



‘Building a sustainable Nollywood industry’ – Emeka Mba

It's great to be invited to participate in this event, and to share my ideas and thoughts about the future of Nollywood and our entertainment media industry in general. First, let me use this opportunity to thank [Ayeni Adekunle](#) and his team for the splendid foresight in putting together this conference, and for inviting me.

Caution: To begin, I think it's important to share a little bit of my background. It so happens that by some degree of design and providence I have been around the media sector for the past 25 years, from journalism to television, film and now media regulation. It has been a career full of plenty drama, quite similar to a good nollywood movie.

In the old days, entertainment in Africa revolved around music, and storytelling under the starry moonlit nights around fireplaces as grandparents took turns to tell stories about the wise tortoise, and his many tricks. Today, we sit around our television sets, millions of them across Africa, watching Nigerian stories.

Over the last two decades there has been a gradual and often a not too subtle shift in the subsisting paradigm underpinning the film industry globally, and this new paradigm has Nigeria as its 'ground zero', where the confluence of technology, uncommon ingenuity and new opportunity has led to the emergence of the Nigerian film industry, aka Nollywood, which has fundamentally altered the dynamics of the film industry regulation and changed the landscape forever.

This new 'Digital democracy' enfranchised so many like never before, that even those without any formal skills in visual story-telling have embraced this medium to present their own agenda and issues, and as a result some of the products do not bear the imprints of widely traditional cinema aesthetics. This development has no doubt required industry players, and government to play catch up in an industry constantly buffeted by winds of change. Requiring the need for the review of the principal instruments and vehicles for the development of the film industry.

One undeniable fact is that our film industry today is at a crossroad. In fact, some have even queried the very notion of a film industry! I, however, am convinced that we do have a film industry, albeit an industry in disarray, and in need of a serious reformation to enable it to effectively contribute its own measurably to the socio economic development of Nigeria.

### **The Future: Understanding the Past and Present**

To speak of a future, it is important to understand the past and the present. Nollywood, is no longer the new kid; it faces competition from emergent film-making hubs from other African countries, and the attacks from piracy. The irony of all this is that the same forces that created and propelled Nollywood are now its greatest threats. Consider that the same digital technology, which is democratising access to the hallowed halls of film-making and allowing anyone to make films often with varying or increasing levels of mediocrity, is now making it easier to illegally copy and distribute movies online or from person to person; consider that the distribution to home video directly and almost exclusively by producers in Nigeria, has made it easier for others to enter the market; and the absence of industry peer review mechanisms and certified apprenticeship. Consumers are now more matured and discerning, yet the opportunity for greatness is infinite.

Consider also that the media and entertainment industries are being reshaped by digital and Internet technologies practically on a daily basis. Today, we have convergence on a number of levels: technology and industry convergence. They, altogether, present enormous challenges as well as opportunities to distribute content to a wide variety of consumers at very little costs. The rise of Nollywood is a perhaps a giant reflection of the dynamic impact of the convergence of technology, media and entertainment in creating or rather reinventing a brand new industry. The pervasive abundance of consumer electronics of all ranges created an interface that today exists between people and content beyond the challenge of dependence. This is the era of what we know as digital democracy made possible by the new dynamics of technology and people. What this has done is that millions of people across the globe, who ordinarily would not have been considered serious participants in the evolution of content, have become hugely enfranchised. People can create their own content freely, thanks to the new currency of digital access. This new freedom has injected a new kind of intensity and individuality in the creative flair. Practically anyone today can be a producer, create content and distribute content.

### **What we need to do to grow the industry?**

The number one requirement for growth is a slow deliberate march towards knowledge, combined with a new mentality, aggregate industry thought leadership, which seeks to move beyond the status quo. That it is comfortable to admit the necessity for change, embrace change and show determination and courage. We must recognise that the old order in Nollywood is changing! Those who choose to maintain the status quo will find themselves on the wrong side of history and, I dare say, on the short end of the money stick. We have lived in a time past when there was no compelling need to change or do better, when there was simply one line, a mad rush to join the never-ending queue of infectious mediocrity.

Nollywood must recognise that success is not a random act; it arises out of a predictable and powerful set of circumstances. Despite the role digital technology has played in democratising film-making, removing the barriers to the hallowed halls of film making, experience and skills have not become redundant but in fact have become critical in distinguishing quality. In the words of Sally Potter, English filmmaker, *'Experience is never redundant'*. The future demands a well-ordered film industry. It is essential that it has at its roots structure and accountability in the industry, both essential ingredients for a viable and sustainable film industry.

### **So what should film-makers do?**

In my mind the most important thing is to continue to tell the story however you can. Yet, to tell a good story, whether it be write a novel or make a movie, one needs certainly to have some elements of story telling skills. Fact is, to become good at anything, one must study and become familiar with that subject, be passionate, be willing to try and fail, and again, and always willing to learn. It's a common maxim that to be a good lawyer, you must read cases and lots of cases; same, I dare say, must apply to becoming a good film-maker. You must watch films, not just from Nigeria but films from across the world, old and new, read and attend festivals and industry events, learn to collaborate and share ideas. Eliminate the witchdoctor mentality of hoarding information.

Having worked as the DG of the NFVCB for seven years, I can't emphasise enough the importance of the above: I have seen film-makers who have no idea who Alfred Hitchcock is; who believe Truffaut is a kind of cake; who are unaware of the 'language of film' or the basic terms of Mise'en Scene; who cannot distinguish between pictorial narrative and linguistic narration. I do not advocate for us to imbibe western aesthetic style of film-making, however, I do wish we could see more people who have proper understanding of cinematic codes, as this would empower them to properly construct more nuanced narratives that speak to our peculiar challenges. It would be near impossible to construct a new reality when you are unaware of the elements of the structure required to build visual narrative. We may be good storytellers over the millennia, but we are just a few decades into visual story telling and employing the power of visual narratives to construct a new reality.

