kui Gichuki  
Florence Nyokabi  
Natasha Wambui  
Neha Shah  
Light Juma  
Sammy Keter

## STAFF

George Karanja  
Rachael Ouko  
Idah Opollo.





**WOMEN IN FILM**  
E A S T E R N A F R I K A



Women in Film Eastern Africa  
KCDF House, Chai Road  
Nairobi, Kenya.



Tel Office: +254 746 626 537  
Cell: +254 720 272 719  
Email: [wifea@gmail.com](mailto:wifea@gmail.com)