

Why "African time" is now for African storytelling, by Africans

 By Leigh Andrews

14 Nov 2019

Yolisa Phahle, CEO of general entertainment at the MultiChoice Group, presented the final keynote session of the second day of AfricaCom 2019. As "a South African who lives and breathes the African dream," she explains why they're retelling possibly the greatest African story of all time, with global appeal.



Yolisa Phahle, CEO of general entertainment at the MultiChoice Group, presenting the final keynote session of the second day of AfricaCom 2019.

Who better to comment, as MultiChoice Group is Africa's leading multi-channel digital satellite and pay-TV destination, with 18.9m customers across MultiChoice South Africa, MultiChoice Africa, Showmax Africa, and Irdeto.



New CEO for M-Net South Africa

7 Mar 2014



Phahle set the context for her talk by commenting that countries like Mexico, Turkey and Scandinavia have had great economic success in bringing local films and TV series to the global market.

Now, Phahle says it's time for South Africa to do the same. We can also deliver incredible economic benefits, and African storytelling can find a home in the hearts and minds of global audiences.

Phahle picked up a common thread throughout AfricaCom 2019's keynote sessions – the power of collaboration and synergy. This is clearly seen in MultiChoice's coproduction with HBO's Cinemax, which is set to broadcast *Trackers* across most global territories.

Tracking local storytelling success

Based on the Deon Meyer-written classic novel of the same name, Phahle said *Trackers* is an African story breaking all the records M-Net has set over the years.

They interrupted regular scheduling for this locally produced drama with an almost 100% South African cast, made with a local production crew.

“ Yolisa Phahle, [@MultiChoiceSA](#) CEO for general entertainment, is one of the headliner keynote speakers on Day 2 at [#AfricaCom](#) and talks about how the new drama series *Trackers* on [@MNet](#) ([@DStv](#) 101) created a 1000 local jobs: pic.twitter.com/M4rNdkGS34— [TVwithThinus](#) ([@TVwithThinus](#)) [November 13, 2019](#) ”

The *Trackers* series has created more than 1,000 jobs and attracted millions in foreign investment in South Africa, so Phahle says to imagine the power of local productions on job creation if this was done at scale.

Piwe Motshegoa, head of sales: general entertainment at DStv media sales said it best during the DStv Seminar of Creativity, a highlight of Loeries Creative Week: “As Africans, we need to remember that we are the ones we have been waiting for.”



#Loeries2019: Africans aren't just swimming with the creative sharks, we are the sharks

Leigh Andrews 23 Aug 2019



Phahle calls *Trackers*' success a breakthrough moment and something they want to build on, as it's living proof of what can be done if we work together, to leverage the land's best talent through our collective technical, digital and creative techniques and skills, and take the abundance of African stories that have been written to the world.

There's proof we can do it, but we need a national agenda to make this work. Giving clout to her story, Phahle shared that Lebo M, who famously created music for the Disney *Lion King*, has spoken out many times on the economic value that was lost to Africa in having this story told by a global entertainment brand rather than having it produced by an African studio.

Phahle says the same can be said of Marvel's *Black Panther* – we need to make sure the next African superhero story is told by an African studio, so those taxes and revenues flow where they're most needed in Africa.



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Uzoma Ukah 22 Aug 2019



The African animation opportunity

Phahle commented that animation is also lovely to watch, but she notes that on average, it takes around 300 animators to produce a feature-length film. In addition, it's difficult for students to imagine how to gain the skills to learn to create this form of entertainment.

That's where Cape Town-based Triggerfish comes in. The award-winning academy has partnered with Disney before and has partnered with the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development in launching the Triggerfish academy.

“ Yolisa Phahle, CEO for general entertainment @ MultiChoice Group , was one of the headliners @ Africa Com today. During her address she highlighted the importance of local productions. [#MCGXAfricaCom#AfricaCom#africacom2019 pic.twitter.com/dhtvbF2cw](#)— MultiChoice Group (@MultiChoiceGRP) [November 13, 2019](#) ”

This free digital learning platform is set to become one of the prime guides into the craft for the next generation.

The Triggerfish Story Lab is doing so well that its shows often feature on Showmax, and Netflix has just picked up its first children's animation series that's for Africa, by Africa, about an all-girl group of Zambian spies.



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Leigh Andrews 16 May 2019



That's why Phahle calls animation: “The perfect intersection of technology and content creation, which presents infinite scope for us to develop a local industry that can surprise and delight local and international audiences alike.”

The Bollywood, Nollywood, Hollywood story

But for this to flourish, there's a need for finance to be allocated accordingly, so that we can better tell these homegrown stories and motivate to create a better society, a new place in the digitised world.

Phahle says that to realise these opportunities, we need a public-private partnership and alignment on how we leverage our creative, technical and digital human capital. We also need continued access to broadband, and as broadband prices fall, we can better reach the people who want to hear our stories.

