

# DIEA

The Documentary Institute in Eastern Africa

White Paper



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## The Documentary Institute in Eastern Africa White Paper

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### Attachment

Description of Cloud services.

## Executive Summary

The Documentary Institute of Eastern Africa (DIEA) has a vision of becoming a resource and production centre for local film and documentary makers as well as aspiring and/or students of film, institutions and individuals in the Eastern Africa.

Documentary film production in the Eastern African countries is affected by a general lack of resources, first of all in terms of funding, but also in terms of professional skills, and in terms of pre-and post- production facilities.

The way DIEA will approach the development of the EA documentary industry is holistic, starting from education and support for aspiring filmmakers, to networking and promotion of new productions to international and local funders, to collaborative and independent productions and finally distribution and archiving.

DIEA builds an IT infrastructure for archiving content, developing, producing and promoting new content as well as e-learning particularly for East African filmmakers in a manner that promotes, gender equality in media.

DIEA collaborates with the educational, broadcast and non-profit sectors, all of which have their own needs for the use of documentary film.

DIEA intends to play a significant role in the fast growing international and regional documentary market. As an innovative documentary film hub within the EAC, the DIEA will represent an ideal provider for major web based international distributors seeking original content produced in Africa. Communication and collaboration with companies and organizations in the IT, communications, media and educational areas will be expanded also at the regional level to give a much needed boost to the local marketplace.

## 1. Problems, challenges and needs necessitating the establishment of a Documentary Institute in the region

### Current situation of the Documentary Film Industry in Africa

The Documentary Institute of Eastern Africa (DIEA) has a vision of becoming a resource and production centre for local film and documentary makers as well as aspiring and/or students of film, institutions and individuals in the Eastern Africa. The need for the establishment of such an institute is informed by various factors as highlighted in the *Report on the State of the African Documentary Film Industry- Executive Summary* document<sup>1</sup> which notes that there is a lack of diversity and capacity in Africa's economic and social institutions as well as an inability by many African governments to invest in social development, including the cultural sector.

At the same time, the centralization and corporate control of the international news media and upheaval across film distribution avenues has resulted in the marginalization of African perspectives on many important issues. The report also puts forth the argument that production sustainability and legitimacy with local audiences are considered as two of the most important factors for achieving a global recognition for the African documentary film industry and, thus, the most effective tools to make African voices and points of view become more influential in the formulation of international discourses and representations about Africa.

Over the past few years, Kenya (and Nigeria) have witnessed the development of extremely active video film industries which offer an example of the possibilities that new technologies have created for the emergence of autonomous and sustainable media industries in the continent. However, documentary filmmaking is not yet particularly developed in neither of the two countries. Further, countries such as Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda which are also a focus of the DIEA, the report notes that though documentary filmmaking does exist, there is a critical lack of resources for a solid and durable development of the sector. These 3 countries have also witnessed the evolution of important video industries over the past few years whose development has revitalized the media production sector and has fostered the emergence of new generations of young self-trained directors. However, until now, there is a radical disjunction between the video production sector, which generally focuses on fiction films, and the documentary film industry. In Ethiopia, documentary production is almost inexistent due to a number of reasons such as political censorship, conflict, profound economic distress, general lack of infrastructures, etc.

Another challenge faced by the Documentary Film Industry in Africa has to do with sustainability. As the report notes, there have been, and currently are, a number of initiatives on an international level to support African filmmakers in the production of documentaries for international markets, mainly outside of the African continent. The limiting factors have often been the same: initiatives with a short time span have come and gone without lasting effects; initiatives have reached only a limited number of filmmakers without creating film communities or audiences; distribution of films has been short term and limited, very often with only a few transmissions by mainly European TV-stations. Few African documentaries have reached African audiences.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.academia.edu/19522919/Report\\_on\\_the\\_State\\_of\\_the\\_African\\_Documentary\\_Film\\_Industry\\_-\\_Executive\\_Summary](https://www.academia.edu/19522919/Report_on_the_State_of_the_African_Documentary_Film_Industry_-_Executive_Summary)

## **On Distribution**

The main problem concerns distribution and exhibition venues, since, except for a few countries such as South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Algeria and Morocco, most cinema theatres in the continent have been closed down. Some countries such as Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya are witnessing the emergence of multiplex theatre halls, but these venues are focused on commercial distribution, target elite audiences and screen mainly foreign films.

