

This discussion document is taken from a draft whitepaper being prepared by the SLFilm Foundation as part of a future public consultation process. It is provided here for the benefit of the SLFILM Guild, as part of ongoing confidential discussions to create and deliver a viable Film Industry Development Plan for the country.

SL FILM COUNCIL: BACKGROUND AND PRINCIPLES V1 (FOR DISCUSSION)

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 The importance of the film industry

From economists to sociologists, politicians to cultural theorists, business experts to artists, all have recognised the unique qualities and growing power of the medium, especially in the last few decades. Today, as it becomes an intrinsic part of our digital age and part of the global digital economy, the ability to harness its potential for contributing to national social, cultural, educational and economic interests becomes more crucial than ever.

The film industry in Sierra Leone is still in its early stages, but it is vitally important that its significant potential and role it can play for the nation is recognised and its development is supported sensitively and intelligently through a formalised industry framework.

1.2 The importance of Independence and Democracy

Post-conflict development in Sierra Leone, supported by the international community, has been successful due to the adoption of public policies promoting, democratic, decentralised, deregulated models of administration. These have helped deliver greater transparency and accountability for government with corresponding benefits for the nation.

An industry framework for the Sierra Leone film industry needs to demonstrate and display an equal acknowledgement of the importance of the principles of democracy and independence. In the media, a successful precedent, supported by the UN, BBC, and other international organisations, has already been established by recognising the need to transform the national broadcaster from a traditional government-run service, the SLBS, to a modernised and independent corporation, the SLBC. In a similar way, rather than taking a retrograde step of creating a government administrative arm for administering the film

industry film, the country needs to develop its own democratic, independent organisation with an appropriate mandate for the administration and regulation of a responsible and publicly accountable self-regulated film industry.

Such a regulatory industry framework provides the assurance that the film industry - which best understands its own needs and how to develop its own potential - is able to successfully deliver the maximum benefits for the country at both a national and international level. In addition, such demonstrable independence and accountability afford important additional benefits such as access to funding and other international resources to which government-run committees or privately-led trade groups would not be eligible.

1.3 The Importance of a national film union for industry professionals

Having recognised the emergence of a varied and diversified emerging film industry, the need for an officially recognised industry trade union, for all professionals working in the Sierra Leone film industry, has long since been recognised. The Sierra Leone Film Industry, Labour & Marketing Guild (SLFILM Guild), which was first developed in 2010 remains the only nationally and internationally registered and recognised trade union for the nation's film sector.

From its early beginnings, supported by various national and international organisations, it has sought to bring together all professionals working in the industry, whether working in film production, marketing, or in other film industry-related service sectors, to provide effective representation and promotion of their profession and their rights. As a democratic organisation, it thus provides a legally recognised collective voice for the film industry and an effective conduit for cross-sector, nationwide communication.

1.4 The importance of a national film authority for the country's film development

In order to manage the industry of professional film production and provide an effective forum for all stakeholders - the film industry professionals, government, civil society - a national film authority, or Film Council, is required.

1.4.1 Constitution

The Council membership should be constituted to ensure that:-

- a. The interests of all professionals working in the industry are properly represented by democratically elected members from the film industry trade union;
- b. The interests of government are properly represented, by appointed representatives from the appropriate key ministries (Information, Culture and Trade)
- c. The interests of civil society are properly represented to ensure respect for all citizens, without ethnic, religious or other forms of social discrimination.

1.4.2 Administration and development

The Council, would be responsible for overseeing the organised administration and development of the industry by:-

- a. Developing appropriate national and international policies
- b. Regulating films and the process of their production and public release through registrations, permits, and the classification of films
- c. Providing funding and resources for film training, production, audience education and marketing to national, regional and international audiences.
- d. Identifying, collating and making available information and statistics, as well as managing its past and its future and maintenance industry development with the support of an administrative responsibilities of the Council

1.5 The Importance of a national film database and knowledge archive to the country's film development

An essential pre-requisite to the management and development of the industry is the ability to accurately monitor and understand its constituent parts – the people and organisations in its varied sectors across production, marketing and exhibition; its productivity and its economic impact.

In order to define, identify and collate this information about the industry, the creation of a national film database is vital. This database has already been developed and is ready to be utilised to provide the following:-

- a. Details of all Sierra Leone films (either made by Sierra Leoneans or about Sierra Leone) including production crew, cast, genres, budgets, certifications, etc).
- b. Details of all Sierra Leone film industry professionals, nationally and internationally, including their link to associated films or organisations

- c. Details of all Sierra Leone film-related service organisations, nationally and internationally, including businesses, non-profit organisations, government agencies and departments, institutions, trade associations and relevant civil society groups.