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The private sector also needs to partner and invest in the creative arts, so that we can all better shape the kind of society we all want to live in.

Phahle defines this as:

“ *A society that values creativity, that understands our painful and punishing history, and that is mobilised and motivated to build a better society, a stronger nation, a unified continent, that has a significant place in the new, globalised world.* ”

Phahle has seen first-hand how economic success is often correlated with a national focus on arts, culture and in the case of Hollywood and Bollywood, a thriving film and television industry.



What Netflix's involvement in Nigeria's massive film industry really means

Alessandro Jedlowski 31 Dec 2018



Looking at film success further across the continent, Phahle shared that we can't ignore the success of Nigeria's Nollywood, which is expected to bring in \$1 billion a year in export revenue next year, with mobile phone viewers spending approximately \$2bn a year watching local content.

Little wonder then that the Nigerian film industry provides employment to close to 2-million people, having worked hard to put systems in place that directly support that industry.

Nollywood is so successful, in fact, as the sixth biggest film industry in the world at present, that it's often referred to in the same hallowed tones as that of Hollywood and India's Bollywood.



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This leads Phahle to ask who will tell the Springboks' story, hot on the tail of their Rugby World Cup 2019 victory? Who's going to bring Siya Kolisi's phenomenal life journey to the screen?

Telling local success stories in a local voice

“ *I hope it comes from South Africans, as we really don't want an African American actor twanging his way through the scrum, or Matt Damon playing Faf du Plessis. No disrespect to Invictus... but surely it's time for South Africa and Africa to bring more of our own stories to the world stage and screen?* ”

Unfortunately, this will only happen if we see consistent and growing involvement in the South African creative arts, by government and the private sector alike.



City of Cape Town plans to further back local film industry with a film fund

7 Oct 2019



Phahle says the biggest and most influential economies in the world all have strong film and television industries, which are a huge part of their national identity and their content travels the world.

That's why she feels film often has more impact on the national psyche than politics, and those stories often contribute more to democracy, social cohesion and personal development.

Just think of the impact of the film *The Color Purple* on young black women's lives, or how *An Inconvenient Truth* got us all thinking of climate change. Locally, think of how the *Yizo Yizo* series reflected hard-hitting daily struggles that are a reality for youth living on the margins of society.



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Matt Rose 5 Dec 2011



That's why Phahle feels a massive stimulus package for the local filmmaking industry would undoubtedly speed up transformation, build up the economy and simultaneously strengthen national consciousness.

There's never been a better time in history to be a 'storyteller'

Earlier this year, the MultiChoice Talent Factory's academic director Femi Odugbemi highlighted the tremendous opportunities that exist right now because of advances in technology, which Phahle feels we should bear in mind as we approach a new future for all involved in creating content in this new technological environment.



Africa is a great repository for untapped and untold stories

Yolisa Phahle 30 Jul 2019



Phahle quoted Odugbemi from the Lagos International Animation Festival, where he said:

“ *The creative industries across the world are in the midst of a pivotal shift, driven by emerging technologies. The extraordinary growth of digital devices, platforms, apps and games has created amazing ways for people to connect with each other and with new ideas and concepts and to share data and content in user-friendly ways. This appetite for content is creating new opportunities for digitally-driven storytelling that Nollywood needs to embrace. Because content is the foundation of the audience's 'connected experience,' the challenge for Nollywood's future is how to leverage every available technology to deliver generation-next content that creates compelling experiences. We need to start distilling the trends that will fundamentally transform how this content is created, distributed and consumed in the immediate future.* ”

Odugbemi concluded that there's never been a better time in history to be a 'storyteller,'" and Phahle firmly agrees.



Tell authentic African stories by empowering content producers

31 May 2018



Artificial intelligence and machine learning lets us dub and subtitle South African content into pretty much any of the world's thousands of spoken languages.

The same technology enables us to better understand what audiences like and want, while audience algorithms help us to define in advance what works and doesn't, and to continually improve the potential impact of our work.

But we can't achieve any of this if we are only inward-looking. We need to work together and collaborate, in order to realise and release the full potential of South Africa's and Africa's creative industries.

Shaka Zulu: Possibly the greatest African story of all time...

Phahle was applauded by the audience for her final point, that if there's one South African as well known as Nelson Mandela, it's Shaka Zulu.

“ His tale means so many things to so many people, as his story is one of courage, intrigue and love. Shaka Zulu can be said to have inspired every nation that has fought against colonialism and in defence of land and heritage. ”

It's possibly the greatest African story of all time and appeals globally, and while there have been previous attempts to tell the story, Phahle was proud to announce the following:

Not only are they leveraging digital and human capabilities in taking great African story to the world and retelling it locally, but they're also making history and encouraging the continent to tell our own history, in our own way.

Keep an eye on our [AfricaCom special section](#) and follow the latest updates on the [#AfricaCom2019](#) hashtag.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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