Beyond funding, distribution is certainly one of the major problems affecting documentary filmmaking in Africa. The difficulties experienced by most African documentary filmmakers in making their films circulate is not only related to the infrastructural problems. It is also strictly connected to the problem of the (missing) relationship between African audiences and documentary films. In most countries, the documentary format is still considered very marginal product by both broadcasters and audiences, and directors encounter countless difficulties in getting their films screened or getting exhibitors (television channels, theatre halls or others) to actually pay for the right to screen the films.

The first and probably the most dramatic problem that an African documentary film director encounters in distributing his or her film is the relationship with local televisions. In most African countries, local television channels almost never commission films or contribute to production expenses. On the contrary, in most cases, televisions ask filmmakers to buy airtime from them in order to screen their films. The director/producer then has to sell advertising slots in order to recover the expenses. This is, for instance, the model applied in Kenya and Uganda.

## **On the Archiving Project**

The report further notes that the general infrastructural collapse that happened in the 1980s and 1990s provoked the quasi-complete abandonment of the existing national archives, whose documents (U-matic tapes, celluloid recordings and so on) needed specific as much as expensive cares in order to be correctly preserved. While a few countries (including Kenya and Tanzania) have started initiatives of restoration over the past few years, in many cases films and other materials have been lost, creating a major problem for filmmakers who intend to use archival materials as part of their projects. This is a tragic and epic loss for the world.

## **On Training**

Formal and well-structured film documentary training institutions are lacking in most African countries, and the existing institutions are concentrated in those countries that have a longer and more established filmmaking tradition (i.e. South Africa, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, Tunisia). There is no such training institution in Eastern Africa.

## **On the role of the Documentaries in advocacy**

The authors of the report believe that culture itself is a value to support. That supporting non-fiction/documentary storytelling is a path to reinforcing freedom of expression and a more

vigorous citizenship. That creating points of entry for engagement results not only in audiences but in the potential to create movements, and in recognition of the enormous capacity, talent and creativity that exists across the continent and that is struggling to manifest itself. In this sense, then, documentary filmmaking can be seen as a tool for democracy and, in the same vein, the support of indigenous documentary film production and dissemination can be considered as a way to promote and consolidate locally-generated processes of social and political democratization.

### **Summary of needs/challenges of the Documentary Film Industry in Kenya (hence the need for the DIEA)**

Based on the very comprehensive report, the documentary film production is still everywhere (including the Eastern Africa countries) affected by a general lack of resources, first of all in terms of funding, but also in terms of professional skills, and in terms of pre-and post- production facilities. The data provided above allows for some general conclusions. Documentary filmmaking in Africa has great potential and can undoubtedly have a highly influential role in positively influencing local social and cultural transformations in the future. The present situation of the documentary film industry is, however, complex and requires strategic interventions in numerous fields. The reports highlight the following areas as priority targets for intervention:

- 1) Production funding;
- 2) Training in all aspects of the filmmaking process, but primarily in project elaboration, scriptwriting and post-production;
- 3) Audience building;
- 4) Distribution, particularly in what concerns local television policies toward local productions and international satellite televisions' attitude toward African productions;
- 5) Policy making, in relation to copyright, film distribution and television production.

The DIEA would concentrate on points 1-4 and to a larger extent, point 5.

The report further highlights that the documentary filmmaking in Africa is affected by a number of contingent deficiencies which slowdown its development. The DIEA could contribute towards the reduction of these deficiencies. Some of these deficiencies include:

- 1) Lack of pre-production in-depth research on film topics (related to lack of funding);
- 2) Lack of professionally trained documentary film critics able to introduce local audiences to the best of local and international documentary filmmaking;
- 3) Lack of training in project writing, which makes the access to international funding particularly hard for African filmmakers
- 4) Well-structured and innovative distribution models, able to make the reality of African informal economies and the dream of economically sustainable film production enterprises meet, need to be invented and implemented through creative solutions.

## 2. The DIEA approach in a nutshell

The way DIEA will approach the development of the EA documentary industry is holistic, starting from education and support for aspiring filmmakers, to networking and promotion of new productions to international and local funders, to collaborative and independent productions and finally distribution and archiving.

We believe that the players in the industry should not work in silos, but actively seek networking. It is obvious that non-collaboration is a big factor behind the previous failures. As hinted at in the report, several initiatives in supporting the filmmaking industry Africa-wide or regionally have failed when funding from the EU, UN or other donors has ceased. The founders of the initiatives have also failed to seek enough synergy from other actors. Artificial and real divisions exist between West, East and South Africa caused by, among others, language, distance, access to information and regional politics.