### **Breaking the frame**

**Technology and its impact on story telling:** Equally important in this age of the digital and involved consumer is to be knowledgeable about the impact of technology and how it affects storytelling. As media companies are pushing and extending content across all channels, consumers are learning to search for and engage content and interact with the content and other users; and therefore the story and the way it is told and being received has equally changed. The narrative and the structure of the story have equally changed. So let's consider for a few minutes how technology is changing the narrative about how the story is being told these days.

**Consumerisation of technology:** I saw it on my iPad! How customers use devices – enabling both production, sharing and distribution.

**Changing business models:** Transmedia Storytelling emerged in response to media convergence. Henry Jenkins describes it as the art of world making, inviting consumers into this new world where they can experience the content on different levels and in different formats, each unique yet connected to the whole. Consider Harry Potter – books, films, cartoons, theme parks, games, fashion, etc.

**Dude, my TIVO thinks I am gay:** All this means that producers of content must rethink old business models and assumptions about what consumers want, and how they want it. Essentially because convergence impacts the way content is created and consumed. Imagine that technology is making linear television programming a thing of the past. We live in a TIVO world! PVRs everywhere you go!

**Audiences fragmentation:** Consumers now have myriad choice for entertainment content across many platforms and devices, added to that is the power of search for content, and the ability to retrieve content on whatever platform, for example Google and YouTube.

**Social Media impact:** The power of social media is often exaggerated or neglected and largely misunderstood, depending on who is talking and to whom. However, no one is in doubt about the influence of social media in affecting how media is consumed and shared. In fact, the former water cooler gist about stuff people see on television has moved online into the digital domain.

**Renegotiating relationships with consumers and technology:** As audiences become more empowered, they inevitably want to share in how the story is told. This means that producers have to relate this into the new structure of the relationship between them and the consumers. The naked truth is that media is evolving, and this transition period, as **Henry Jenkins** said, is a 'prolonged' one.

**Legal and regulatory impacts:** We all have to deal with the issue of legal and regulatory issues pertaining to the impact of the new media and the new technologies. Consider the challenges faced by Google in China, and twitter agreeing to censor content based on territories. For content owners especially, it means understanding basic concepts of IP, and territorial distribution and marketing all the same

**New markets, new opportunities:** The best thing about all the devices out there is that they all require more content. Consider the current iteration of the iPad with the retina display. This means that new games, new apps have to be developed to take advantage of the technology. The same thing applies for all the new online distribution platforms; they all would require content. This means there will always be a market for creators and owners of content

**Going past 2015: Digital future:** For us at the NBC, we believe that the future is here and it is digital. The transition to digital broadcasting will undoubtedly usher greater consumer benefits with more choice and quality in television services as well as industry benefits, as digital opens up new revenue streams and business models. Regardless of the changes, one thing remains sacrosanct – content and the people who consume it. The truth remains that despite the fact that audiences are fragmented and are faced with so much choice and alternative entertainment, TV content remains ever more popular and in fact is growing in more advanced markets like the US.

### **Final Thoughts**

The economies of entertainment have always been volatile -- always been a fight between talent and capital! Very often in the film business, you don't get what is fair; you get what you are able to negotiate. Fair is only a point of view! Lunatics taking over the asylum with the formation of UA in 1919. Artistes rarely make good business people.

Establish effective and auditable distribution platforms that will drive to distribution-led financing for new films, focusing on advances on exclusive licensing agreements for exclusive territorial distribution of movies in territories such as US market, Europe, UK, Nigeria and parts of Nigeria,

Corporatise, and involve other formal sectors such as insurance. For instance, it is important to institutionalise completion bonds as part of the production process – since it serves as insurance that a movie will be completed.

Nollywood has long been ruled by passion and crass mercantilism, which has taken us thus far. We now need to recognise that the driving force for making films is the 'deal' and not the film-maker's passion. Pragmatism and creative thought leadership is key to the process and building faith in the industry by outsiders.

We need to create a new industry that is distribution-led, not production-led, with a strong secure domestic distribution structure with well developed exhibition circuits. There is need for structured deals and business plans, for deals with funders, distributors, and defined output deals with other windows such as pay TV, SVOD, etc. The second problem is marketing. So many film-makers make movies without a clue as to how to market the films. Marketing determines the success both financially and critically.

We need to use our power as storytellers to strike a balance between the realism of our challenging existence and a vision, and indeed desire for a more ideal society. How to create that

balance requires conviction, and creative thought leadership, and importantly the ability to transmit that passion to the people.

Francis Bacon, in the 16th century, spoke of the role of the arts as the significant factor responsible for the differences in development trajectory of nations. Or as Daniel Patrick puts it '*the central conservative truth is that culture and not politics promotes human progress*'.

Be curious rather than critical: Ask questions that provoke reflection and further inquiry. Do not create a fortress mentality. Ideas don't work unless you speak up.

To achieve this we need to follow the maxim by Eric Reinert: '*An important part of the success of any civilization is its ability to emulate the factors that led to the success of other civilisations*'. Nollywood must embrace the spirit of innovation and adventure it wants to improve, and move beyond curiosity to collateral success.

***This speech was delivered at the second edition of the Nigerian Entertainment Conference held on Wednesday, April 23, 2013 at the Grand Ball Room of the Eko Hotel and Suites, Lagos, Nigeria.***

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