

Thapelo Mokoena challenges UG film industry

Mokoena argues that a film must be built like an investment portfolio capable of generating returns long after opening night, emphasising intellectual property protection and structured ownership.

BY ISAAC SSEJOMBWE

South African actor and producer Thapelo Mokoena has challenged Ugandan filmmakers to stop thinking like mere artists and start thinking like architects of long-term wealth.

Speaking during a high impact master class organised under the Africa Film Forum initiative of the iKON Awards at Reach A Hand Uganda office in Kampala last Friday, Mokoena delivered a message that was both practical and provocative that film is not just culture but capital.

"Create something that can still earn you money 10 years from now," he urged.

The Netflix star pushed filmmakers to rethink the lifecycle of their projects. Beyond premieres and applause, he emphasised intellectual property protection, structured ownership, licensing, syndication and streaming deals.

A film, he argued, must be built like an investment portfolio, capable of generating returns long after opening night.

In a continent where production quality is rising, he noted that distribution strategy, data tracking and rights management still lag behind. The future, he suggested, belonged to filmmakers who treat content as a scalable asset.

Mokoena described African cinema as "a family coming together," highlighting growing cross-border collaborations between Uganda, South Africa and Ni-

geria, including projects emerging from iKon relationships and a forthcoming production commissioned by Netflix.

For him, collaboration is not goodwill but a leverage. He shared funding, technical exchange and distribution pipelines are what will move African cinema from fragmented industries to a continental force.

The session drew leading industry players, including Mathew Nabwiso, Nana Kaggwa and Sasha Vibes. But beyond attendance, the real focus was alignment.

And to reinforce the call, Mathew Nabwiso, the president of the Producers Guild of Uganda, stressed the importance of guild membership, industry data and unified storytelling.

Without measurable impact, he warned that the sector could not convincingly claim its economic value.

Nabwiso also called for unity. "We

need to work together a lot more." "Growth will not happen in isolation." He echoed this sentiment, calling on creatives to write stories that matter.

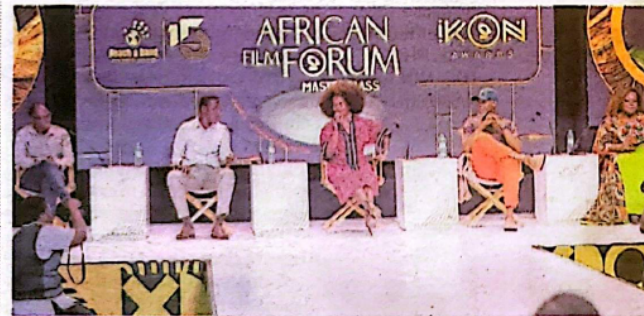
"We need to write movies that have impact," he said, noting that institutions such as the Uganda Tourism Board are looking for content that meaningfully showcases Uganda's identity and potential.

He stressed the importance of guild membership and industry organisation, arguing that a sense of belonging enables proper data collection, which is critical in demonstrating the film sector's contribution to the national economy.

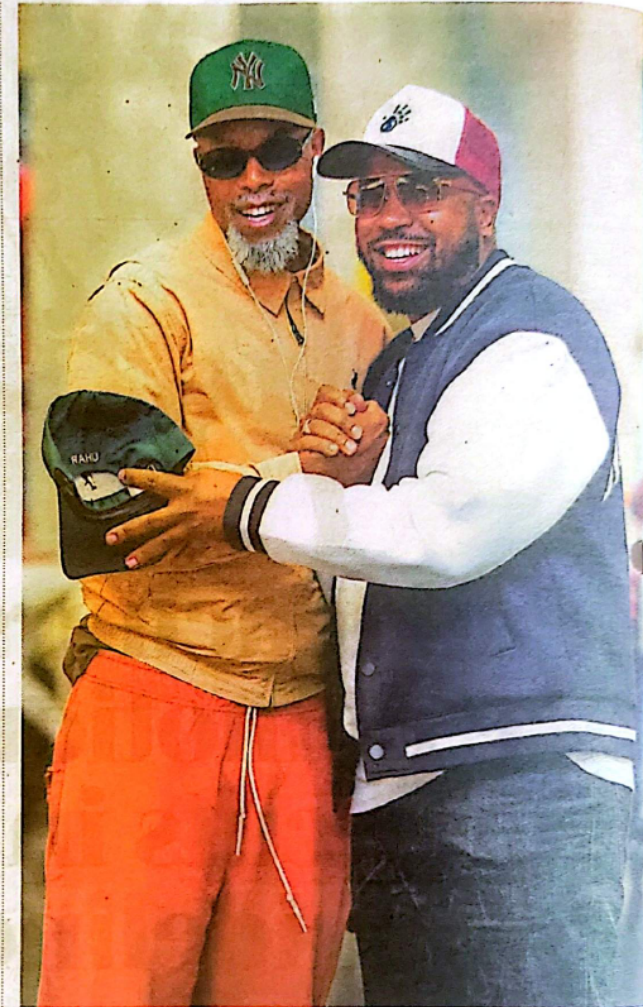
Also present was Uganda's special presidential envoy on Tourism and Trade, Rosa Malango, signalling government recognition of film as a tool for trade, tourism and national branding.

Opening the forum, Humphrey Nabimanya, the founder of Reach A Hand, said the platform was built to ensure African stories are told "authentically" by Africans themselves.

This year's iKON Awards received more than 200 submissions, with 40 percent from outside Uganda, proof of its growing continental footprint.



The panel discusses how film makers can make their content scalable.



Thapelo Mokoena (left) shares a light moment with Reach A Hand founder, Humphrey Nabimanya at the event. PHOTOS/ISAAC SSEJOMBWE