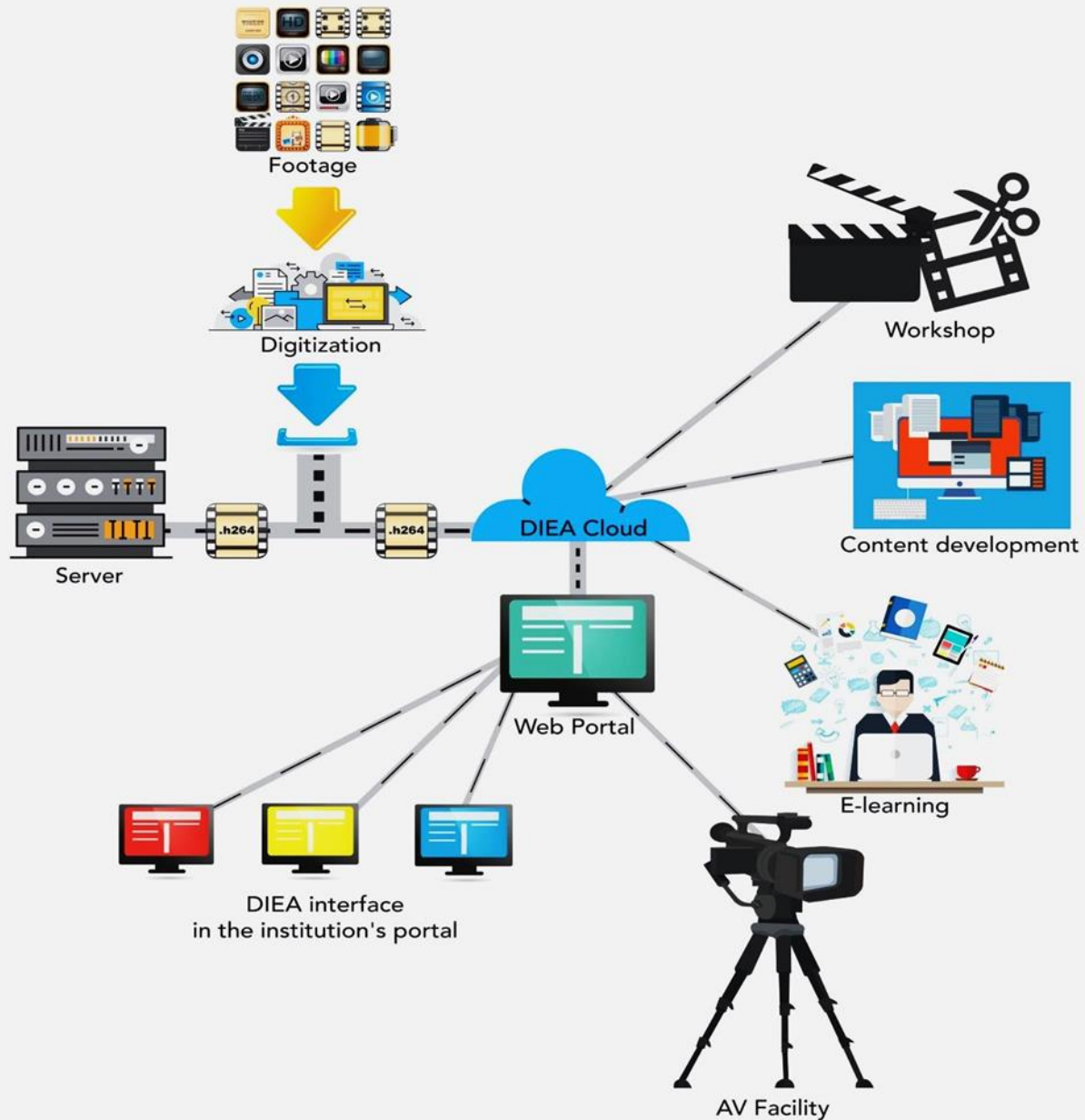
DIEA takes an approach of transparency and sustainability from the start. The initiative will not depend on a single or a few funders, but brings healthy business thinking to the creative and artistic sector. This strategy does not mean competition with other initiatives, but synergy benefits of joint efforts for the growth of the documentary industry. For instance in the educational sector the big online distributor Kanopy is not seen as a competitor with their African Studies film section. Instead, the content DIEA produces and distributes with university partners can be syndicated with Kanopy and other such distributors. The Pan African online film platforms in development such as mahala.tv and Mokolo Projects have similarities with DIEA planned activities but are seen as potential collaborators.

