

Leading From Behind the Lens

CELEBRATING FEMALE AFRICAN CREATIVES IN FILM AND TV

Women have always been an integral part of Africa's film industry, but 2019 marked a shift, particularly with films such as *Atlantics*, Wanuri Kahiu's *Rafiki* and even Genevieve Nnaji's *Lionheart*. Their respective wins were the stamp of confirmation that female African creatives have been steadily taking space within the creative film and TV industry, and not just in front of the lens.



SHAPING THE NARRATIVE

The emergence of more women producers, directors and executives has been rooted in the desire of women working in the industry to create stories that showcase how they navigate race, power, personal desires, curiosities and expectations. It's this desire that fuelled Nigerian director Aderonke Adeola to create her 2019 UNESCO prize-winning documentary *Awani*.

"I've always been obsessed about identity; what [it means] to be black, African, to be a woman, to be Nigerian, to be Yoruba. I'm obsessed with the construction and deconstruction of identity," Aderonke explains.

These are some of the components that have been carefully crafted in *Awani's* storyline.

For her, there's still a desperate need to make multifaceted portrayals of women a norm, especially within the Nigerian film industry. "There's a huge lack of nuance when it's applied to telling stories about women. So, when you have these one-dimensional characters, you're doing [us] a disservice. I think having women writers, women being encouraged to be part of the writing process or the storytelling process, is important. [This] will help forge gender equality," she explains.

A study by the Sundance Institute showed that from 11 years' worth of data on programmed U.S feature-length films at the Sundance Film Festival, only 29.8% of content creators - cinematographers, producers, writers, directors - were women. This translated to roughly 2.36 men to every one woman behind the camera.

TAKING UP SPACE THROUGH DOCUMENTARY

Regardless of the clear gender parity challenge shown in studies like the one by Sundance, Kenyan creative feature producer Toni Kamau has built a career within her country's documentary film industry. "We have a history in Kenya of very strong female leaders in the production space, and I'd say this cuts across to narrative [and] fiction production. The top producers in Kenya are women - Appie Matero, Njeri Karago, Dorothy Ghetuba. There were a lot of women role models to look up to, so it wasn't strange for me to envision myself as a producer," Toni explains.

Njoki Muhoho, who has had a dual career in Kenya's management consultancy and film industries spanning over two



NJOKI MUHOHO



NIKITA MOKGWARE

decades, echoes Toni's sentiments over the prominence of highly skilled women in the East African country's film and TV industry.

"In the recent 10 years, I have seen more women take up the role of DOPs and Sound. Those two have struck me as very interesting. Unfortunately, the people who easily get fame in our industry are the directors and DOPs mainly. We [nevertheless] need more women in all roles," says Njoki.

Njoki is also the East African academy director of the MultiChoice Talent Factory's 12-month film and TV training programme. As the world starts to take more notice of the stellar content that the continent is producing, her role in mentoring and knowledge sharing with the next generation of filmmakers is crucial, and collaborating with women such as Toni and Appie Matero will also go far.

One of Toni's latest projects is as one of the producers on 2020 documentary release *Softie*, which won the Sundance World Cinema Documentary Special Jury Award for Editing in February this year. Directed and produced by Kenyan Sam Soko, *Softie* also made history as the first Kenyan-produced documentary to premiere at the festival. For her, forging a career in documentary wasn't in isolation.

Support from bodies such as Docubox, a filmmaking fund and film training organisation founded by Kenyan veteran filmmaker Judy Kibinge, played a role in shaping Toni's career. The availability of this level of support is the foundation that fuels her drive to continue her work.

BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF FILMMAKERS

Just as Docubox provides foundational support for East Africa's filmmakers, the MultiChoice Talent Factory (MTF) aims to do the same. The shared-value initiative, established in 2018, is rooted in providing specialised training for developing emerging African creatives in film and TV through the MTF Academy hubs in Lagos, Nairobi and Lusaka.

26-year-old Botswana native Nikita Neo Mokgware was one of the 60 budding filmmakers that were chosen for the academy programme in 2018. It's nevertheless been evident for Nikita that the industry she plans to build a career in is yet to properly tackle gender parity.

Nikita is a Botswana-based scriptwriter who recently returned from a month-long writing internship in Nollywood! She was a part of the inaugural class of 2019 and co-wrote MTF student film *The Painting*, which has since aired on Zambezi Magic and is currently available on Showmax. The *Painting* along with 5 other MTF films are nominated for the AMVCAs. During her time in Lagos, Nikita was afforded the once in a lifetime opportunity to work on sets of four different TV shows, including TV show *Tinsel*, *Brethren* and *Broken*, as well as SuperSport. While in Lagos, Nikita also had the chance to co-write a film script and receive mentorship from MTF West Africa Academy Director, Femi Odugbemi.

The MultiChoice Talent Factory (MTF) is a shared-value initiative that provides a platform for the creative industries to develop their talent and engage with one another through their shared passions. This initiative has a multi-tiered approach, namely; the MTF Portal, MTF Industry Masterclasses, MTF Academies in 4 hubs namely, Nairobi, Lagos, Lusaka & South Africa as well as the MTF ZA Scriptwriting Incubator and Bursary Programmes.

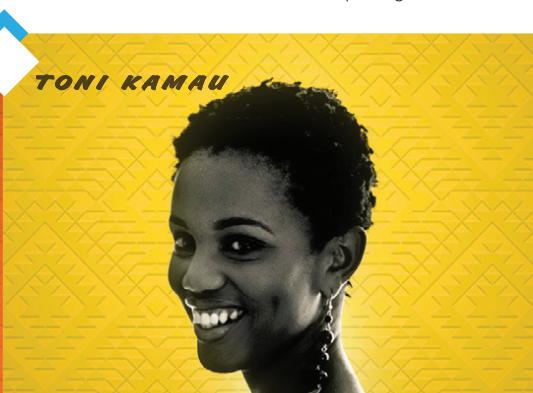


Scan above QR code to sign-up.

To honour International Women's Day on 8 March, the MultiChoice Talent Factory celebrates leading women behind the lens who have dedicated their lives to telling authentic African stories! Are you inspired by these women? You can reach them on the MTF portal via the instant messaging component or just check out their profiles. Not signed-up? Join over 25 000 registered users who have created profiles on the pan-African networking platform for TV & film creatives. Who knows, you could soon be learning on the go through the Produce like a PRO! online masterclasses series. #SignUp2MTF



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