1.6 The Importance of a national film industry consensus by ensuring engagement through film industry and general public consultation

Due to the important contribution and broad impact that film can make in social, cultural, educational and economic terms, it is important that all stakeholders are given the opportunity to participate in its development.

Consequently, a public consultation is planned in order to elicit feedback from all individuals (professional and general public), groups and organisations with an interest in the future of the Sierra Leone film industry. In this way, through an open process of engagement, a consensus can be formed and a public mandate obtained to provide the government, public and industry recognition and compliance necessary to effectively enable the policies of the Film Council and the development of a nationally supported film industry.

2. KEY PRINCIPLES

Whilst work is being done to develop the most appropriate legal and operational framework, it is useful to highlight some key points. These are outlined below and should be read in conjunction with the attached diagrams.

1. The national film industry must be a self-regulated industry, managed through open and accountable democratic processes that reflect the needs of the film industry and the needs of the nation:-
 - a. Film industry professionals are represented by a recognised trade union (the Guild).
 - b. The Guild members vote for the five regional film industry representatives they choose, to sit on the Film Council Board.
 - c. Elected film industry representatives sit on the Council board, constituting 50% of the board, alongside Government appointees from Ministries (such as Information, Culture and Trade) and Civil Society groups (such as Human Rights and Inter-Religious), who together constitute the remaining 50% of the Council Board.

- d. Other relevant stakeholders and partners, such as the police, diplomatic missions or other groups may also be invited to the board, by the Council, as Observers (non-voting status), in order to encourage their participation in, and support of, appropriate Council policies.
2. The industry must be developed from the ground up, using grass-roots support, involvement, endorsement and accountability, rather than an externally imposed, top-down solution that will eventually become unworkable.
3. Any formulated organisational structure must be inclusive from its beginning, and seek to involve and combine the strengths of all stakeholders, be they individuals or organisations, rather than alienate or exclude.
4. The Council
 - a. The administrative framework of the Council should be economically viable and financially affordable and self-sustainable, even with only a minimal revenue budget.
 - b. The reporting lines and work of the Council is not hampered by overly-complicated hierarchies or outmoded bureaucratic processes get.
 - c. The implementation of the Council as a working national institution should, in the first instance, be mandated by key stakeholders as soon as possible. The consequent details of implementation (budgets, premises, staffing, etc) can then be rolled out subsequently.

Fig.1. Film Industry Pyramid

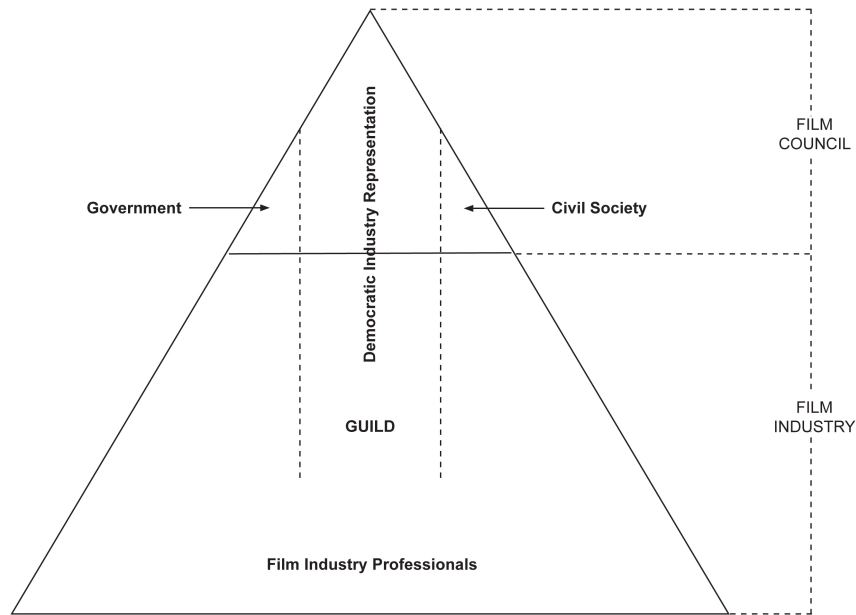


Fig.2. Film Industry Organogram