DIEA collaborates with the educational, broadcast and non-profit sectors, all of which have their own needs for the use of documentary film. In education, documentary filmmaking skills serve visual researchers, professors, lecturers and students. In broadcast industry the 30 min. and feature length documentary format is the flagship of factual production department, with increasing audience numbers of demanding prime time quality documentary content as an alternative to daytime light entertainment. In the non-profit sector, documentary can serve in campaigning, awareness, advocacy and fundraising. The founders of DIEA combine decades of experience in all the three sectors.

### 3. The DIEA technical solution

DIEA builds an **IT infrastructure** for archiving content, developing, producing and promoting new content as well as e-learning particularly for East African filmmakers in a manner that promotes, gender equality in media.

The DIEA IT Infrastructure consists of two main structures: **The Cloud Platform** and **The Web Portal**





The **Cloud Platform** serves as a database for:

- **Archiving** - *material/footage* (access: rights owners/producers, researchers and broadcasters)
- **Pre-production** - a working space for content development, promotion, funding pitching and networking activities (access: producers, filmmakers to their dedicated project space)
- **Production** - a virtual workshop for the production of documentary films and multimedia content. (access: producers, editors, researchers, universities and filmmakers to their dedicated project space)
- **Education** - an e-learning platform for training activities within the university network and BIEA webinars (access: researchers and students)

## The Web Portal

The **Web Portal** is built on a CMS (Content Management System) consisting of a dedicated **Front-end**, visible online to all users, and a **Back-end** visible to administrators and portal's managers.

### Front-end

The **Front-end** is structured as a **Video Gallery** where the content is organized into categories and subcategories. Content is catalogued with metadata to facilitate identification and research within the archive. There are different levels of access and pricing of the content according to user and client ( commercial, research, education, non-profit ), including open source, pay-per-view, subscription etc.

### Front-end dedicated to other related portals

The DIEA allows associated client and partner entities (museums, archives, universities etc.) to host a dedicated Video Gallery on their own website. The gallery is published in the associated entity's portal via a link leading to a dedicated URL, the domain name of which is decided by the entity. The graphic interface, content management and distribution are provided by the DIEA.

### AV Production Facility, Seminar and Event Spaces

At the Front-end The DIEA also publishes the online reservation system for the AV Production Facility, for the adjacent Seminar and Event Spaces at BIEA Nairobi.

### Back-end

The **Back-end** is the file management interface within the **Web Portal**. It allows to name, post, tag and publish video files. Access of the Back-end is limited to DIEA administrators.

**For more information about cloud based solutions see Appendix 1**

#### 4. **Business benefits**

African Politics & Policy magazine in 2016 stated: *Generating US\$4.2bln and 547,500 jobs the rapidly growing sector of cultural and creative industries (CCI) in Africa is believed to be on the verge of becoming one of the major drivers of the sustainable development and economic growth in the continent.*

Indiewire magazine wrote in 2017 about the surge in sales of documentaries driven by a strong demand from the highly competitive SVOD companies—Netflix, Amazon, Hulu etc. The continuing hunt by theatrical buyers also opens up new opportunities in this sector. This increasing number of active buyers for documentary films suggests that there's an enthusiasm for independent nonfiction cinema today, and that includes documentaries from Africa.

DIEA intends to play a significant role in this fast growing market. As an innovative documentary film hub within the EAC, the DIEA will represent an ideal provider for major web based international distributors seeking original content produced in Africa. Communication and collaboration with companies and organizations in the IT, communications, media and educational areas will be expanded also at the regional level to give a much needed boost to the local marketplace.

In addition to documentary production and distribution, DIEA expects to generate revenue streams from training and industry events as well as digitization and footage sales of archival collections in collaboration with museums, archives and private content owners in East Africa.

Hivos report<sup>2</sup> on the status of the creative economy in East Africa states: *A holistic approach bringing together the government, the private sector, the media, development partners and industry players will certainly contribute to a vibrant and creative and cultural industry in East Africa. The creative and cultural industries require enablers willing to create platforms that increase the sector's impact in the region and improve the livelihoods of many people dependent on the sector.*

At DIEA we see ourselves the kind of enabler in the documentary industry that Hivos calls for. To the contributing players we add the educational sector. Skills training and educational distribution are among the critical needs for the growth of the documentary industry and for the enhancement of the professionalism, visibility and reach of the individual filmmakers.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.hivos.org/sites/default/files/ubunifu\\_report\\_1.pdf](https://www.hivos.org/sites/default/files/ubunifu_report_1.pdf)

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